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HEFT 15

## Theological Foundations of Evangelization

by  
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## FOREWORD

Dr. phil. Paul Hacker, Professor Emeritus in the University of Münster, suddenly died at his home on March 18, 1979. Among his manuscripts we found a complete treatise, already prepared for publication, under the title *Theological Foundations of Evangelization*.

Paul Hacker was born on January 6, 1913, in Seelscheid (Siegen/Rhine). After graduating from the Gymnasium in 1932, he attended the universities of Bonn, Heidelberg, Frankfurt, and Berlin; there he studied English, Romanic and Slavic Languages and Literatures, Indology, comparative linguistics, and philosophy. In 1940, he submitted his doctoral dissertation on Ivan Sergeevich Turgenev, generally regarded as one of the greatest Russian novelists together with Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, to the University of Berlin.

After World War II, Paul Hacker turned his attention especially to Indian studies. His dissertation for the "habilitation", which he submitted to the University of Bonn (1949), was in this field. One year later, in 1950, he became "Dozent" for Indology at the University of Münster. In 1954, he accepted a professorship at the Mithila Institute, Darbhanga/India. In 1955, he returned to Germany to occupy the Chair of Indology at the University of Bonn, Germany's oldest Chair of Indian studies. In 1963, he was appointed full professor at the University of Münster and director of the newly established Institute of Indology ("Indologisches Seminar"), a position which he held up to his retirement in 1978.

In various important areas of Indian studies, Paul Hacker made pioneering contributions and developed new and exemplary methods of research. In particular, his contributions to an historical analysis of Advaita Vedanta and his investigations in the Puranas and other anonymous Sanscrit Texts have set new standards. His research has not been restricted, however, to the classical Hindu tradition. It has also given new and highly significant impulses of the study of modern Hinduism. Another area of his scholarly work has been in modern Indo-Aryan linguistics; in particular, his stimulating contributions to the analysis of Hindi syntax have found international recognition.

Paul Hacker was a religious thinker. He came from a Protestant family. His mother taught him to love the Bible and prayer. All his life, he was concerned with the sources of Christian revelation, accepting wholeheartedly the fundamental truths of Christian faith and striving after a very Christian life. On September 28, 1962, he was received into the Roman Catholic Church. His decision to do so was not a sudden one. He deepened continuously his understanding of Christian faith by systematic study of the Scripture and the Fathers; he studied the great theologians of the Middle Ages, above all he read again and again the works of St. Thomas Aquinas; he analysed the writings of Martin Luther, one fruit of

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which was his *The Ego in Faith*. Martin Luther and the *Origin of Anthropocentric Religion* (1970); he was also accurately acquainted with modern trends in philosophy and theology.

Based on intensive studies of Christian theology and of comparative philosophy Paul Hacker could provide new contexts and a more synoptic and interdisciplinary orientation for his exploration of Hindu philosophy and religion. "In its totality, Paul Hacker's work presents a rare combination of existential commitment, of philological rigour and acumen, and of methodological awareness. There can be no doubt that he has not only made a lasting contribution to Indological research, but also that he has given new impulses to the general theological and philosophical encounter and dialogue between India and the West" (German News, June 7, 1979).

Paul Hacker was "a dedicated Indologist" and theologian. He was a distinguished expert, always acutely conscious of his responsibilities. That is why he wrote his *Theological Foundations of Evangelization* with the purpose of clarifying the theological position of missions and the confused situation of the church in India in particular. R. I. P.

Johannes Dörmann, editor

Ever since the end of the Second Vatican Council the Catholic Church has been experiencing a growing crisis. All areas of ecclesiastical, spiritual, and theological life are concerned; to some it would seem that the Church is losing her very identity.

One of the primary expressions of the Church's life is evangelization or missionary work. It too has been affected by the post-conciliar disaster. If we wish, with God's grace, to prepare a reconstruction of what has decayed, the first thing we ought to do, after due penance, is to recall the foundations of evangelization as laid down in Holy Scripture, testified in Tradition by the Fathers, and eventually codified in pronouncements of the *magisterium*.

The presupposition of evangelization is the New Covenant, which includes the Risen Lord's commandment: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19f.). But the meaning of the New Covenant cannot be adequately understood if the previous covenants which God made with mankind or a part of it are not duly considered. Accordingly, the first Chapter of this book treats of the Covenants up to the New and Eternal Covenant, also called the Evangelical Law, established by Jesus Christ. The covenant that in a significant sense is called "the Old Covenant" was exclusive; the New Covenant combines a specific exclusiveness with that universality which is realized by means of evangelization. The principles of the Old and New Covenants involve special problems concerning the relationship and attitude of those within the Covenant to those without. Such subjects will be treated in the first Chapter on the basis of Holy Scripture; in the second Chapter we will cull relevant ideas from the works of such Fathers of the Church as may be considered to be representative of Tradition; in the second part of the third Chapter we will reflect on pertinent pronouncements of the Second Vatican Council. Polemics will be indispensable, and in the first part of the third Chapter, by way of contrast with our consideration of the Council doctrines, we will criticize the one ideology which more than any other factor has contributed to the decay of evangelization.<sup>1</sup>

The fourth Chapter was written later than the preceding three. It focuses on India, that is, on a country whose missionary situation in modern times is of special interest. This reference will not only contribute to concretizing, modifying, and extending what we could ascertain in the pre-

<sup>1</sup> In their original form, the first three Chapters of this book appeared as articles in the *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* (Münster/Westphalia): in 1970, vol. 3, pp. 161-185; 1970, vol. 4, pp. 235-278; 1971, vol. 2, pp. 81-97.



ceding chapters; it will also give an opportunity to study a significant example of how evangelization and its foundations are conceived in the post-conciliar time.

A standard for a theological appraisal of the postconciliar development of the Church in India is the Papal *Adhortatio* "*Evangelii nuntiandi*" (promulgated in December, 1975). Some of its statements seem to refer specially to views prevailing today in India. Therefore this document is treated in the beginning of the fourth Chapter.

The Indian population in its vast majority is still pagan. But the same country is the homeland of a long-established Catholic Church. Post-conciliar experience has shown us graphically that such a coexistence involves problems that had been foreseen neither by the Fathers of the Church nor by the last Council nor by missiologists who had evolved theories of evangelization. Theologians, no matter whether of Western or Indian extraction, and bishops who follow their advice, are attempting to apply new theories and methods, but their mistakes constitute a grave peril to real evangelization today. Problems of this kind will be treated in the fourth Chapter.

The author has throughout worked directly from sources: Holy Scripture, texts of the Fathers, texts of the Council, a Papal *Adhortatio*, texts of Karl Rahner and Amalorpavadass; documents of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, the Report of an Indian "seminar", Giovanni Caprile's Report *Il Sinodo dei Vescovi* 1974, and a few reviews. This method differs from the way in which the subject is usually treated. So the author deemed it dispensable to cite many studies of scholars. A few wide-spread views (which will be known to the specialist) have been repudiated without their advocates being named.

The author wishes to express his grateful thanks to his colleague, Professor Johannes Dörmann, and to the publisher for still having made the publication possible in spite of difficulties. Last but not least it is his pleasant duty to thank an American friend who did for this book what I elsewhere described as "atticizing my English *komé*".

