

A CHANGING ECCLESIOLOGY IN A CHANGING CHURCH:
A SYMPOSIUM ON DEVELOPMENT IN THE ECCLESIOLOGY
OF KARL RAHNER

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Although Karl Rahner's *Grundkurs des Glaubens*¹ does not propose to present a summary view of the author's previous theological writing, this major work is awakening new interest in Rahner's theology for a number of reasons. It is the lengthiest unified study he has yet published. The ordering and interrelation of its theological questions provide a uniquely synthetic perspective on his theology. The vocabulary and the method, even at the "first level of reflection" to which the book restricts itself, epitomize the fruitful maturity of four decades of theological reflection, a maturity in terms of which earlier essays and positions will now surely be evaluated. Because of its comprehensive if introductory character, the *Grundkurs* sets in profile in a striking way both the remarkable strength of Rahner's thought and the issues on which he has been criticized by even his most sympathetic readers.

Many of these critics have bridled at what they consider the individualistic or intellectualistic cast of Rahner's theology. Even granting the increasingly thematized reflection on human intersubjectivity and community which characterizes Rahner's essays in his middle years—and for which more enthusiastic students find foundations in the earliest work—socially inclined critics have found Rahner to be on the one hand too philosophically existentialist and on the other hand too unconcerned with social change. Curiously, such commentators have generally directed their attention chiefly to Rahner's essays on fundamental theology or the doctrine of God, seldom to the ecclesiological writings, where issues of communal life and reform might readily be expected to be addressed.

As indeed, I think, they have been. Rahner's ecclesiological writings are coterminous with his general theological work, and though they present perhaps a less rounded unity than his writing on grace or God, they nevertheless remain an integral part of his thought as a whole. This the *Grundkurs* again makes clear, with its sixth section on "Christianity as Church," a chapter of seventy-five pages which stands second in length only to the central section on Jesus Christ. In these pages Rahner discusses the institutional mediation of religion in Chris-

¹ *Grundkurs des Glaubens: Einführung in den Begriff des Christentums* (Freiburg: Herder, 1976).

tianity and the way in which we may understand the Church to be founded by Jesus Christ. After briefly assessing the New Testament picture of the Church and the necessarily ecclesial character of Christianity, Rahner turns with special energy to an "indirect method" for legitimating the Catholic Church as the Church of Christ. Thereafter he treats Scripture in the Church, official teaching, and some selected questions on the individual Christian and law in the Church.

But I do not intend here to investigate either this important chapter or the *Grundkurs* as a whole. Rather, as English-speaking readers eagerly await the translation by William V. Dych which Seabury Press hopes to bring out by the end of this year, I wish to introduce three highly competent students of Rahner's ecclesiology who have come together to analyze the major stages in the development of that thought. It is our hope that this attention to development in Rahner's text may provide a useful background not only for assessing the ecclesiological contribution of the *Grundkurs* but also of his future writing in this area. In particular, by signaling the varying emphases, approaches, and audiences of Rahner's ecclesiology, we hope to exemplify the pilgrim status of a theology in service to a pilgrim people.

In the first contribution, Peter Schineller of the Jesuit School of Theology in Chicago analyzes several early articles which lay foundations for Rahner's thought on the Church. In the years between World War II and the beginning of Vatican II, we find that at Innsbruck Rahner developed an approach to systematic theology which not only included major theses in the field of ecclesiology but also prepared for important future positions. John Galvin of St. John's Seminary in Brighton, Massachusetts, provides the second contribution, centering on the years 1960-65, from the immediate preparation of the Council to its conclusion. Along with deeper probing into the nature of the Church, Rahner's thought proceeds further at this period in its investigation of church office and of salvation outside the Church as well as within it. The third contribution, by Michael Fahey of Concordia University in Montreal, surveys new directions in Rahner's ecclesiology in the decade after Vatican II. Together with significant new experiences for the theologian himself, we find in these years new approaches to changes in Church structures and also to the tasks of the Church in the world. With this brief introduction, let me turn directly to our contributors.²

² There is some confusion with the variant numbering between Rahner's *Schriften zur Theologie* and the English translations *Theological Investigations*. Up to 1969 the volume numbers of the originals and the translations coincide, but since 1971 the German volume has been translated into two English volumes, and thus there is a

THE EARLY FOUNDATIONS

Karl Rahner began to teach dogmatic theology at the University of Innsbruck in 1937. During the years between 1939 and 1948, when the faculty of theology was forced to close, he was involved in lecturing, pastoral work, and some teaching.¹ As early as 1946, however, he had written his first important article in ecclesiology. This essay intends to review the foundations he laid for his ecclesiology in those postwar years. We find there a wide range of concerns and issues: freedom and free speech in the Church, the parish in relation to the diocese and Church universal, the place of the laity and the function of the priest in the Church, the Church and non-Christians and nonbelievers, dangers facing the Church, and the relation of the Church to the sacraments.

During this period and into the present, Rahner has not presented any systematic or comprehensive treatise on ecclesiology, but rather has responded to significant issues and concerns as they emerge in the ongoing life of the Church.² When Rahner does address questions concerning the Church, he writes as a systematic theologian, relating ecclesiology to his views of grace, God, Christology, and sacramental theology. There is a danger, therefore, in isolating his ecclesiology. But insofar as this aspect of his thinking has been a constant theme of his reflections, and insofar as he has been significant in shaping current Catholic thought on the Church, it surely bears further examination. In addition, this study will take into account the simple fact, often overlooked, that the position of a theologian such as Rahner develops

discrepancy in the volume numbers thereafter. For summary purposes, the correspondence is given here between the *Schriften zur Theologie* (henceforth S.), all published by Benziger at Einsiedeln, and *Theological Investigations* (henceforth T.I.) with their first American publication: S. 1 (1954) = T.I. 1 (Baltimore: Helicon, 1961); S. 2 (1955) = T.I. 2 (Baltimore: Helicon, 1963); S. 3 (1956) = T.I. 3 (Baltimore: Helicon, 1967); S. 4 (1960) = T.I. 4 (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966); S. 5 (1962) = T.I. 5 (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966); S. 6 (1965) = T.I. 6 (Baltimore: Helicon, 1969); S. 7 (1966) = T.I. 7 and 8 (New York: Herder, 1971); S. 8 (1967) = T.I. 9 and 10 (New York: Herder, 1972, 1973); S. 9 (1970) = T.I. 11 and 12 (New York: Seabury, 1974); S. 10 (1972) = T.I. 13 and 14 (New York: Seabury, 1975, 1976). At present writing, *Schriften* 11 (1973) and 12 (1975) have not yet appeared in English translations. Henceforth all references are to the English translations wherever possible. For a chronology and systematic listing of Rahner's writings, see Roman Bleistein and Elmar Klinger, *Bibliographie Karl Rahner 1924-1969* (Freiburg: Herder, 1969), and Roman Bleistein, *Bibliographie 1969-1974* (Freiburg: Herder, 1974).

¹ For Rahner's biography, see H. Vorgrimler, *Karl Rahner: His Life, Thought and Works* (Glen Rock, N.J.: Paulist, 1966); K. Lehmann, "Karl Rahner," *Bilanz der Theologie im 20. Jahrhundert* 4, ed. H. Vorgrimler and R. Vander Gucht (Freiburg: Herder, 1970); and Gerald A. McCool, *A Rahner Reader* (New York: Seabury, 1975).

² In his one essay on method, Rahner himself states that this is how he has worked: "Reflections on Methodology in Theology," T.I. 11, 68-114.

and matures over a period of time. This is certainly true of Rahner's thinking over the last thirty years, and as this symposium seeks to demonstrate and document, it can be exemplified from a study of his ecclesiology.

From the many themes and questions in ecclesiology that Rahner has addressed, I have chosen to focus on three of his earliest essays, "The Individual in the Church," "Membership of the Church according to the Teaching of Pius XII's Encyclical 'Mystici corporis Christi,'" and "The Church of Sinners."³ These are central to his ecclesiology for several reasons. They are his earliest writings that focus directly on the Church and indicate some of the specific problems he had to deal with.⁴ They provide the basis for later expansion and development up to and beyond Vatican II. Finally, some of the viewpoints and conclusions drawn by Rahner have become significant and even commonplace in recent discussions of ecclesiology.

My method will be to explore the key insights and viewpoints of these early essays and then indicate how they lead into and are developed in subsequent essays. I will also maintain that there is no significant reversal of these early positions in the later writings, but rather a genuine development, as the insights are expanded, deepened, and correlated with new situations. In this manner I hope to capture the early, basic ecclesiology of Rahner as it unfolds up to Vatican II.

The Church and Freedom

The first theme that emerges in Rahner's early ecclesiology concerns the freedom and responsibility of the individual member of the Church. While this is developed in several essays, I am focusing here on his 1946 essay "The Individual in the Church." Arguing almost exclusively from the viewpoint of philosophical and theological anthropology rather than from Scripture or tradition, Rahner shows that although the Church is truly a visible society with hierarchical authority, it may never forget that it is a society of free, individual persons. The nature of the human person and the nature of the Church demand that a

³ "The Individual in the Church," in *Nature and Grace* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963) 5-83; "Membership of the Church according to the Teaching of Pius XII's Encyclical 'Mystici corporis Christi,'" T.I. 2, 1-88; "The Church of Sinners," T.I. 6, 253-69.

⁴ Two earlier essays of Rahner can be mentioned that touch upon ecclesiology. In a 1934 essay, "The Meaning of Frequent Confession of Devotion," T.I. 3, 184-86, he speaks of God's presence in the world in a narrow and exclusivist sense as a presence occurring only through the Church. In a 1942 essay, "Priestly Existence," T.I. 3., 247-49, Rahner first makes the distinction between church in a broad sense, involving all those affected by the grace of Christ, and church in a narrower sense, referring to the visible Church.

legitimate private sphere be left for individual inspiration, initiative, and responsibility on the part of each member of the Church.⁵

In the introduction to this essay Rahner cautions against the danger facing the Church that the individual could take refuge in the collective and think that to be a good and mature Christian it is sufficient to march willingly and passively with all the rest of the Church's people.⁶ Such an attitude, Rahner argues, is against the Church's very nature and purpose. Thus he wishes to examine and defend the rights and, more importantly, the duties of the individual in the Church. To understand what the proper relation of the individual to the Church must be, Rahner highlights two aspects of the Church's nature. First, it is a community of the redeemed, the place of the grace of Jesus Christ. But secondly, and at the same time, it is an organized and visible society, with rules and regulations.⁷ The individual relates in a different way to both of these elements. On the one hand, the Church addresses the individual living a unique life of grace before God. On the other hand, the Church addresses the individual not so much as unique but as a member of the human family and hence subject to common rules and laws. Tensions can arise precisely because of these two different encounters: for example, when the Church as an organized visible society addresses the person as spiritual, unique, graced individual. The difficult challenge is to safeguard, support, nurture, and give proper freedom to that ultimately private sphere of the unique person before God. The Church cannot force prayer, faith, vocation upon the unique individual member, nor can it decide upon the member's moral standing in the sight of God.⁸

Rahner is aware that the Church has not always acted in this manner but has often tended towards an unchristian religious dictatorship or an ecclesiastical totalitarianism or collectivity. The necessary counterforce to this tendency is the need to foster and challenge the laity to a mature and responsible attitude towards the Church. Each Christian must act out of his or her unique sphere and stance before God. In this manner the charismatic element of the Church, which is

⁵ "The Individual in the Church" 54-64. We might note that although Rahner is primarily a systematic theologian, his interests and reflection often, as in this essay, include ethical and moral considerations which are inseparable from systematic questions. An early example of his reflection on the type of ethic demanded of the individual in the Church can be found in his 1955 essay "On the Question of a Formal Existential Ethics," T.I. 2, 217-34. For the most thorough treatment of Rahner's ethics, see James F. Bresnahan, *The Methodology of "Natural Law" Ethical Reasoning in the Theology of Karl Rahner, and Its Supplementary Development Using the Legal Philosophy of Lon L. Fuller* (unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 1972).

⁶ "The Individual in the Church" 49-50.

⁷ *Ibid.* 64.

⁸ *Ibid.* 69-70.

not always in the possession of the hierarchy, will be rekindled. The Church must allow what it professes, namely, that God speaks directly to the unique individual. Thus there should be movements, free groups, charismatic individuals in the Church that do not stem only from the Church's official organization. The basic principle that will safeguard and foster the rights and duties of the individual member, according to Rahner, is that the Church is for persons, persons are not for the Church.⁹

In summary, in this early essay Rahner provides a starting point and foundation for his emphases upon the dynamic and charismatic element in the Church, the place of free speech and public opinion, and even the basis for a principle of democratization. These ideas would be expanded and developed in later essays, before and after Vatican II.¹⁰

The Church and Grace

In 1947 Rahner wrote an extended reflection on the meaning of Pius XII's Encyclical *Mystici corporis Christi*, which had been issued in 1943. The Encyclical, drawing upon the ecclesiological reflections of the 1930's among Roman Catholic theologians, gave a privileged position to the Pauline image of the Church as the Body of Christ.¹¹ Much of the discussion that followed the Encyclical centered on the way in which it identified the Mystical Body of Christ on earth with the Roman Catholic Church.

Rahner entered into this ongoing discussion with his essay "Membership of the Church according to the Teaching of Pius XII's Encyclical 'Mystici corporis Christi.'" With an eye on the ecumenical relationship to other Christian Churches, he attempts to justify a broad interpretation of the traditional maxim *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, while at the

⁹ Ibid. 82.

¹⁰ These insights are developed by Rahner in the period up to Vatican II in essays such as "Peaceful Reflections on the Parochial Principle," T.I. 2, 283-318; *Free Speech in the Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1959); "Freedom in the Church," T.I. 2, 89-107; "Notes on the Lay Apostolate," T.I. 2, 319-52; "The Charismatic Element in the Church," in *The Dynamic Element in the Church* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964); "Dogmatic Notes on Ecclesiological Piety," T.I. 5, 336-65. For the development of many of these ideas after Vatican II, see the essay by Michael Fahey.

¹¹ Two authors whose writings on the Church as Mystical Body preceded the Encyclical would be Emile Mersch, *The Whole Christ* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1938) and *The Theology of the Mystical Body* (St. Louis: Herder, 1951), and Sebastian Tromp, *Corpus Christi quod est ecclesia* (New York: Vantage, 1960). Tromp is generally considered to be the person who actually wrote the Encyclical. For a more recent exposition of the Church as the Body of Christ, see Hans Küng, *The Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967) 203-60. Finally, chap. 3, "The Church as Mystical Communion," in Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1974), shows how Vatican II develops and modifies the views of *Mystici corporis*.

same time maintaining the necessity of the visible Church. He thus retrieves and reflects upon traditional Church teaching on baptism of desire, the possibility of invincible ignorance, and finally on God's universal salvific will.¹² He reasserts the validity of things Christian outside the Catholic Church and upholds the possibility of grace for those who do not belong to the Church in the full sense. One of his principles in this discussion is that baptism of desire does involve an implicit desire for membership in the Church. Perhaps the basic point he is arguing is that one cannot identify the Mystical Body of Christ with the Roman Catholic Church in a direct and unnuanced manner.¹³

In this essay Rahner lays the foundation for his later, developed ideas on the Church as sacrament.¹⁴ The insights of sacramental theology can illumine one's ecclesiology. Sacraments can and must be viewed under two aspects: as valid (even if unfruitful) signs and as effective or fruitful signs. The Church, too, must be viewed in two notions or dimensions: as the visible, bodily structure and as the sign of invisible grace. Even though it is a Church of sinners, it remains the real, permanent, and ever-valid presence of God in the world. In this sense, therefore, the Church is the protosacrament or prime sacrament. As Rahner writes, "she is, in her whole concrete, visible and juridically verifiable appearance, a real sign and embodiment of the salvific will of God and of the grace of Christ."¹⁵

Rahner has already been speaking of the relation of the Church to the reality of God's grace. He explains this further by showing the implications of the two notions of Church that he has presented, based upon insights of sacramental theology. Church refers to the visible, external, juridical community of believers, but it must also refer to the people of God, or, as he expresses it, humanity consecrated through the Incarnation. Rahner justifies this more cosmic view of Church by

¹² "Membership of the Church" 39, 58-59.

¹³ Vatican II, while it affirms that the Church is the Body of Christ, distinguishes between the Church as a hierarchical society and as the Body of Christ (*Lumen gentium*, nos. 8-9). Thus, too, it never asserts that the Church of Christ or the Mystical Body is coterminous with the Roman Catholic Church. On this point, see Dulles, *Models of the Church* 48, 135-37.

¹⁴ The more fully developed version of Rahner's reflections on the relation of the Church to the sacraments is found in *The Church and the Sacraments* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963). In developing this sacramental perspective, Rahner associates himself with the writing of H. de Lubac, *Catholicism* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1950) 29 and 35, and especially with the seminal work of O. Semmelroth, *Church and Sacrament* (Notre Dame: Fides, 1965). For more recent discussion of the strength and weaknesses in viewing the Church as the prime sacrament, see Dulles, *Models of the Church* 58-70. As Fahey's essay will note, after Vatican II Rahner emphasizes that the Church is the sacrament of salvation *for the world*.