Münster (Westphalia)  
September, 1978

Paul Hacker

## CONTENTS

Foreword	3
Preface	5
I. The Religions of the Nations in the Light of the Holy Scripture	9
II. The Religions of the Gentiles as viewed by Fathers of the Church	35
III. The Christian Attitude toward Non-Christian Religions	61
IV. The Situation of the Church in India	79



## THE RELIGIONS OF THE NATIONS IN THE LIGHT OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

### I

#### 1. *Hermeneutic Preliminaries*

Historical criticism has disclosed that the traditional text of many biblical books is the result of a redaction or several successive redactions. The redactors combined and intertwined materials they took from different sources. But even these sources did not, at least in the case of the Old Testament, give direct and first-hand accounts of events. They were collections of materials, probably oral traditions, of very different origins and contents. The compilers, and later the redactors, added their own contributions at least in selecting and arranging the traditions.

These results of research, though uncertain in innumerable details, are safe in their broad outlines. Their discovery, however, seemed to involve a theological problem. Most of the non-Catholic researchers solved the problem in a somewhat rash and irresponsible manner. They simply brushed aside the traditional dogma of inspiration. This may have been a counter-movement to the previous exaggeration which had interpreted inspiration as fixing the individual words and as restricted to a superficial literality. But Catholic dogma had never supported this rigidity, and the doctrine of the spiritual sense had healthily counterbalanced the regard for the literal and historical senses. Catholicism's acceptance of historical criticism could have been quite smooth and fruitful if there had not been, at first, the need for warding off the subversive tendencies connected with liberal criticism. In our time, again, the assimilation of sound historical methods is impeded by a hectic anxiety to catch up with liberalism.

The Constitution on Divine Revelation of the Second Vatican Council (*Dei Verbum* = DV) has explained that God, who is the primary author of Scripture, elected men in order to engage them in such a way that they were to use their own faculties in writing down what God wanted them to record (In sacris vero libris conficiendis Deus homines elegit, quos facultatibus ac viribus suis utentes adhibuit, ut Ipse in illis et per illos agente, ea omnia caque sola, quae Ipse vellet, ut veri auctores scripto traderent. No. 11). These statements of the *magisterium* uphold the dogma of inspiration and yet in no way conflict with the safe findings and sound methods of biblical criticism. Nor do they encourage rationalistic or modernistic approaches.

Research shows the texts of Scripture to be embedded in a process of formation and transmission of traditions. Just as this process did not cease with the final redaction of the text, so it did not start all of a sudden with the recording of the first redaction. The inspired authors or hagiographers, referred to by decrees of the last three Councils, are of course those who actually recorded the text, that is to say, principally the redactors of the final text. It is this text that has become canonical.

Consequently, it is the final, canonical text that has to be used as the basis of theological reflection. In the framework of the present study, differences between the Yahwist, the Elohist, the Deuteronomist and the Priestly Code become irrelevant. Only in the case of the latest strata of the Old Testament does comparison with earlier stages seem to be of importance for discerning the intention of the canonical text.

Differences between inferred sources and differences between strata stemming from various periods can indeed sometimes render valuable aid in assessing the theological import of Scripture passages. However, we must not allow ourselves to play off one source against another and to see opposition where the redactors or hagiographers saw harmony. Revelation certainly includes varied aspects of the recorded text, here and there even statements which at the level of literal understanding are simply irreconcilable with each other. This is a consequence of divergences between the sources used by the redactors. But there is no contradiction at the strictly theological level, nor is there any *dialectics*. Theological interpretation "must pay due regard to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture, taking heed of the whole Church's living tradition and of the analogy of faith" (diligenter respiciendum est ad contentum et unitatem totius Scripturae, ratione habita vivae totius Ecclesiae Traditionis et analogiae fidei. DV no. 12). The unity of Scripture is not, of course, one of literary genus, nor does it consist in a homogeneity of style or outlook or in the coherence of a system. Nor does it entail factual agreement when one and the same event is related in different parts of Scripture. The unity of Scripture is of a theological nature, that is to say, it is constituted by the Holy Spirit who has inspired all canonical books. Apparent contradictions and disagreements are invitations by the Holy Spirit to view significant events under different spiritual aspects — and a warning against confusing scriptural theology with secular historical information. The Fathers of the Church were quite alive to this invitation, and they can teach us an important lesson on this point, though in following the Spirit's guidance they used categories and methods different from the ones that are familiar to us today.

Critical research has revealed that the historical texts of Scripture are not simply reports on external events and facts nor are they absolutely unhistorical. There are many levels of historicity included in the texts. "The truth which God for the sake of our salvation willed to be committed to writing in Holy Scripture" (veritas, quam Deus nostrae salutis causa Litteris Sacris consignari voluit, DV no. 11) in some cases gradually disclosed itself in century-long meditation on the divine economy underlying the events and facts. This process, itself part of the *history* conveyed by the texts, was guided by the Holy Spirit. The text presents facts in the meaningful form in which the Spirit revealed them to the inspired authors and, through them, to all potential readers in the future. Therefore, once we succeed in freeing ourselves from the secularistic, existentialistic, or rationalistic bias of which many exegetes today are possessed, we discover that it is precisely the results of sober and responsible historical criticism that can prepare the way for a fresh approach toward a spiritual and dogmatic interpretation of Scripture.

In the framework of the present study it is important to note that historical investigation has discovered in the texts adaptations of elements from religions preceding the religion of Yahweh and from religions contemporary to and

neighboring upon Israel. Such adaptation does not, however, imply a canonization of those religions. What matters is the fact that the foreign elements were thoroughly reoriented by their inclusion in the sacred text. The light of the Holy Spirit has transformed and transfigured them, thus setting free the truth included in them. The same phenomenon of a reorienting assimilation of foreign materials recurs in the New Testament and in the writings of the Fathers of the Church.

## 2. The Old Testament

In the language of Holy Scripture the word *Nations* (*gojīm*, ἔθνη, sometimes rendered by *pāgans* or *gentiles*) signifies men who have a religion but do not live under the Covenant (*berith*, διαθήκη) established by God (in this sense, the word *Nations* is capitalized in this study). On the other hand, those under or within the Covenant are set apart and marked as God's own possession; hence they are *holy* (cf. Ex 19:5f; 1 Peter 2:9). The designation of those outside the Covenant as *the Nations* presupposes that those within are *chosen*, not as individuals but as a people. The Covenant is essentially established by God alone resolving and declaring that he will steadily preserve and protect and prosper the partner of the Covenant. Thus the notion of covenant includes the idea of *promise*. So Scripture can even speak of a covenant that God established with day and night (Jer 33:25), which means that he promised to preserve the order of nature. A covenant made with men includes stipulations concerning their behavior. Hence ratification of the Covenant is required of the chosen. This reciprocity constitutes the analogy to the secular use of the word *berith* in which it means *compact* or *agreement* (cf., e.g., Gen 31:44; Deut 7:2).