¹⁵ "Membership of the Church" 73.

reflecting upon the unity of the one human race, created by God and, more importantly, fundamentally and radically called to share the life of God supernaturally. This call is given visibility by the fact of the Incarnation, and this results in an ontological determination of the nature of each human being. In this sense, in the light of God's salvific plan for all mankind that would be accomplished in Christ, Rahner says that there already exists a people of God which extends as far as humanity itself, even before any social and juridical organization of mankind into what we call the visible Church.¹⁶

In these moves and in continuity with the theological anthropology of *Hearers of the Word*, Rahner is setting forth the bases of what will later be the thesis of the anonymous Christian.¹⁷ Even in this early essay of 1947 he writes that "whenever man as a person accepts the concrete reality of his nature totally, in the free act of a supernatural justification by faith and love, the membership of the people of God becomes the expression of this justifying act."¹⁸

By means of this twofold distinction of the Church as visible society and as humanity consecrated by Christ, Rahner shows the compatibility of two theological data: the necessity of the Church as a means for salvation, and the possibility of salvation for someone outside the Church. Later essays on the Church and sacraments and on the relation of the Christian to non-Christians and nonbelievers will develop the insights and foundations set forth in this essay.¹⁹

The Church and Sinners

Many Americans were introduced to Rahner for the first time by his essay "The Church of Sinners," originally published in 1947.²⁰ Its main thrust is to acknowledge the humble, earthly, human, and indeed sinful element in the Church. While this aspect of the Church might easily be seen in one's concrete factual experience of the Church,

¹⁶ Ibid. 81-83.

¹⁷ The clearest exposition of Rahner's theory of the anonymous Christian in this early period is found in "Christianity and Non-Christian Religions," T.I. 5, 115-34. For later development and criticism of this central idea, see the following essay by John Galvin and the references given in his notes 44-47. As examples of recent presentations of ecclesiology in the light of the doctrine of the anonymous Christian, see the December 1976 issue of *Theological Studies* (Vol. 37, no. 4), consisting of five collaborative and thematic essays on the theme "Why the Church?" See also the work of Jerome Theisen, *The Ultimate Church and the Promise of Salvation* (Minnesota: St. John's University, 1976). He specifically deals with Rahner's ecclesiology on pp. 81-103.

¹⁸ "Membership of the Church" 84.

¹⁹ In addition to the essays already cited, see "The Christian amid Unbelieving Relations," T.I. 3, 355-72.

²⁰ "The Church of Sinners" was first published in English in *Cross Currents* 3 (1951) 64-74.

Rahner bases his argument not on experience but on the Church's tradition and dogma.²¹ Even though Christians believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, tradition has asserted the sinfulness of the Church in two senses.

First, there are sinners in the Church, including those who may be eternally lost. Even though Catholics lack the grace of God, they still belong to the Church, even if they do not belong in the same full sense as the graced person. Rahner expresses this as follows: they belong to the visible Church, but their visible membership is not an effective sign of the invisible membership in the spiritual community. The sinner gives a lie to the sign he or she professes to be.

Secondly, the Church itself is sinful. We cannot look to an idealized or unreal invisible Church; we must live with the Church that is real and made up of sinners, even among Church leaders and official representatives. To hold a different position would be an ecclesiastical docetism. Of course, the Church does not sanction sin, but if its members are sinners and as sinners remain members, then it is itself necessarily sinful.

The fact of the sinful nature of the Church should lead to renewal, from a realization that the individual's sinfulness is a sickness, a contradiction to the Church in its deepest roots, and a stain or spot on the Mystical Body of Christ. But the fact of the Church's sinful nature also calls for an honest admission of one's failings rather than a falsified and idealized view of the Church and life in the Church.²²

I see this early essay of Rahner as important in setting the stage for responsible criticism of the Church by laity, leaders, and theologians. This emphasis upon the human and indeed sinful element in the Church allows moves towards encouraging public opinion in the Church and fosters a realistic atmosphere for ecumenical dialogue with Christians and non-Christians. It does this by showing the Church not as set apart from or above the world, but as a part of the world and its history of sin.²³

²¹ "The Church of Sinners," T.I. 6, 255.

²² In a helpful essay entitled "Development within Rahner's Theology," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 42 (1975) 36-49, Edward Vacek points to one place where Rahner seems later to modify his position radically. In "The Church of Sinners" Rahner maintains that from this Church there is no escape which could lead to salvation, and one can never be right in fleeing away from her (265). In his later writings Rahner would surely nuance these bold statements.

²³ An interesting example of how Rahner develops his reflection on the Church of sinners is found in "Justified and Sinner at the Same Time," T.I. 6, 218-30. In an ecumenical context he examines this Protestant principle in continuity with his own retrieval of Catholic tradition on the Church as the Church of sinners.

Concluding Remarks

I have focused on three early essays which treat of three important themes in Rahner's early ecclesiology. What is striking is the broad and liberal base or foundation he has set forth from the very beginning. He will develop his positions, but there does not seem to be any radical shift or reversal of the foundational positions of these early essays. The development will occur because of shifts in the audience to whom he is speaking. The essays we have explored are written primarily for Roman Catholics, addressing problems that arise within the Catholic tradition and framework. The sources for his argumentation are the metaphysics and anthropology of the Thomistic tradition, together with Church tradition. Gradually, however, Rahner begins to broaden his horizons and his sources for theologizing. He draws more on contemporary experience, on Protestant theology, and on the insights of biblical scholarship.

The following essays by John Galvin and Michael Fahey will demonstrate concretely how Rahner's ecclesiology unfolds and expands, first in the period around the Council, and finally in the late 1960's and into the present. As new situations arise in the Church, including the Council itself, and as the Church faces the growing phenomenon of being a little flock in a diaspora situation, Rahner turns to theological interpretation of these situations. We will see that he has progressively broadened his horizons beyond Catholicism and the Catholic tradition so as to be in constant dialogue with the extra-Catholic world in all its varied forms. Yet it is important to note that this expansion is legitimated by and consistent with his earliest position on the reality of grace and truth beyond the Catholic pale. This expansion will be echoed in Vatican II's openness towards non-Catholic religions and towards the modern world in general. Rahner's position on the Church of sinners also finds echoes in the decrees of the Council.²⁴ Finally, his reflections on freedom, individuality, and the charismatic element in the Church are echoed both in the procedures of Vatican II and in the documents that emerged from the discussions and dialogues of the Council fathers. It becomes clear, therefore, that Rahner's early ecclesiology is significant not only for what it says or does not say about concrete positions, but for the manner in which his insights and views were taken up into the ongoing life and mission of the Church.

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²⁴ Rahner himself has reflected on this theme in "The Sinful Church in the Decrees of Vatican II," T.I. 6, 270-94.

QUESTIONS CENTERED ON VATICAN COUNCIL II

The time of the Second Vatican Council represents in many respects a distinctive stage in the theological work of Karl Rahner. Following an immensely productive period, during which many of his most important essays were composed, it is marked especially by his involvement with the Council from his appointment in 1960 as consultor to a preparatory commission until the conclusion of the Council in 1965. But it is also noteworthy that in 1964 he resigned from his chair of dogmatic theology at the University of Innsbruck in order to move to Munich, where he succeeded Romano Guardini in the chair of Christian *Weltanschauung*.¹ (Rahner held the Munich chair until 1967, when he assumed a chair of dogmatic theology at the University of Münster.) Since Rahner's theology is primarily developed in occasional essays on topics dictated by his perception of the needs of a particular situation, it is not surprising that the Council both led him to increased writing on ecclesiological themes and influenced his choice of issues for consideration. The resulting essays draw heavily on his earlier work and reflect his typical approach to theology, but do not constitute a complete, systematic ecclesiology.

To present an orderly survey of this stage of Rahner's thought on the Church, it will be helpful to distinguish three areas of concern: the nature of the Church, office in the Church, and the limitations of the Church. The systematization which results is not explicit in Rahner but can, I believe, be defended as an appropriate structuring of his work.

Nature of the Church

Rahner's ecclesiology views the Church primarily as the result of grace, rather than as the means through which grace is mediated to individuals; the latter aspect, while not denied, is clearly subordinated to the former.² The fundamental point of reference is the universal salvific will of God, who freely chooses to communicate Himself as man's salvation to all men of all times and all places.³ Since man is by nature historical and social, the divine offer necessarily includes histor-

¹ Cf. K. Lehmann, "Karl Rahner," *Bilanz der Theologie im 20. Jahrhundert* 4, ed. H. Vorgrimler and R. Vander Gucht (Freiburg: Herder, 1970) 146-47; H. Vorgrimler, *Karl Rahner: His Life, Thought and Works* (Glen Rock, N.J.: Paulist, 1966) 51.

² *Theology of Pastoral Action* (New York: Herder, 1968) 26-29, and "The Church and the Parousia of Christ," T.I. 6, 297.

³ For an indication of the centrality of this, cf. K. Rahner, "Zur 'Offenbarungsgeschichte' nach dem II. Vatikanum," *Schriften zur Theologie* 12, 241-50, and "Le Schema du P. Karl Rahner: De la révélation de Dieu et de l'homme faite en Jésus-Christ," *La révélation divine* 2, ed. B.-D. Dupuy (Paris: Cerf, 1968) 577-87.

ical and social dimensions, though it is not limited to these.⁴ Rahner therefore distinguishes between transcendental and categorical dimensions of the offer and acceptance of grace.⁵ The history of the divine offer reaches its high point within the history of the world in the life and death/resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, which represents the definitive acceptance of the offer and can therefore never be surpassed within the remainder of history.⁶ The Church is the salvific society of this final, eschatological stage of salvation history,⁷ the legitimately organized community in which God's victorious communication of Himself in Christ tangibly expresses its presence as truth and love in and to all later periods of the history of the world.⁸

The location of the Church within the context of salvation history, in the time between the death/resurrection of Christ and the Parousia, is fundamental to this conception of ecclesiology.⁹ The Church exists because the definitive nature of God's victory in Christ necessarily implies that faith, hope, and love will result, that there will exist socially tangible witness to the salvation of the world in Christ, and that the reality of this faith, hope, and love will never be completely separated from its visible expression (even though it may be separated in individuals).¹⁰ The universal Church is thus permanent, indefectible both in its faith, hope, and love and in its expression of these. Yet, since the Church exists within history and not at its end, it is also pilgrim Church, still awaiting the full presence of the kingdom of God. Despite its holiness, it is a sinful Church (not merely a Church with sinful members), affected by sin and error in varying measure, in all its acts.¹¹ When it definitively commits itself to particular actions,

⁴ K. Rahner, "The Meaning of Ecclesiastical Office," *Servants of the Lord* (New York: Herder, 1968) 24. Rahner develops the point more extensively in other contexts; cf. *Hearers of the Word* (New York: Herder, 1969), and "Observations on the Concept of Revelation," in K. Rahner and J. Ratzinger, *Revelation and Tradition* (New York: Herder, 1966) 9-25.

⁵ The terminology is discussed and criticized by L. B. Puntel, "Hans Küng, die Logik und die theologische Redlichkeit: Bemerkungen zur Kritik des Tübinger Theologen am Begriff 'anonymes Christentum,'" *Orientierung* 40 (1976) 6.

⁶ Cf. esp. K. Rahner, "Christology within an Evolutionary View of the World," T.I. 5, 157-92.

⁷ For Rahner's understanding of salvation history, cf. "History of the World and Salvation-History," T.I. 5, 97-114.

⁸ Cf. K. Rahner, "On the Presence of Christ in the Diaspora Community according to the Teaching of the Second Vatican Council," T.I. 10, 92, esp. n. 17, and *Theology of Pastoral Action* 26-29.

⁹ Cf. esp. "The Church and the Parousia" 295-312.

¹⁰ Ibid., esp. 307-8; cf. also *Theology of Pastoral Action* 71-72; "The Meaning of Ecclesiastical Office" 21-22, 24; "On the Presence of Christ" 91-93.

¹¹ K. Rahner, "The Sinful Church in the Decrees of Vatican II," T.I. 6, 270-94; "The Church and the Parousia" 308-10.

however, as in its definitive teaching and its celebration of the sacraments, the Church will never be so affected by error and sin as to destroy its permanence as the tangible presence of the victory of God's truth and love in Christ.¹²

Rahner's over-all approach to the Church can be summarized as an understanding of the Church as the sacrament of the world's salvation, a terminology which reflects his concern with the "incarnational" structure of Christianity, and even of the whole of reality.¹³ Its foundations lie primarily in theological anthropology, the theology of grace and Christology, not in positive historical information about the Church; it could thus be termed an "ecclesiology from above."¹⁴ Grace, God's offer of Himself to man as man's salvation, necessarily tends to express itself and finds its appropriate expression in Church, which, as the result of grace, bears witness to the victorious presence of grace and serves to mediate it to individuals.

One further element should be noted here. Rahner insists strongly on the importance of the local Church, which, far from being a mere part or region of the universal Church, is rather the Church itself present in a particular place; for it is in the local Church that the basic actions of the Church are performed.¹⁵ Despite this interest, however, he is also emphatic in maintaining that many attributes of the universal Church, especially its indefectibility in holiness and truth, cannot be predicated of the local Church (just as they cannot be predicated of the individual Christian¹⁶). While the victory of God's grace in Christ implies the continued existence of the universal Church, it in no way guarantees that a local Church will not culpably distance itself from the effects of that triumph.¹⁷

¹² Ibid. 306-8.

¹³ Cf. *Theology of Pastoral Action* 44-49; "The Theology of the Symbol," T.I. 4, 221-52; "The New Image of the Church," T.I. 10, 12-24. The incarnational structure of Rahner's theology is analyzed and criticized in the unpublished dissertation of W. Schmölders, *Inkarnatorische Struktur: Funktion und Relevanz eines Denkmodells in der Theologie von Karl Rahner* (Innsbruck, 1973).

¹⁴ For the use of similar terminology in Christology, cf. W. Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968) 33-37. Dangers inherent in exaggerated use of this approach in ecclesiology have been noted by W. Kasper ("Wort und Sakrament," *Glaube und Geschichte* [Mainz: Grünewald, 1970] 293-95) and H. Weber ("Wort und Sakrament: Diskussionsstand und Anregung zu einer Neuinterpretation," *MTZ* 23 [1972] 250-54).

¹⁵ By local Church Rahner at this time generally means diocese or regional Church (as in *Theology of Pastoral Action* 90-91), but some writings begin to consider even smaller churches (i.e., communities without a bishop) under this perspective (as "The New Image" 7-12; "On the Presence of Christ" 84-102; "The Presence of the Lord in the Christian Community at Worship," T.I. 10, 75-76).

¹⁶ "The Church and the Parousia" 299 n. 3.

¹⁷ "On the Presence of Christ" 92, esp. n. 17.

Office in the Church

Rahner's writings in this period reflect increased interest in questions concerning Church office, especially in issues raised by or under discussion at Vatican II. In these works, however, he continues to stress the limitations of Church office: all members of the Church, not merely its officeholders, are recipients of God's grace and contribute to the mediation of that grace to others, in such a way that Church office is dependent on nonofficial charisms in both officeholders and others for its effective and fruitful exercise.¹⁸

Church office is distinguished from nonofficial charisms chiefly by stability and tangibility.¹⁹ It possesses the ability to engage the Church as such in a particular action.²⁰ Since office is necessary in the Church as it is in any historical-social reality,²¹ Church office is of divine institution in the same sense that the Church itself is;²² it participates in both the indefectibility and the pilgrim state of the Church as a whole.²³ Because of the unity of the Church, whose existence and unity it exists to preserve and promote, Church office itself must be essentially one, prior to any distinctions.²⁴ While it is legitimate to distinguish among offices of teaching, sanctifying, and governing and between powers of orders and jurisdiction, these distinctions are secondary and must not be permitted to obscure Church office's basic unity.²⁵

Nonetheless, the Church is able to confer participation in its office without conferring full participation.²⁶ The traditional threefold division of office—bishop, priest, deacon—originates from the Church's use of this power, not from explicit words of the historical Jesus.²⁷ The fact that other structures existed in the New Testament period does not imply that such structures represent legitimate options for later centuries, since historical developments which correspond to the nature of the Church may be irreversible and thus represent *jus divinum*, at least if they occurred in the apostolic Church, even if they are not

¹⁸ *Theology of Pastoral Action* 64–70; "The Meaning of Ecclesiastical Office" 34–37; "On the Theology of the Council," T.I. 5, 244–67.

¹⁹ *Theology of Pastoral Action* 73.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 76, 78.

²¹ *Ibid.* 75.

²² *Ibid.* In his contribution to a commentary on *Lumen gentium* (H. Vorgrimler, ed., *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II* 1 [New York: Herder, 1967] 190), Rahner wonders if appeal to the eschatological definitiveness of the gospel might not provide sufficient justification for the permanence of Church office.