There is in the economy of salvation one case of a covenant that God made with an ethnic group. This is the Old Covenant established in the desert at Mount Sinai or Horeb. But Scripture records even earlier covenants. We may speak of a covenant based on the Creation. This was broken by man in his Fall, which resulted in a progressive degradation of mankind. Only after the Flood did God conclude a covenant described as *berith*. This covenant consists in God's promise to Noah and his descendants (Gen 8:21—9:17) that God will never "again destroy every living creature" (8:21) and will preserve the course of nature. Thus this covenant is not made with men only but animals and all created things are included. Homicide is prohibited, on the ground that "God made man in his own image" (9:6); moreover, blood may not be partaken of because it is life (9:4). There was no ratification from the side of the human partner. God gives his promise because (!) "the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (8:21). The two last-mentioned features clearly show that the Noah Covenant is an *emergency regulation* (*Notordnung*; von Rad). It reckons with the fact that man is evil (cf. Gen 6:5; 8:21; Ps 14:3). In not enjoining any



worship of God and not exacting man's faithfulness, God implicitly presupposes that most of mankind will not remember the Covenant. *Because* mankind is evil, God's mercy protects them — against the drift to nothingness inherent in their trend to rebellion. Only from the viewpoint of the New Covenant does this mysterious *because* disclose its sense. For from this point of view the Noah Covenant reveals itself as an act of God's forbearance (*ἀνοχή*; cf. Rom 3:26). By preserving mankind in spite of their sins God establishes an ordinance which is to make it possible for the gospel in later times to reach all nations. The later covenants, on the contrary, namely the ones which God made with Abraham (Gen 12:2f. 7; 15:1. 5—11. 18—21; 17:1—21; 22:16—18) and with the Israelites at Sinai (Ex 19—23), are a direct *preparation* for the gospel.

The diversity of the peoples and languages, according to Gen 11:6—9, is the consequence of a curse of God. After the Flood men were building up technical civilization in man-centered secularity. This implied a defiance of God, who punished men's arrogance by confusing their languages and scattering them all over the earth.

Thus men's willfulness had forfeited the unity of mankind. A salvific covenant with the whole of mankind now seemed impossible. In this situation God called one single righteous man out from the plurality of nations and, making his covenant with him, laid the foundation of the future existence of the people that was to be his own possession. This righteous man was Abram, later named Abraham, to whom God promised: "I will make of you a great nation" (12:2).

Before the descendants of Abraham had grown into a people and before God had extended to this people the covenant he had made with Abraham, an opposition between the Covenant and the religions of the Nations could not possibly become conspicuous. Accordingly, in the history of the patriarchs and Joseph (Gen 12—50) the relationship to the religions of the Nations nowhere appears as distinctly thematic or problematic. Yet there can be no doubt that Scripture regards those religions as illegitimate, and there is no indication that the descendants of Abraham and Isaac practised a cult equal or similar to the cults of the Nations or acknowledged those cults as legitimate. When Jacob had left Laban, Laban noticed that his household idols had been stolen, and in fact Jacob's wife Rachel had taken them (Gen 31:19.30—34); but the event is merely recounted, not judged. On entering Canaan and before constructing an altar to God who had appeared to him, Jacob instructed "his household and all those who were with him: Put away the foreign gods that are among you" (35:2). This event shows that the cult of the gods whom Jacob worshipped was incompatible with other religions. On the other hand, in the dealings of Jacob with Laban and of Joseph with Pharaoh it appears that those outside the Covenant do acknowledge the God of Jacob (Gen 31:29.48—54) and Joseph (41:38), though as one

among many gods. Thus those outside the Covenant interpret the religion of those within from the standpoint of polytheism; but the religion of the Covenant is exclusive. If the exclusivity remains unmentioned in some situations, as in the story of Joseph's marriage with the daughter of an Egyptian official<sup>1</sup> (41:45), it is none the less never abandoned. To be sure, a scrutiny of the texts can infer an earlier stage of tradition where the patriarchs were worshippers of a god who had revealed himself to their Fathers. But if this is sure, it is surer still that in the final redaction of the text, which follows here the line of its immediate sources, the God of the Fathers is none other than the one true God. It is the redaction that has made the old legends a vehicle of the Revelation, and a comparison of the text that we have before us with the inferred previous stages can only contribute to elucidating the greatness of the revealed content.

The texts intend to say that the transcendent Being who from the twilight of confusion appears first to Abraham (12:1—3. 7; 15:1—16; 17:1—8) and then to Jacob (28:13—15) is the one true God. This God is worshiped also by Melchizedek, the officiant and king of Salem, who solemnly blesses Abraham (14:18—20); for who can be the "God Most High, the maker of heaven and earth", in the intention of the final redaction, if not the one true God? The undeniable similarity of his title and position with the Canaanite religion is interesting; but the inference that the editor of the text wanted to hold him up as a representative of the Nations can claim no higher degree of truth than the classification of the religion of the New Testament as a variety of Hellenism on account of the occurrence of terms like *θεός*, *κύριος*, *συνήγ*, *λόγος*, etc. In the religion of the final redactor the *Maker of heaven and earth* can only have been the one true God — whose religion was gradually revealed in the covenants that God made with Adam, with Noah, with Abraham, with the Israelites.

It was in Egypt that the descendants of Abraham grew into a people. The separation from the Nations began from the time when Moses asked Pharaoh to allow the Israelites to go out and offer sacrifices to their God in the wilderness (Ex 5ff). After the exodus God, through the mediation of Moses, made a covenant with the whole people at Mount Sinai.

From now on it is the supreme duty of the people of God to keep unwavering loyalty to the one eternal God, the Creator of the world and the ruler of all events. God promises the people: "If you will . . . keep my Covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me . . . a holy nation" (Ex 19:5f). Accordingly, the first and the second commandments of the

<sup>1</sup> I use the word *officialant* to express the notion of Hebrew *kohen* or Latin *sacerdos*, because I wish to reserve the word *priest* to the domain where alone it properly belongs, namely to Christianity.



Law of the Covenant enjoin: "You shall not have other gods besides me" and, "You shall not bow down to images or serve them" (20:3-5). The people ratified the Covenant (19:8; 24:3-7). The ratification was repeated on some later occasions (Joshua 24:16—18, 21, 24; 2 Kings 23:3; Neh 9:38; 10:1—39).

The Covenant separates and distinguishes the holy people from all other Nations. For all those Nations worship other gods, identifying them with material images or with things of nature. In the view of the Old Testament as well as the New Testament idolatry is the crucial feature by which the religions of the Nations differ from the statutes of God's Covenant. Only with respect to a time after the establishment of the Covenant of Sinai does it make sense to speak of the *Nations* (*goyim*, גוים) in the biblical sense. For this usage connotes that the chosen people is set apart from all other peoples or nations. Since these are a plurality, the word *Nations*, signifying peoples outside of the Covenant, is in the Old Testament invariably used in the plural. The use of the words *pagan* or *gentile* to denote a single person presupposes conditions that arose only with the New Covenant, i.e. in Christianity. But whether it be used with reference to a time before or after the Incarnation, in either case the word *pagan* or *gentile* signifies a person outside the Covenant; whereas he who is in the Covenant is, by the same token, *holy*. Therefore the juxtaposition of the words *holy* and *pagan* in the phrase "the holy pagans of the Old Testament" is self-contradictory and confusing.