²³ "The Church and the Parousia" 305–10; *Theology of Pastoral Action* 76.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 78; "The Meaning of Ecclesiastical Office" 23–24.

²⁵ K. Rahner, "The Episcopal Office," T.I. 6, 344–50; "The Meaning of Ecclesiastical Office" 26–28; *Theology of Pastoral Action* 78–84.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 79; *Commentary* 191–92; "The Theology of the Restoration of the Diaconate," T.I. 5, 273–75.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 274.

strictly required by the Church's nature or are at least not identifiable as so required.²⁸ Thus the fact that the threefold division was not present from the beginning does not preclude the possibility that it is *juris divini* and not subject to alteration by the later Church. It is certain, however, that at least some variations in the content of the three offices lie within the competence of the later Church, which has at various times made use of this power.²⁹

As far as individual offices are concerned, Rahner directs his attention in this period chiefly to those offices under discussion at Vatican II, episcopacy and diaconate, with less attention paid to priesthood. His primary point of departure for a theology of the episcopacy is the episcopal college,³⁰ the body of bishops with the pope as its head, which as the successor to the fundamental form of church office, the college of apostles with Peter as its head, is the subject of full and supreme authority in the Church. Just as the universal Church has attributes which cannot be predicated of the local Church or the individual Christian, so too, and for the same reason, does the college of bishops have attributes which cannot be predicated of its individual members. On the disputed question of the precise relationship of the pope and the college of bishops, Rahner argues that the primary subject of supreme authority in the Church is the episcopal college; its authority, however, can be exercised either in a collegial act strictly so called or by the pope "alone," who is then acting precisely in his capacity as head of the college of bishops. The basic and highest form of Church office thus exhibits both collegial and personal elements.³¹

The relatively few dogmatic considerations of the priesthood emphasize the presbyterium, the body of priests surrounding the (local) bishop, as the primary point of reference. Rather than being a mere concession to the physical limitations of the bishop, the presbyterium

²⁸ K. Rahner, "Reflection on the Concept of 'jus divinum' in Catholic Thought," T.I. 5, 226-40; "The Episcopal Office" 320-21.

²⁹ Ibid. 343-44, esp. n. 12. In some texts ("The Theology of the Restoration of the Diaconate" 276; "Reflection on the Concept of 'jus divinum'" 224-25; *Commentary* 192) Rahner allows for the further possibility that the later Church might possess the ability to restructure the set of divisions; other texts from this period deny this (*Theology of Pastoral Action* 79; "The Episcopal Office" 341 n. 10; "On Bishops' Conferences," T.I. 6, 378). Rahner's more recent work, esp. *Vorfragen zu einem ökumenischen Amtsverständnis (Quaestiones disputatae* 65; Freiburg: Herder, 1974), is more consistent in attributing this ability to the Church.

³⁰ Cf. esp. "The Episcopal Office" 319-25 and "On the Presence of Christ" 101-2 n. 27. He takes a different approach in "The Episcopate and the Primacy," in K. Rahner and J. Ratzinger, *The Episcopate and the Primacy* (New York: Herder, 1962) 11-36.

³¹ "The Episcopal Office" 313-60; "On the Relationship between the Pope and the College of Bishops," T.I. 10, 50-70.

is a continuation on the local level of the collegial-personal structure of office in the universal Church.³²

Rahner also addresses the question of diaconate, a matter of major concern at the Council. Defining diaconate as relatively permanent and relatively significant nonsacerdotal assistance to Church office in its specifically official functions,³³ Rahner argues that it has never ceased to exist in the Church, despite considerable variation in its details. In favoring the ordination of permanent deacons, he thus assesses this step as the reintroduction of the practice of sacramental conferral of a complex of rights and duties rather than as the restoration of a suppressed office.³⁴ This is a line of argumentation which, if correct, would have considerable bearing on several other theological issues as well.

Limitations of the Church

A discussion of Rahner's ecclesiology, even in this restricted period of his work, would not be complete without mention of "anonymous Christianity." The fact that the Church is the sacrament of God's victorious grace in Christ does not imply that this grace is present and operative only within the Church; the Church is rather the explicit visibility of a grace which is offered universally. Rahner argues that the offer of grace tends with intrinsic necessity toward historical manifestation in Christ and the Church and that there is no offer and acceptance of grace without some tangible historical mediation; from this he concludes that those who have accepted the offer of grace but who are not explicit Christians can be called "anonymous Christians," in order to express in a brief formulation both the possibility of salvation "outside" the Church and the necessarily Christian ecclesial character of that salvation.³⁵ In his judgment, however, the word "Church" should be used without qualification only where Church-distinctive elements are found, not wherever Church-constitutive elements are present. This avoids conceptual confusion and leaves intact a terminology suitable for speaking about what from the time of the

³² *Theology of Pastoral Action* 95-100; "The Episcopal Office" 340-44.

³³ "The Theology of the Restoration of the Diaconate" 270.

³⁴ Cf. *ibid.* 268-314; "The Teaching of the Second Vatican Council on the Diaconate," T.I. 10, 222-32.

³⁵ As summary cf. "Anonymous Christians," T.I. 6, 390-98. The foundations of this theory lie in Rahner's theology of grace and Christology. A valuable presentation is available in K. Riesenhuber, "Afterword: The Anonymous Christian according to Karl Rahner," in A. Röper, *The Anonymous Christian* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966) 145-79.

New Testament has been called Church.³⁶ Rahner considers an awareness of the possibility of anonymous Christianity increasingly important for a Church which will presumably have to exist in a diaspora situation without succumbing to a sect-like mentality.³⁷

Conclusion

Although it would be inappropriate to evaluate Rahner's ecclesiological work in this period as if it represented the whole of his writing on the topic, various specific criticisms which pertain to the stage discussed here should at least be noted. One fundamental criticism opposes Rahner's speculative, transcendental method, which is accused of paying insufficient attention to the actual historical development.³⁸ That Rahner is particularly concerned with the transcendental aspect of Christianity can hardly be denied; and this can at times lead to a relative neglect of the categorical dimension. Yet it must be remembered that Rahner's method does not claim to be exhaustive, but only to represent a legitimate, though incomplete, approach.³⁹ His ability to incorporate new dimensions into his basic transcendental approach shows that his method is open to expansion from other perspectives.⁴⁰ In addition, some major issues concerning the foundation of the Church

³⁶ Cf. *Theology of Pastoral Action* 47-48; K. Rahner, "Kirche ausserhalb der Kirche: Stellungnahme zu D. Sölle," *Kritisches Wort* (Freiburg: Herder, 1970) 38-39.

³⁷ Cf., e.g., "The New Image of the Church" 12-24.

³⁸ Criticisms of this sort are registered strongly by H. Küng, "To Get to the Heart of the Matter," *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* 71 (1971) 24-30; A. Gerken, *Offenbarung und Transzendenzenerfahrung* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1969) 22, 40, 72-74; A. Stock, *Kurzformeln des Glaubens: Zur Unterscheidung des Christlichen bei Karl Rahner* (*Theologische Meditationen* 26; Zurich: Benziger, 1971) 23-26, 50. Related but more nuanced criticism is joined with a more complete consideration of Rahner's thought in F. Schupp, "Zum Begriff 'Offenbarung,'" *Auf dem Weg zu einer kritischen Theologie* (*Quaestiones disputatae* 64; Freiburg: Herder, 1974) 102-7; E. Mitterstieler, *Christlicher Glaube als Bestätigung des Menschen: Zur "fides quaerens intellectum" in der Theologie Karl Rahners* (Frankfurt: Knecht, 1975) 73, 139-47.

³⁹ The limitations which Rahner explicitly recognizes in his treatment of eschatological statements ("The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Assertions," T.I. 4, 324-25) he would certainly acknowledge in other works as well. Cf. his own comments on his theology ("Gnade als Mitte menschlicher Existenz," *Herausforderung des Christen* [Freiburg: Herder, 1975] 122, 124, 141-42) and the remarks of O. Muck on *Hörer des Wortes* ("Phänomenologie-Metaphysik-Transzendente Reflexion," *ZKT* 96 [1974] 74-75).

⁴⁰ Cf. A. Carr, "Theology and Experience in the Thought of Karl Rahner," *JR* 53 (1973) 372-74; W. Schmölders, *Inkarnatorische Struktur* 140-74, 183-84; E. Mitterstieler, *Christlicher Glaube*, 38-39 n. 87, 46-47; B. van der Heijden, *Karl Rahner: Darstellung und Kritik seiner Grundpositionen* (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1973) 85-86, 113 n. 115, 147-52; W. Kasper, "Christologie von unten?: Kritik und Neuansatz gegenwärtiger Christologie," *Grundfragen der Christologie heute*, ed. L. Scheffczyk (*Quaestiones disputatae* 72; Freiburg: Herder, 1975) 156.

and the structure of office within the Church are addressed at greater length and with greater historical care in his later work.⁴¹

A second line of objection is of greater weight. Rahner's approach to ecclesiology has been accused of presupposing the legitimacy of given teachings or structures within the Church and of rendering such realities immune from criticism by determining the conditions for their possibility and thus suggesting their necessity or inevitability.⁴² There is some validity to this charge, since Rahner does at times take specific teachings or structures as the unquestioned starting point for his reflection, though this is often due to the deliberate choice of a limited topic for a particular essay. On the whole, however, it should be recognized that Rahner's writings have often shown that the pertinent preconditions reveal a given teaching or structural system to be incomplete or inadequate, even if not false or illegitimate. In this respect his work has contributed considerably to a widening of recognized possibilities, and thus to Church reform.⁴³

Finally, criticism of Rahner's theory of anonymous Christianity should be mentioned. His view has been opposed both for underestimating the importance of explicit Christianity and thus, among other things, as having an adverse effect upon the Church's missionary endeavors, and also as being an imperialistic Christianization of non-Christians, to be rejected in the name of the legitimate autonomy of other religions and world views.⁴⁴ Many of the critics seriously misrepresent Rahner's position.⁴⁵ While the terminology is certainly open to question,⁴⁶ it would seem that, as Rahner and others have argued, the

⁴¹ Cf. *Vorfragen*, "Aspects of the Episcopal Office," T.I. 14, 185-201; *Grundkurs des Glaubens* (Freiburg: Herder, 1976) 313-87; "Zur Ekklesiologie," in H. U. von Balthasar *et al.*, *Diskussion über Hans Küngs "Christ sein"* (Mainz: Grünewald, 1976) 105-11.

⁴² W. Schmölders, *Inkarnatorische Struktur* 112, 117, 185, 187; H. Küng, "To Get to the Heart of the Matter" 26-30.

⁴³ E. Mitterstieler, *Christlicher Glaube* 147.

⁴⁴ Cf. "A Modern Conception of the Salvation of Infidels Which Hampers Apostolic Zeal according to Father Karl Rahner: Missionaries Express Their Concern," *Christ to the World* 8 (1963) 421-28; H. Kruse, "Die 'anonymen Christen' exegetisch gesehen," *MTZ* 18 (1967) 2-29; H. U. von Balthasar, *The Moment of Christian Witness* (Glen Rock, N.J.: Newman, 1968) 60-68; H. Küng, *On Being a Christian* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976) 97-98, 125-26; H. Küng, "Anonyme Christen - wozu?" *Orientierung* 39 (1975) 214-16.

⁴⁵ This is also noted by B. van der Heijden (*Karl Rahner*, 259-60) and E. Klinger, "Perspektiven des Christlichen im Begriff der anonymen Christlichkeit," *Christentum innerhalb und ausserhalb der Kirche*, ed. E. Klinger (*Quaestiones disputatae* 73; Freiburg: Herder, 1976) 15-16 n. 12.

⁴⁶ Cf. the objections of E. Jüngel, "Extra Christum nulla salus - als Grundsatz natürlicher Theologie?: Evangelische Erwägungen zur 'Anonymität' des Christenmenschen," *Christentum* (ed. E. Klinger) 122-4. As Jüngel notes, Rahner does not consider the terminology decisive ("Anonymous Christians" 398).

theory can be defended as a way of expressing the possibility of salvation of non-Christians without compromising the necessary relationship of salvation to Jesus Christ.⁴⁷ Though developed primarily to articulate the possibility of the salvation of non-Christians, the future importance of Rahner's position may well lie in its insistence on binding salvation to Christ, thus preventing Christianity from seeing itself as merely one religion among many.

On the whole, this stage of Rahner's ecclesiological writing can be judged a major contribution to the work of the conciliar period, an effective vehicle for the transition from Neo-Scholastic ecclesiology to more contemporary approaches. It is in part limited by the questions raised and by the way in which they were posed at that time. Rahner's ecclesiology, like much of his other work, is coproductive of a situation in which verbal repetition of his positions or mechanical duplication of his procedures would no longer be adequate.⁴⁸ Rahner's later work, discussed in the following essay, shows some ways in which these further issues can be pursued. But other approaches, particularly those with even greater attention to foundational and critical questions, are also necessary if ecclesiology is to respond adequately to the needs of the present Church.

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THE DECADE AFTER THE COUNCIL

The Second Vatican Council ended on December 8, 1965, with a liturgy in St. Peter's Square that included as concelebrants some of the very theologians who fifteen or twenty years earlier had labored under a cloud of suspicion. Catholic theology was maturing. In the wake of the Council further changes in Catholic theology would follow for the Church and for individual theologians. For Karl Rahner the close of Vatican II marks the beginning of new developments in his theological interests and in his ecclesiology.

In January 1966, at Koblenz, Rahner delivered for the first time a lecture on "The New Image of the Church," an essay which conveniently summarized his ecclesiology in the days immediately following Vatican

⁴⁷ Most recently in "Observations on the Problem of the 'Anonymous Christian,'" T.I. 14, 280-94. Cf. also H. R. Schlette, "Rahner, Küng und die anonymen Christen," *Orientierung* 39 (1975) 174-76; Puntel, "Hans Küng" 3-6; H. Fries, "Der anonyme Christ - Das anonyme Christentum als Kategorien christlichen Denkens," *Christentum* (ed. E. Klinger) 25-41.

⁴⁸ Cf. the remarks of J. B. Metz, "Widmung und Würdigung: Karl Rahner, dem Sechzigjährigen," *Gott in Welt* 1, ed. J. B. Metz et al. (Freiburg: Herder, 1964) 10*; F. Schupp, "Zur Diskussion um das Theologieverständnis," *ZKT* 92 (1972) 309, and *Mythos und Religion* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1976) 76.

II, a council, he noted, of the Church about the Church.¹ As is often the case in Rahner's theology, he is reacting to topics, problematics, controversies occasioned by inner-Catholic affairs rather than by a stimulus to systematize. What he stressed as central to the ecclesiological thrusts of Vatican II were the insights (a) that the Church is concretely present in the local communities and regional or subordinate churches,² and (b) that the Church is the sacrament of salvation for humanity.³ He also pointed to further fresh traits in the image of the Church which emerged more strongly at Vatican II: (a) the concept of the sinfulness of the Church; (b) the Church as a communion of faith, hope, and love; (c) the Church as a charismatic community; (d) the Church as gathering of the poor and oppressed; and (e) the Church as situated in the eschatological phase of saving history.⁴

This essay is a convenient watershed summarizing Rahner as outlined in the previous essay by John Galvin. The only major preoccupation from Vatican II ecclesiology that Rahner does not list in that summary is his view developed in the important essay in *Sacramentum mundi* on the new perspective about the relationship of "Church and World."⁵

The next ten years of Rahner's theological investigations, the period from 1966 to 1976, the principal focus of this third essay, were influenced by three events which touched his own life. These three events, though somewhat related to the Council, at least in the sense that they grew out of the spirit of Vatican II, gave his reflections new directions. The first event was his collaboration with the preparation for and initial meetings of the West German Pastoral Synod, sponsored by the West Deutsche Bischofskonferenz, which held its first working session May 10-13, 1972, in Würzburg.⁶ In this work Rahner gained greater contact with local parishes and came to understand better the aspirations and frustrations of the average German Catholic. For a complex of reasons, Rahner eventually resigned from all the committees of the Pastoral Synod, but his work had been already marked by his new associations with local Church. Possibly Rahner felt that the Synod's agenda was too sprawling, that discussions were too politicized. At any rate, he resigned. But it is this involvement that occasioned his important

¹ K. Rahner, T.I. 10, 3-29.

² T.I. 10, 7-12. He draws here from *Lumen gentium*, no. 26. This theme is further developed in his "Schism in the Catholic Church?" T.I. 12, 98-116.

³ T.I. 10, 12-24.

⁴ Ibid. 28.

⁵ *Sacramentum mundi* 1 (New York: Herder, 1968) 346-57.

⁶ Reports can be found from 1969 on in *Herder Korrespondenz*. Also a special publication, *Synode*, published about eight times a year, has covered the progress of the Pastoral Synod. For further bibliography and comment, see M. A. Fahey, "Continuity in the Church amid Structural Changes," *TS* 35 (1974) 438-39.