Never did the Israelites totally and perfectly keep the Covenant. Even before they reached the land of promise, cases of gross apostasy occurred: immediately after the proclamation of the Covenant (Ex 32), and again when the Israelites were staying in Shittim (Num 25). Israel's history up to the Exile is, with a few intervening cases of faithfulness, a series of breaches of the Covenant and of punishments that God inflicted accordingly. Essentially it is God alone who steadily keeps the Covenant (cf., e.g., Ex 2:24f; Neh 9:32). Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy again and again recall the prohibition of the worship of other gods and of the adaptation to religious habits of the Nations. Those gods are not God (Deut 32:21); if they are anything at all, they are demons (Deut 32:16f. 21. 39). The reason for the ban on image worship, according to Deut 4:15, is the experience, which the Israelites themselves made at Horeb, that God has no visible form.

The Israelites were not allowed to conclude any compact with the Nations dwelling in Canaan at the time of the invasion (Ex 23:32; 34:12). In particular, mixed marriages were prohibited (Ex 34:16). The Law enjoined the destruction of the idols, religious symbols and places of worship which the immigrating Israelites found in the promised land (Ex 34:13; Num 33:52). God promised to drive out the previous inhabitants of the land (Ex 23:27—31; 34:11; Lev 20:23) and the Israelites

themselves were to join in this action (Ex 23:31; Num 33:52). Some texts enjoin not expulsion but extermination of the Nations (Deut 7:2.16; Joshua 11:20). The book of Joshua relates examples of extermination.

The reason for the injunction of expulsion or destruction, according to the texts, is the temptation to apostasy and idolatry involved in the coexistence with the Nations: "They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against me; for if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you" (Ex 23:32f; similarly 34:12—16; Deut 7.4.16). Other texts say that the destruction or expulsion of the Nations is a punishment inflicted by God for the abominable religious practices of the Nations (Lev 18:25. 27f; 20:23; Deut 9:5).

Since Israel had disobeyed the commandment to keep aloof from the inhabitants of the land and to destroy their places of worship (Judges 2:2), God resolved not to drive out the Nations but to punish the chosen people for their apostasy by allowing the Nations to oppress them (2:3.21). Not only peoples who were living in Canaan but also foreign tribes harassed the Israelites.

The historical writings of the Old Testament as well as the Prophets judge by one supreme standard all doings of the people of the Covenant and all events that befall this people. This standard is faithfulness to the Covenant, in particular to the First and Second Commandments. Most of the kings of Judah, and all the kings of Israel, were found disobedient. They favored the cult of foreign gods and idolatry. Finally God passed and executed his judgment, first on the northern kingdom: "They despised his statutes, and his Covenant that he made with their fathers, and the warnings which he gave them. They went after false idols, and became false, and they followed the Nations that were round about them, concerning whom Yahweh had commanded them that they should not do like them . . . Therefore Yahweh . . . removed them out of his sight" (2 Kings 17:15.18). Then on Judah: "I will cast off the remnant of my heritage, and give them into the hand of their enemies . . . because they have done what is evil in my sight and have provoked me to anger, since the day their fathers came out of Egypt" (21:14f). Elijah fought against the cult of Baal in the northern kingdom and by a miracle compelled the people to acknowledge: "Yahweh, he is God" (1 Kings 18:39). God's judgment on the people's apostasy is a prominent theme of the admonitions of the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea. Neither is this subject absent from the prophecy of Amos (2:4; 3:14; 5:26; 7:9), Micah (1:7), Habakkuk (2:18f), and Zephaniah (1:4—6). "The Law and the Prophets" are unanimous in their zeal for the First and Second Commandments.

However, oracles of doom and disaster are directed not only against the people of the Covenant but also against neighboring Nations. Obadiah's and Nahum's messages concern foreign Nations only. Now



it is noteworthy that only a small number of the prophetic threats say that it was the idolatry of the Nations which provoked God to anger (e.g. Jer 50:38). Most of the relevant passages explain the sin of the Nations as consisting in their arrogance and cruel treatment of the people of God. But this cannot be interpreted as implying that Scripture tacitly regards the foreign cults, though forbidden for Israel, as *legitimate religions* for the Nations. Such relativism was as foreign to the prophets as was a missionary attitude.

The best theological commentary on the reserve of the Old Testament toward the religions of the Nations is found in Acts 14:16, where St. Paul says to the people of Lystra: "In past generations God allowed all the Nations to walk in their own ways." This implies that the ways of the Nations are not those of the people of the Covenant. The cults of the Nations do not concern the chosen people, in a twofold sense: first, inasmuch as those cults are banned in Israel; secondly, inasmuch as the people of God, if faithful to their Law, "do not inquire about the gods of the Nations" (Deut 12:30) and do not even mention their names (Ex 23:13; Josh 23:7). It has also to be noted that the commandment of destruction envisages only cults exercised in the Holy Land. When the Israelites were waging war with Nations living outside their country they never thought of eradicating false religions. There was no *jihad* in Israel. For the Nations lived under the Noah Covenant — to which St. Paul's speech at Lystra, as recorded in Acts 14:17, clearly alludes. No matter whether the authors or redactors of the writings of the Old Testament did or did not have in mind the Noah Covenant when they abstained from "inquiring about" the religions of the Nations as long as these did not intrude upon the chosen people, the fact is that the attitude of the texts is in perfect accord with that of the Noah Covenant actually did not enjoin any form of worship. It was to ensure the continued existence of the Nations until the time had come (Gal 4:4) for salvation to be offered to all peoples.

On the other hand, the reserve toward foreign religions did not preclude the prophets' insight and accusation that all inhabitants of the earth "have broken the everlasting covenant" (Is 24:5). This we may very well interpret as referring to the Noah Covenant. Later St. Paul was expressing the same idea when he said, "All have sinned" (Rom 3:23). The prophets foretold that all inhabitants of the earth will be judged and punished when "Yahweh of hosts will reign on mount Zion and in Jerusalem" (Is 24:21—23; cf. Jer 25:29ff; Joel 3:2ff). But this judgment will be mysteriously simultaneous with the salvation of all Nations (Is 2:2—4; Micah 4:1—3; also Zeph 3:8—9). Again, this salvation is not to happen automatically or irresistibly but it is tied to a condition. The Nations will be saved if they will ask Yahweh "that he may teach us his ways", as Isaiah and Micah say (*loc. cit.*), "if they will diligently

learn the ways of my people", as Yahweh says in Jeremiah's prophecy (12:14—17). The New Covenant was to bring more concrete information about how the Nations' "diligent learning of the ways of God's people" was to be effected.

In assessing the Old Testament statements concerning the covenants we must inquire above all into the nature of the *salvation* that is given in the covenant. Inasmuch as a covenant implies God's care for men, it is certainly coterminous with salvation. But there are different kinds of salvation — or, if salvation be understood as essentially one, namely as man's communion with God, it must be said that in God's dispensation salvation is manifested in different aspects and approximations. In the Old Testament salvation is, generally speaking, either an event of the past or a promise for the future. But in both cases the statements of the older texts, if taken in a strictly literal sense, refer to earthly life on this side of the grave. A rare exception is a text like Ps 49:15, "But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me". An analysis of this verse in the context of the whole psalm shows that redemption can be understood here only as a post-mortem event. Generally speaking, however, it must be stated that the explicit belief in resurrection and immortality emerges only in some of the latest writings. Death is an open problem for the earlier covenants. This implies that the full import of salvation is not yet realized. The total meaning of the salvation involved in God's covenant is not revealed before the Incarnation. There is a relativity in the earlier covenants. If considered from the point of view of the human individual, they are all incomplete. They point to something beyond themselves. Jesus Christ is the consummation of all previous covenants. Only his incarnation, passion and resurrection reveal the nature of that "everlasting salvation" which Deuterisaiiah (45:17) proclaimed (cf. Hebr. 5:9; 9:12).