Strukturwandel der Kirche, translated into English as *The Shape of the Church to Come*.⁷

A second factor that shaped his thinking in the post-Vatican II period was his involvement in the Vatican's International Theological Commission (begun on April 11, 1969), a group of 30 theologians under the sponsorship of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.⁸ Rahner was a member from 1969 until 1974. The Commission has addressed key theological issues such as pluralism, apostolic succession, moral norms, and magisterium. Because of advancing age and other reasons, Rahner eventually resigned from the Commission, but not before he had been marked by its preoccupations. This experience helped him to reflect on ecclesiological issues from a wider international perspective.

A third fact which influenced his writing was his move to Munich after he had become emeritus at the University of Münster in 1971. At first he resided in Munich with the staff of *Stimmen der Zeit* at Zuccalistrasse, but in August 1973 he moved nearer the University to Kaulbachstrasse, the Jesuit scholasticate (Berchmanskolleg), where he became writer in residence and consultant to academicians, university students, and younger Jesuits. During this period he has developed considerable interest in the phenomenon of basic Christian communities (*Basisgemeinden*). Now, at the age of 73, he recently completed a "summary" overview of faith,⁹ and he continues to write and give occasional lectures and supervise the publication of his collected essays.¹⁰

⁷ *Strukturwandel der Kirche als Aufgabe und Chance* (Freiburg: Herder, 1972); English translation, *The Shape of the Church to Come* (London: SPCK, 1974). This book contains expansions of ideas in "Perspectives for the Future of the Church," T.I. 12, 202-17; "On the Theology of a 'Pastoral Synod,'" T.I. 14, 116-31; and "Basic Observations on the Subject of Changeable and Unchangeable Factors in the Church," *ibid.* 3-23.

⁸ Rahner's address delivered at the first session of the International Theological Commission (Oct. 6, 1969) is published as "The Congregation of the Faith and the Commission of Theologians," T.I. 14, 98-115. For a list of the members of this International Commission, see the *Annuario pontificio*; Rahner's name is listed in the editions of 1970, 1971, 1972, and 1973. One of the principal texts produced by the Commission to date is the study on pluralism from the October 1972 meeting, *Die Einheit des Glaubens und der theologische Pluralismus* (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1973); English summary statement in *Tablet* [London] 227 (1973) 646-47.

⁹ *Grundkurs des Glaubens* (Freiburg: Herder, 1976).

¹⁰ Rahner has been assisted in this task by a younger Jesuit colleague, Karl Neufeld, who serves a function comparable to that exercised by J. P. Jossua, O.P., for Yves Congar, O.P. Neufeld worked closely on the major revisions of the studies of penance in the early Church, especially in St. Cyprian, published in *Schriften* 11, a revision of essays Rahner first published in 1952. Neufeld also edited the analytic index *Rahner Register* for the first ten volumes of the *Schriften*.

Throughout this eleven- or twelve-year period there seem to be three strands that run through his writings connected with the Church: the need to reflect on the concrete Church; the tasks of the Church in the world; and the need for structural changes within the Church.

Reflection on the Concrete Church

Rahner consistently states in the post-Vatican II period that theological reflection's point of departure must be the concrete Church as it now exists. Theology cannot restrict its considerations to abstract dogma or moral theology, nor to principles deduced from them, but must reflect on the historical and social situation which is the Church's present matrix.¹¹ Such theological reflection accepts the Church as the "little flock" in society (a diaspora), a flock that will surely, argues Rahner, become all the smaller in coming decades.¹² Honest reflection on the actual life and activities of the Church will disclose that the Church was and still is partly the cause for the decline in explicitly ecclesial Christianity.¹³

The Church, then, for Rahner is not an idea or a principle or a postulate. The Church cannot be identified purely and simply with what is confessed as part of the creed, the "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church." Although the Church believes that God through the promise of His predestinating grace has guaranteed it indefectibility (the Church will never cease to be a concrete reality in the world), still the Church is something more than the expression of that promise. The Church is visible, a particular people of God, a social entity, an institution in the world. The Church is, in Rahner's view, made up of institutionalized groups of individuals. When these groups and individuals enter the Church, they bring with them values, structural preferences, cultural norms, and it is precisely these important aspects which have escaped the reflection of classical ecclesiology.¹⁴ More and more Rahner is interested in this component, the anthropological element of the Church.¹⁵ Here Rahner advances beyond what Vatican II stated.

¹¹ "Concerning Our Assent to the Church As She Exists in the Concrete," T.I. 12, 142-60.

¹² "Perspectives for the Future of the Church," T.I. 12, 202-17, esp. 203-6.

¹³ *Shape of the Church to Come* 31.

¹⁴ "On the Structure of the People of the Church Today," T.I. 12, 218.

¹⁵ For broader treatment of Rahner's anthropology, see Klaus P. Fischer, *Der Mensch als Geheimnis: Die Anthropologie K. Rahners* (Freiburg: Herder, 1974); Bert van der Heijden, *Karl Rahner: Darstellung und Kritik seiner Grundpositionen* (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1973); J. B. Metz, "Karl Rahner—Ein theologisches Leben: Theologie als mystische Biographie eines Christenmenschen heute," *Stimmen der Zeit* 192 (1974) 305-16.

There is not much of this new perspective in *Lumen gentium*. It is interesting to note that Rahner's starting point for ecclesiology is close to Küng's methodological procedure sketched in *The Church* that begins with an explicit treatment of the Church's *Unwesen* or tarnished concrete mirror.

Rahner observes that the Church is constantly tempted to conceive of itself merely in terms of its own nature and to conceal from itself its real concrete reality by hiding behind the idealized portrayal of its nature. This procedure he rightly labels as "ecclesiological monophysitism."¹⁶ The Church cannot overlook its historical, social, and political reality that is not simply identical with its "nature."

Because the starting point for ecclesiological reflection is the concrete Church, theologians need to take into consideration the various tensions and burdens that believers experience toward the Church. Believers will normally only "partially identify" with the Church. Rahner describes this phenomenon as "incomplete identification."¹⁷ In other words, there are limits, he reasons, to the concrete "yes" that one can give to the Church. Here again we find emphases which are quite distinct from those of the texts of Vatican II but which are more in line with his earlier pastoral concerns reflected in the multivolumed *Handbuch der Pastoraltheologie* published under his editorship.

Earlier Rahner was more accustomed to write that the "Church is the continuance of Christ's presence in the world, the fundamental sacrament of the eschatologically triumphant mercy of God."¹⁸ The Church was seen in that earlier period as having an exhibitiv character. Without denying this aspect in the post-Vatican II period, Rahner now argues that though the Church is the sacrament of salvation for

¹⁶ T.I. 12, 219. On this from *Schriften* 12, see "Opposition in der Kirche" 469-81; "Mysterium ecclesiae" 482-500; "Die eine Kirche und die vielen Kirchen" 531-46; "Dritte Konfession?" 568-81.

¹⁷ "Schism in the Catholic Church?" T.I. 12, 112-16. On this see H. R. Schlette, "On So-Called 'Partial Identification' with the Church," *Concilium* 66 (New York: Herder, 1971) 35-49; André Godin, S.J., "Belonging to a Church: What Does It Mean Psychologically?" *JSSR* 3 (1964) 204-15.

¹⁸ "The Church and the Sacraments," *Quaestiones disputatae* 9, quoted in *A Rahner Reader*, ed. G. A. McCool (New York: Seabury, 1975) 280. To appreciate the extent to which Rahner's ecclesiology has developed in the post-Vatican II period, contrast the ecclesiological themes emphasized in our present essay with those themes proposed as central in the studies of Herbert Vorgrimler, *Karl Rahner: His Life, Thought and Works* (Glen Rock, N.J.: Paulist, 1965) 75-81, and Louis Roberts, *The Achievement of Karl Rahner* (New York: Herder, 1967). See also Edward Vacek, "Development within Rahner's Theology," *ITQ* 42 (1975) 36-49. A very detailed study of Rahner's ecclesiology, in comparison with that of Hans Küng and Hans Urs von Balthasar, can be found in Medard Kehl, S.J., *Kirche als Institution: Zur theologischen Begründung des institutionellen Charakters der Kirche in der neueren deutschsprachigen katholischen Ekklesiologie* (Frankfurt: Knecht, 1976) esp. 172-238.

the world, in point of fact most people are saved and drawn into eternal life without the Church's institutionalized means. Therefore, when through evangelization new members are acquired for the Church, it is not a question of making salvation available to those who would otherwise be lost, but of gaining new witnesses who will manifest publicly God's grace already long effective in the world, though hidden.