The salvation contained in the Noah Covenant is the physical survival of mankind as a whole. This is a general and outward preparation for the new and eternal covenant, whereas the covenants made with Abraham, on Sinai, and with David were more specific preparations. There is an irreversible movement from the early covenants to the "eternal salvation" which Christ offers "to all who obey him" (Hebr. 5:9). It does not, therefore, make sense to isolate one of the earlier covenants — the Noah Covenant — and claim for it a salvific significance which it did not and could not have.

"The Law and the Prophets" are unanimous in the profession that Yahweh alone "is the true God" (Jer 10:10). He has created all things and is the ruler and judge not only of his chosen people but also of the Nations. Assyria is the rod of God's anger (Is 10:5; cf. 2 Kings 19:25 f). In Jeremiah's prophecy Yahweh names Nebuchadnezzar his servant because the Babylonian king executes God's judgment on Judah, even though he does not know that he is God's instrument. Cyrus, who allows



the Israelites to return from the Exile, is even Yahweh's *shepherd* (Is 44:28) and his *anointed* (45:1). Yahweh addresses him: "I call you by your name, I surname you, though you do not know me" (45:4). Cyrus has "to fulfill Yahweh's purpose" (44:28). These are words of the same Deuteroisaiah who again and again condemns idolatry, including the idolatry of the Nations. The false religion of the foreign king and his people is in no way condoned by the fact that the true God prompts this king to execute His plans concerning His chosen people.

Where the Old Testament speaks of relations of Israel to foreign individuals it either represents these as somehow acknowledging Yahweh, or Yahweh's domination over all nations is manifested, or the difference of religion remains simply unmentioned. A few examples of all these three attitudes have already been adduced. We will consider a few more instructive cases.

There is no word on difference of religion in the account of Moses' relation to his father-in-law Jethro, the Midianite officiant (Ex 2:21). When Jethro later came to see his son-in-law at Sinai, he acknowledged Yahweh's superiority and even offered sacrifices to him (18:11f). The ingenious conjecture that the Midianites were worshippers of Yahweh even before the Israelites may or may not be true; in any case, the canonical text of Ex 18:11 makes Jethro say: "Now I know that Yahweh is greater than all gods."

Balaam, when summoned by the Moabite king to curse Israel, was quite willing but Yahweh forbade him to do so and commanded him to bless Israel according to the inspiration he would receive (Num 22—24). The man whom God thus compelled to do his will was the same Balaam who, according to Num 31:16, was far from being a worshiper of Yahweh but enticed Israel to idolatry.

Naaman, a Syrian officer, was healed by Elisha of his leprosy, whereupon he professed that henceforth he would worship Yahweh (2 Kings 5:17). He added, however, that his position at the court obliged him sometimes to go into the temple of Rimmon, the god of Damascus, and to worship there, and he therefore supplicated Yahweh's pardon. Elisha did not enter upon the question implied in Naaman's excuse; he only said, "Go in peace" (5:19). The actual acknowledgment of the one true God by members of foreign nations was a problem whose solution was still inconceivable at that time. What the scholar in his jargon is inclined to describe here as a *problem* is exactly that "mystery" to which the hymnic meditation of the Apostle of the New Covenant refers in Rom 16:25f, Eph 3:4—9, and Col 1:25—27.

By way of rare exception could a foreigner associate himself with Israel. The most interesting case in point is that of the Moabite woman Ruth. She solemnly declared to her mother-in-law: "Your people shall be my people, and your God my God" (Ruth 1:16). Thus, in joining Israel she

at the same time acknowledged Yahweh and adopted the religion of Yahweh.

But it could also happen that a devout worshiper of Yahweh lived in a foreign country. An outstanding example of this is Job. He lived in Edom; but this does not imply that he was an Edomite. In Jer 40:11 we learn that Israelites could actually live in Edom. In the mind of the hagiographer Job was certainly not a *pagani* but a man within the Covenant. This becomes clear from the fact that Yahweh names Job his servant (1:8; 2:3; 42:7f) and that Job serves the true God not unknowingly, as Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus did, but consciously and with zeal. He remained faithful to the true God not only in a foreign country but even when Satan, with God's permission, put him to the test (2:6). Moreover, Yahweh even revealed himself to Job, although there was no place consecrated to the cult of Yahweh. All this enhances the significance of Job's figure and adds to the importance of the message of the book that tells his story. The view of the universal power of God is widened into a vision of the incomprehensible majesty of his justice, a vision that is darkness and anguish to the servant of God.

After the Exile Israel's relation to the religions of the Nations appears changed in more than one respect. Idolatry had apparently ceased to be an actual danger. The condemnations of idolatry in Deuteroisaiah, written probably during the Exile, partly look back on Israel's past (48:5), but most of them more or less clearly refer to the cults of the Nations (40:18—20; 41:7; 42:17; 44:9—20; 45:16,20; 46:6f; 47:13). In the appendices to the book of Isaiah there are some passages that denounce present aberrations (57:3—13; 65:3,4,7; 66:17). On the whole it seems that when texts composed after the Exile speak of Israel's apostasy they are referring to the past, especially in penitential prayers (Neh 1:7; 9:18,26—30; Dan 9:5,11; Bar 1:21—2:12; 4:7,12f). The prophecies about the end of idolatry and apostasy seem to have come true. In Judith 8:18 it is expressly said that there was no longer any idolatry as it used to be practised in the past. In the book of Baruch the worship of foreign gods appears as an actual threat only for Jews in the diaspora (Ch. 6).

The exclusiveness of Israel's religion was taught after the Exile no less strictly than it had been before. Mixed marriages were banned (Ezra 9:11ff; 10:2f; Neh 13:23ff; Mal 2:11ff).

On the other hand, the belief in the universality of Yahweh's domination, which had already been proclaimed by pre-exilic prophets, was intensified and expressed in a more concrete form.

In the beginning of the Exile Yahweh had proclaimed through Ezekiel that calamities as well as, in some cases, deliverance were to make the Nations "know that I am Yahweh" (25:7,11,17; 26:6; 28:24—26; 29:6,9,16; 30:19,26; 32:15; 35:15). The restitution of Israel will bring the Nations to the same insight (36:36; 37:28; 38:23; etc.), as the Israelites themselves also shall know Yahweh when they see his deeds (*passim*). But the



acknowledgment of the true God by the Nations is here conceived as compelled by dread and shame. Micah describes it in the words: "The Nations shall see and be ashamed of all their might . . . They shall turn in dread to Yahweh our God" (7:16f). Only a few of the earlier prophecies, as for instance Is 2:2-4 (Micah 4:1-3), envisage a kind of inner conversion of the Nations.

From the time of Deuteroisaiah onward, however, the future salvation of the Nations, involving a conversion, is contemplated in an increasing number of prophecies and exhortations and poetical reinterpretations of past events. The Servant of Yahweh is to be "a light to the Nations", so that Yahweh's "salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (Is 49:6). Foreigners are expected "to join themselves to Yahweh" and "to love the name of Yahweh", and Yahweh promises: "These I will bring to my holy mountain . . . For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples" (56:6f). Yahweh urges: "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other" (45:22; cf. Ps 66/67).