In the course of his writings about the concrete Church, particularly in his *Strukturwandel der Kirche*, Rahner distinguishes among several terminological usages for the word "Church." First he notes the existence of a *Volkskirche*, somewhat weakly translated as "the people's church," that is more a cultural phenomenon in many countries where people are classified as "Church" members because of cultural or geographical associations, irrespective of the presence or the absence in them of personal Christian belief.¹⁹ Rahner stresses that the mere fact of being baptized does not automatically constitute full or real membership in the Church. Secondly, he distinguishes the use of "Church" in the sense of the gathering of those who believe clearly as a result of their own decision under grace.²⁰ He sees some people in a transitional state between the one and the other. Further, the expression "Church" can refer to the *Amtskirche*²¹ or institutional Church, the Church almost exclusively identified with its "officials" or hierarchy (bishops and priests). He also at one point speaks of the *bischöfliche Grosskirche*, the episcopal great Church that forms a translocal, even transnational, reality.²² He is often sharp in his criticism of this larger Church for the ineptitude of its leaders, but most especially for its occasional spiritual bankruptcy.

Tasks of the Church in the World

The post-Vatican II period for Rahner occasions a further elaboration of ideas that began to take shape in the sixties about the Church and the world. Here he explores the relationship between those who believe in the Lordship of Christ and those who do not explicitly confess Christ. Rahner explicates his thought on the interrelationship of those who believe and those who do not believe in the divinity of Christ (the Church and the world) by discussing what are the various "tasks" and "commissions" the Church has received by way of responsibility for the world. Rahner prefers to use the words *Aufgabe* ("task") or *Sendung* ("commission") rather than the more familiar *Mission*, a term associated with Mt 28:18-20.²³ Here he opposes what he calls "horizontalism,"

¹⁹ *Shape of the Church to Come* 23.

²¹ *Ibid.* 50.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 27.

²² *Ibid.* 109 ff.

²³ See M. A. Fahey, "The Mission of the Church: To Divinize or to Humanize?" *Proceedings, Catholic Theological Society of America* 31 (1976) 51-69.

the attempt "to make the Church function as a purely humanitarian institution, perhaps even as a merely secular society of the future."²⁴ The task of humanizing the world, he writes, and the concrete organizational forms taken by world responsibility cannot be the immediate or exclusive work of the Church as institution or social organization. The Church has recognized the independence of a secular world, a world with its own possibilities and self-elected goals, with its institutions and organizations, with its pluralism and with the antagonism that this inevitably entails.²⁵ This world is not subject to the immediate control of the institutional Church but is autonomous.

Thus, for Rahner, the organizing power behind the direct humanizing of the world is not and cannot be the Church. It would denote an excessively clericalist and sacralist view of the Church to consider it *the* controlling power responsible for the world task of mankind. The Church can disclose to a person what the ultimate meaning of such responsibility is, or its relationship to man's eternal destiny. The Church can encourage groups of Christians to organize for the task of further humanizing the world. It is even possible for the Church as institution to aid secular organizations in their efforts when this aid is asked for and when particular goals would serve the dignity and freedom of man. But the Church *as institution* is not the proper force for realizing the task of humanizing the world. The Church, in fact, should declare itself incompetent in this area, suggests Rahner. In a sense, Rahner here explains more about the status of the world than he does about the Church as such.

Structural Changes in the Church

In planning for the future of the Church, Rahner argues that structural changes are not only permissible but quite necessary. Throughout this discussion he is restricting himself to the Roman Catholic Church. What he foresees is that the Church of the future will be one built from below by basic communities as a result of free initiative and association.²⁶ He speculates that parishes, in the sense of administrative areas of the institutional Church, are not the basic communities out of which the Church will have to be built for the future. These new spontaneous and informal groupings described as basic Christian communities will, Rahner reasons, at least complement what he terms the "episcopal great Church." These are ideas that are

²⁴ *Shape of the Church to Come* 123.

²⁵ "The Church's Commission to Bring Salvation and the Humanization of the World," T.I. 14, 295-313.

²⁶ *Shape of the Church to Come* 108.

not present in Vatican II, except very remotely in sections about charisms in the Church.²⁷

The Church of the future, writes Rahner, will be an open Church, ecumenical from its very roots, democratized, and especially declericalized. He does not say much about how the Church's structures need to manifest justice, a theme which is developed more by liberation theologies and other writings traceable to the famous Medellín conference.²⁸

Rahner has some devastatingly shattering critiques to make about the lack of spirituality in today's Church, a Church he regards as often terrifyingly lifeless and spiritless. Here the tone of his remarks takes on a new intensity. Interestingly, one can note numerous parallels between his harsh remarks and much of the writings of the French Catholic Marcel Légaut, whose works, though unfortunately little known in the Anglo-Saxon world, have had a phenomenal success in France and in Germany through translations.²⁹

Hierarchical office should always be respected in the Church, but those who are unselfish, who have a prophetic gift in the Church, those who love, constitute the "real Church," despite the fact that they are sometimes quite removed from officeholders in the Church.

One interesting proposal, which goes beyond the scope of Vatican II, is the proposal about alternate modes of ordained ministry for basic Christian communities. Rahner reasons that it is quite compatible with the nature of the hierarchically constituted Catholic Church as a whole for a local community to present to the bishop a suitable leader coming from their midst to petition for him a "relative" (i.e., not "absolute") ordination for this particular community. In America, Stephen Clark in his *Unordained Elders* has proposed a similar recognition of gifted leaders of the faith, a proposal which has, he argues, good historical precedents.³⁰ In presenting practical proposals for structural adjustments in the Church, Rahner raises several issues

²⁷ "Observations on the Factor of the Charismatic in the Church," T.I. 12, 81-97. On Rahner's reflections concerning charisma, see René de Haes, *Pour une théologie du prophétique: Lecture thématique de la théologie de Karl Rahner* (Louvain: Nauwelaerts, 1972).

²⁸ For an example of another view, see *Between Honesty and Hope: Documents from and about the Church in Latin America*, issued at Lima by the Peruvian Bishops' Commission for Social Action, tr. J. Drury (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1970).

²⁹ The basic texts of Légaut are *Introduction à l'intelligence du passé et de l'avenir du christianisme* (Paris: Aubier, 1970); *L'Homme à la recherche de son humanité* (Paris: Aubier, 1971); *Mutation de l'église et conversion personnelle* (Paris: Aubier, 1975). A brief selection in English is found in *Cross Currents* 23 (1973) 1-29.

³⁰ Stephen Clark, *Unordained Elders and Renewal Communities* (New York: Paulist, 1976).

which would affect the way we envisage the relationship of Church to ordained ministry. That important theme would itself require a separate and detailed analysis.

Conclusions

In the post-Vatican II period we have seen how Rahner reflects upon the concrete Church, the tasks of the Church in the world, and the need for structural change within the Church. We can observe a growing independence from the agenda or priorities of Vatican II, though his preoccupations remain very Roman Catholic, in fact Roman Catholic of the North Atlantic communities. Rahner's lack of reference to the concrete life of the German Evangelical (Lutheran) Church gives some of his comments a quasi-parochial tone. His ecclesiology is open to the criticism of lacking a sufficiently ecumenical scope. Eventually Rahner will have to grapple with the question whether a nonepiscopal church is a valid model of church.

Rahner's ecclesiology in the late 60's and 70's is descriptive and phenomenological. Again it is characterized by probing analyses of situations and crises. In one sense it is less interdogmatic or systematic than it was at an earlier stage, where Rahner was anxious to show more explicitly the innerconnectedness of Church and grace, Church and Trinity, or Church and sacraments. He clearly presupposes that his present readers will have harked back to his earlier basic writings. All this is simply to say that Rahner's ecclesiology is in need of being complemented by systematic treatments such as those produced by Klostermann³¹ or Mühlen³² or the editors of the *Mysterium salutis* series.³³ To appreciate Rahner's notable, even outstanding, present contributions to ecclesiology, one needs to recognize what particular theological "functional specialities," to use Bernard Lonergan's terminology, he is intent on pursuing. In my judgment, Rahner has recently concentrated in his ecclesiology on those functional specialties described by Lonergan as research, interpretation, historical analysis of our present situation, even doctrinal development. Rahner has not yet completed the work of "systematics." This observation is not meant as a criticism; it is rather an expression of our own impatient anticipation of the synthesizing yet to come.

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³¹ Ferdinand Klostermann, *Gemeinde—Kirche der Zukunft* (2 vols.; Freiburg: Herder, 1974).

³² Heribert Mühlen, *Una Mystica Persona* (2nd ed.; Paderborn: Schöningh, 1967).

³³ *Mysterium salutis: Grundriss heilsgeschichtlicher Dogmatik* 4/1, 4/2, eds. J. Feiner and M. Löhrer (Einsiedeln: Benzinger, 1972-76).