While in Deuteroisaiah's prophecy Cyrus does not yet know that he is God's instrument (Is 45:4), later reinterpretation makes him profess: "Yahweh, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house" (2 Chr 36:23; Ezra 1:2). Nebuchadnezzar, who in Jeremiah's prophecy had been no more than an instrument of God, in the book of Daniel can profess: "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings" (2:47). He prohibits blasphemy of Yahweh (3:29) and praises the "Most High" in a hymn (4:34f). Darius comes to recognize that "the God of Daniel . . . is the living God, enduring for ever" (6:26). In the Hebrew text of the book of Esther, King Ahasuerus merely allows the Jews "to gather and defend their lives" (8:11), whereupon "many from the peoples of the country declared themselves Jews" (8:17); the Greek interpolation makes the king acknowledge "that the Jews . . . are governed by most righteous laws and are the sons of the Most High . . . who has directed the kingdom both for us and for our fathers in the most excellent order" (16:15). In the book of Judith the Ammonite Achior "believed firmly in God, and was circumcised, and joined the house of Israel" (14:10). Jesus Sirach prays to God on behalf of the Nations: "Let them know thee, as we have known that there is no God but thee, O Lord" (36:5).

While all these texts clearly foreshadow an extension of the Covenant to all Nations, they do not include the slightest indication that the cults and beliefs of the Nations are legitimate religion. On the contrary, the exclusive universality of the Covenant and its salvation entails acknowledgment of Yahweh as the only true God and fulfillment of His will.

The book of Jonah, which was composed after the Exile, is of particular interest in this connection. Jonah is ordered by Yahweh to announce

punishment to the sinful inhabitants of Nineveh (1:2). But he is unwilling to do so. Old Testament stories do not know abstract reasoning; so the book of Jonah does not say explicitly why the prophet tried to escape fulfilling God's commandment. Yet the narrative makes it quite clear what the motive for Jonah's evasion was. He was a devout man; his prayer in the belly of the fish leaves no doubt about his piety. But his piety was of a very narrow kind. He was indignant at the idea that God wanted to show mercy to pagans. He thought that Yahweh was a national god, with his power restricted to the land where he was worshiped. Therefore he hoped to escape "from Yahweh's presence" by traveling to a remote country (1:3). But he had to experience that God found him even on the sea. Then, after Jonah had announced the imminent destruction of their city to the Ninevites, they actually did penance and God pardoned them (3:6-10). This again "displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry" (4:1). He would not have that God should have shown mercy to pagans (4:2f). God had to teach him another lesson, after the one implied in his being thrown into the sea and swallowed by the fish (1:15, 17). God made a plant grow over the place where sullen Jonah was sitting outside of Nineveh. But then God made the plant wither, and Jonah once more became irritated (4:6-9). Thereupon God said to him: "You pity the plant . . . which you did not make grow . . . And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, (whose inhabitants) do not know their right hand from their left . . .?" (4:10f).

The doctrine implied in the story is clear. On the one hand there are the pagan mariners who "feared Yahweh exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to Yahweh and made vows" (1:16) after God had saved them from the tempest; and there are the pagan Ninevites who "believed God" and did penance (3:5-9). On the other hand there is the pious but selfish Israelite who became angry as he saw that God's mercy did not respect the national limits to which he wanted to confine him. Jonah is of the same type as the Pharisees in the New Testament. The message of the book of Jonah is very close to the universalism of the gospel.

The story of Jonah makes it quite clear that the biblical idea of universality is not based on the commonness of religious feelings or the faculty of self-transcendence in all men, but on the all-comprehensive power, mercy and love of God. This is why true universalism is essentially tied up with an exclusivity. But this exclusivity again is not a quality of man. It is not narrow-mindedness or self-preservation but the sovereign claim of truth and love that is incompatible with error and egoism, and this truth and love are identical with God. God rebukes the pious selfishness of his prophet; yet this prophet has to, and does, testify to the one true God. The religion to which the foreigners, the mariners and the Ninevites, are converted, is not a *self-evident mystery* revealed in a *transcendental anticipation* of their heart; rather, it is the response to an imperative call of the one true God. The mariners' prayers to the



gods of their religions proved ineffectual to calm the tempest (1:5). The fact of their prayer reveals indeed a transcendental urge of their heart. But this urge was misoriented. The gods to whom the mariners prayed were mere figments. But the phenomenon of the gale in combination with the prophet's explanation led them to know the truth. They came to know that "the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land", had sent the gale to overtake his fugitive servant, who nevertheless professed himself his worshiper (1:9). So they prayed to this God and did his will by throwing Jonah into the sea (1:14f). This disposed them to perceive, and respond to, the call: "They offered a sacrifice to Yahweh and made vows" (1:16). Thus the behavior of the mariners as also that of the repentant Ninevites bears witness to the exclusive universality of the true God and to his religion, whose truth is in no way impaired by the inefficiency of its prophet.

The two books of the Maccabees, composed about 100 B.C., recount partly the same wars, of the Syrians with Israel, to which the book of Daniel refers in the form of prophecy. In these wars the enemies were attacking not only the people, as foreigners had often done in the past, but precisely their religion. Antiochus Epiphanes wanted to impose Hellenic religion on Israel (1 Macc 1:21—28, 41 f. 44—51, 54—61; Dan 11:21—39). Nevertheless the second book of the Maccabees, like other deuterocanonical books, makes pagans arrive at a knowledge of the true God. Heliodorus offers a sacrifice to Yahweh (3:33—40). Antiochus Epiphanes in 1 Macc 6:12 f merely avows his injustice; in 2 Macc 9:13—17 he, at the point of dying, makes vows to Yahweh and promises to become a Jew himself.

The conversion stories in the late books of the canon of the Old Testament are surely fiction if seen from the point of view of external history. But they portray a spiritual event. They describe the growing insight or revelation that the knowledge of the one true God is accessible to all men. In this respect they intensify the visions of the prophets and are drawing a step nearer to the New Covenant.

The most thorough and thematic reflection on the problem of the religions is found in the book of Wisdom. Here ideas are developed of which about a century later St. Paul could make use to show that, once the time for salvation had come, not only Jews but all nations were called. — Wisdom teaches: "From the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator" (13:5). This implies that in principle all men can know the true God. Accordingly, Wisdom does not speak to Jews only but addresses the princes of all nations: "Love righteousness, you rulers of the earth, think of the Lord with uprightness, and seek him with sincerity of heart; for he is found by those who do not put him to the test, and manifests himself to those who do not distrust him" (1:1—2). He who allows himself to be guided by Wisdom will gain true knowledge of God and this will lead him on to

know what is right. Morality is represented here, following Greek philosophy, by the four cardinal virtues (8:7). Ignorance of God eventually produces moral corruption (14:21—31). — Since to know God is possible for everybody, the ignorance that worships false gods is a sin. To be sure, those who worship phenomena of nature incur a lesser guilt; "for perhaps they go astray while seeking God and desiring to find him" (13:6). Yet they stop at admiring created things while they ought to have proceeded to inquire about the author of all things. Therefore "not even they are to be excused" (13:8). "Miserable", however, are those "who give the name *gods* to the works of men's hands" (13:10), i.e. those who identify God with images.

The essence of the teaching of Wisdom is not alien even to the canonical writings of a "Hebrew" pattern of thought. In point of fact the whole canon of the Old Testament is an appeal to recognize God as him who created the world and has been directing Israel's history. But in the earlier writings the method of demonstration is quite different from the reasoning of Wisdom. Hebrew thinking argues implicitly, by relating events; philosophy, as developed in Greece (and in India), reasons by connecting and dividing concepts. Events are individual; concepts are general. Both ways of thinking imply an appeal to the hearer. It is a gross misunderstanding, widespread in our time, that the abstraction of "general truths" leaves man unconcerned and that only the reference to individual situations can bring it home to man that his own self is involved. If the true knowledge of God was to shine forth from Israel and to spread over the world; if the prophecy of Is 2:2—4 and 45:22 and of Ps 66/67 was to be fulfilled, then it was necessary that the conceptual pattern of thought should be added to the pattern of relating events. For the environment of Israel, and to a large extent the chosen people themselves, were living in the atmosphere of Hellenic culture, whose highest spiritual accomplishment was conceptual thinking. The book of Wisdom exhibits an interweaving of the two patterns of thought. As some Psalms and other texts in the older books of the Canon had done, the book of Wisdom also reviews prominent events of Israel's past, but with the intention to show that all those happenings are evidence of the operation of eternal Wisdom, who herself "is a breath of the power of God, a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty", and "a reflection of eternal light" (7:25 f).

Neither of the two methods or patterns of thinking may be posited as absolute, neither the way of the Prophets nor that of Wisdom. Prophetic speech can proclaim that all Nations will know the true God; but it cannot demonstrate this knowledge by arguments understandable to men outside the sphere of Hebrew thinking. On the other hand, the book of Wisdom, while undertaking such a demonstration, seems to impart too much of eternal Wisdom's light to the chosen people who were guided by her. As a consequence some important features of the message of the Old



Testament become less conspicuous. Men's sin and God's judgment are not presented in their stern outlines. God's punishments are explained as discipline and warning, reminding man of the Law (11:10; 16:6 f.11). This is surely a true interpretation, but an incomplete one.

However, the aspect of deficiency appears only if the book of Wisdom is separated from the context of the whole Canon. If it is read, as it ought to be, against the background of the Law and the Prophets, then the earlier writings of the Canon and Wisdom turn out to be complementary. The contemplation of Wisdom was as indispensable as the dynamism of the prophetic proclamation. Both styles of Scripture envisage, each from its own angle, the exemplary function allotted to Israel. The Prophet proclaims: "Out of Zion shall go forth the Law, and the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem" (Is 2:3); Wisdom speaks of God's sons "through whom the imperishable light of the Law was to be given to the world" (18:4). Both the Prophets and Wisdom were preparations for the final solution that the problem of the religion of the Nations was to find in the New Covenant.

### 3. *The New Testament*

The New Covenant, based on the Gospel, is not restricted to an ethnic group as the human partner of God. Though the Abraham Covenant is its abiding basis (Gal 3:29; Rom 4:16 f.), the partner is now potentially the whole of mankind. Those who through faith and Baptism are incorporated in Christ, have been called into the New Covenant, no matter to what nation they belong. The uniting grace of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:6-11) has spiritually abrogated the curse that had divided the peoples and languages (Gen 11:6-8). The spiritual bond establishes union at a much deeper level than membership in a racial or political unit can ever bring about. But this spiritual fellowship involves the individual's option. Therefore within the community the individual receives a far greater importance than he had in the Old Covenant. As a consequence of this transmutation, the word *pagan* or *gentile* has taken on a new sense in the history of Christianity. A pagan is now an individual who has a religion but belongs neither to the Old nor to the New Covenant.

However, the universality of the New Covenant was realized only gradually. The gospel, i. e. the message of the coming of God's kingdom, was at first proclaimed to the *House of Israel* exclusively (Matt 10:5 f.; 15:24). Not before the majority of the Jews had rejected the gospel (Matt 22:8) and their leaders had crucified the Son of God, was the gospel brought to the Nations; only after his resurrection did Jesus give the commandment, "Make disciples of all Nations" (Matt 28:19). According to the account of Acts even Paul was in the habit of proclaiming the gospel first to Jews (13:5-14; 14:1; 16:13; 17:1 f.10.17; 18:4,19; 19:8). Only when the Jews had opposed his preaching did he turn to the

gentiles (13:48; 18:6). The coming of the many "from east and west and from north and south" to "sit at table in the kingdom of God", is mysteriously connected with the rejection of Christ by "the sons of the kingdom" (Matt 8:11 f.; Luke 13:28 f.). Paul interprets this connection in the words: "Through their trespass salvation has come to the gentiles, so as to stir Israel to jealousy" (Rom 11:11). In using the expression "to stir to jealousy" the Apostle implicitly gives a positive interpretation to the words of Deut 32:21, "I will stir them to jealousy by those who are no people". He means to say that the Jews will be moved to emulate the gentiles when they see that these have become heirs to the promise made to the chosen people.

In the narrative of Acts 13:13-52, however, the jealousy (*ζήλος*) of the Jews has a negative form. The Jews became jealous when they saw that even gentiles — "almost the whole city" (13:44) — came to listen to St. Paul's preaching. What scandalized the Jews was not only the content of the gospel, but perhaps still more the fact that the New Covenant extended the call to all Nations and thus abolished the national exclusivity of Israel.

In the Acts of the Apostles St. Luke describes the extension of the Covenant from the Jews to the Gentiles in four successive stages. The first stage is the conversion of Samaritans. These, though not Jews proper, agreed with the religion of the Jews to a very large extent; so their reception was not a great problem. The gospel was proclaimed to them, and the converts received Baptism and Confirmation (8:5,12,15-17). The Baptism of the minister of the Ethiopian queen (8:36-38) did not present difficulties either, probably on account of the close association of this man with the cult in Jerusalem (8:27). The third stage is the reception of the centurion Cornelius. Apparently he was not a formal proselyte, but he was "a devout man who feared God" (10:2). The fourth stage, finally, is the evangelization of Gentiles of a polytheistic and idolatrous religion and of Hellenic patterns of thought (17:16-34).

Success of the evangelization was harder to attain at the fourth stage than at any of the others; yet the Judaeo-Christians found the main difficulty in the passage from the second to the third stage, for from the ritual point of view a man like Cornelius remained a Gentile. This is why Luke has described the third stage of the propagation of the gospel in greater detail than the other stages. His elaborate treatment indicates aspects of abiding importance. — In his spiritual attitude Cornelius belonged to the same group as the Ethiopian minister. This group included persons whose religion in varying gradation accorded with the faith of Israel. The existence of such persons was presupposed or at least prepared by the narrations, in late writings of the Old Testament, of gentiles who attained the right knowledge of God and, above all, by the demonstration of the possibility and necessity of such knowledge in the book of Wisdom. Already under the Old Covenant Israel had begun to



realize its mission among the gentiles. — Cornelius was apparently less intimately linked to the Jewish community than the Ethiopian eunuch. In the story of the Ethiopian, Luke notes his worshipping in Jerusalem and his reading the Scriptures, but neither of these two features is mentioned in the description of Cornelius' piety. Peter, while speaking in the house of Cornelius, refrained from demonstrating the truth of the Gospel from Scripture as he and other apostles did when speaking to a Jewish or proselyte audience (Acts 2:14 ff; 3:12 ff; 7:2 ff; 8:32—35; 13:15 ff). He confined himself to a summary mention of the *Prophets* (10:43). Thus Peter presupposed that Cornelius and those who lived in his house had a respect for Scripture but he did not reckon with his audience's being familiar with it.

Cornelius' piety consisted in regular prayer and in the practice of other good works (10:2). His characterization as "godfearing" connotes that he had a proper knowledge of God. Yet there is nothing in the narrative to indicate that by his knowledge of God and by his piety he was already within the Covenant. Neither explicitly nor implicitly or anonymously was he already a Christian, though as a religious man (εὐσεβής 10:2), with a religion that was thoroughly explicit, he was incomparably less anonymous than those who are today sometimes called "anonymous Christians". If St. Luke by emphasizing the centurion's piety had intended to indicate that Cornelius was already a Christian, though not explicitly, he would have given the narrative quite a different course. — The centurion's "prayer has been heard" (10:31); his prayer and his aims "have ascended as a memorial before God" (10:4). It is not stated that his prayers included definite wishes whose fulfillment the angel came to announce. Probably the prayers consisted in fixed formulas. At any rate, it is impossible that Cornelius should have expressly prayed for his reception into the Church. The Baptism of a gentile was a thing so novel and unheard of that nobody could have thought of asking for or administering it. Otherwise it would not have been necessary that God himself should intervene to make it clear that He willed the Baptism of gentiles.

Cornelius had no distinct idea of what God intended to give him through Peter. This results from a comparison of the three versions in which the account of the centurion's vision occurs in the narrative. The first version, a direct narration by the author (10:3—5), gives no indication of the goal to which Cornelius is led. The angel merely demands an act of obedience, asking Cornelius to send for Peter. In the second version Cornelius, speaking to Peter, adds the following words to the account of his vision: "Now we are here present in the sight of God, to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord" (10:33). Thus Cornelius expects Peter to give him a *message* from God: he is come to *hear* that message. But Cornelius does not seem to have had any idea of the possible content of the message. The third version, being Peter's report of the event to the Church of Jerusalem, is naturally tinged by

Peter's own experience. So the apostle makes the angel say to Cornelius: Peter "will declare to you a message by which you will be saved" (11:14). This reveals that Peter knew that he had to speak to Cornelius of the way to salvation — which he actually did (10:34—43).

In speaking to Cornelius and his household Peter presupposes that his audience have already heard of Jesus (10:36). He stresses that the gospel was first sent only to "the sons of Israel" (10:36, 42). Another intervention of God was therefore required to remove the last doubts regarding the offer of salvation to all Nations. This intervention consists in the effusion of the Holy Spirit "on all who heard the word" (10:44), which causes them to "speak in tongues" (10:46) just as it had happened in Jerusalem on the first Pentecost (11:15; 2:1—4). To manifest his will, God here imparts the Spirit before Baptism, whereas in the normal case (8:16 f) Baptism precedes the granting of the Spirit. — Before receiving the Holy Spirit and Baptism, Cornelius was neither in the Old nor in the New Covenant. He was not in the Old Covenant for the simple reason that he was a gentile, and as long as he had not yet received the Holy Spirit he was not in the New Covenant either. He was not yet accepted, but he was acceptable (δεκτός 10:35), i. e. pleasing to God, because he did what is right. God had *purified* (10:15) the pious gentile for a definite purpose. There is an inner dynamism in the right knowledge of God and in the doing of good works outside the Covenant. Being a response to an offer of grace, such piety disposes or even urges the person who practises it to seek reception into the Covenant, into the Church. The pious gentile does not force the goal to which God is leading him, but if he obediently follows the guidance of God he is sure to reach the end.

It would amount to missing or evading the point of the passage if we would inquire what might happen if a pious gentile does not come to know the gospel and the Church. The last phase of the economy of salvation, which is the establishment of the New Covenant through Christ, entails certain concrete consequences. This is how events come to pass like the one related in the story of Cornelius. Evidently the hagiographers were convinced that God does succeed in leading into the Church those whom he *foreknew* and whom he accordingly *calls* and "ordains to eternal life" (Rom 8:29 f; Acts 2:39; 13:48). This should duly engage our meditation before we venture speculations of our own.

Quite different from the case of Cornelius is the situation of gentiles who have not yet attained to a pure knowledge of God. They are still living under the Noah Covenant. In fulfillment of this covenant God has preserved life on earth, thus testifying to his existence. "He did not leave himself without witness, for he did good and gave from heaven rains and fruitful seasons" (Acts 14:16 f). God can be known from his operation in nature. In his Epistle to the Romans St. Paul expresses this idea in words reminiscent of chapters 13—15 of the book of Wisdom: "What can be known of God is plain to men, because God has shown



it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made" (Rom 1:19f). To be sure, this knowledge is nowhere pure. Still, elements of true knowledge of God have remained, and it is to these remnants that the gospel appeals.

The biblical example of such preaching is St. Paul's speech on the Areopagus as recorded in Acts 17:22–31. The speech makes use of several concepts of pagan origin. In their original context none of them expresses pure knowledge of God. But each of them includes an element of truth. — According to the account of Acts 17, there was in Athens an altar with the inscription, "To the (or: an) unknown god". This inscription may have been the outcome of a typically polytheistic concern. There were so many gods. The worship of one among them might have been neglected through oversight. So it seemed safe to propitiate him by dedicating an altar to him. But whatever the motive for the construction of the altar may have been, in any case the altar bore evidence of an indistinct feeling that polytheism was insufficient or inefficient. It vaguely pointed to a reality beyond the illusions of polytheism and idolatry. There was a half-conscious, implicit dynamism in the inscription. St. Paul noticed this. He brought the meaning of the inscription from twilight to clarity and distinctness. He boldly declared: "What you worship without knowing it, this I proclaim to you" (17:23). Some manuscripts, not the oldest, read: "Him whom you worship . . . I proclaim to you." But it is easily intelligible how the neuter gender (ὃ, what) could be changed into the masculine (ὁ, him whom); for before and after this sentence the text has the masculine gender (ἀγνώστῳ θεῷ; ὁ θεός). On the other hand it is hard to understand how an original masculine could have been changed into the neuter gender. Therefore the reading, "Ὁὗτος (ὁ) you worship . . ." is surely the original one. The solution of this question of textual criticism has a bearing on the interpretation of the passage. It is significant that Paul (in Luke's report) here uses the neuter gender. This implies that he did not simply identify God, whom he was professing, with the deity that the Athenians worshipped at that altar. The text does not say, "This unknown God I make known to you," but: "Ὁὗτος you worship without knowing it, this I proclaim to you." This means: If you admit your obligation of worship, and if you admit that there may be an unknown Being that claims your worship, you are quite right in both cases. But the Unknown is not one of many gods to be worshipped at "shrines made by men" (24). Rather, he whom you do not know is the one true God who created the world and preserves it (24–26).

This God, Paul says, "does not live in shrines made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything" (24f). This implies that the way the Athenians worshipped their gods — and among them the *unknown god* — was not legitimate homage. Again, the fact that they dedicated an altar to a, or the, *unknown deity* reveals that

they were *seeking* a divinity, and Paul approved of this openness. God in fact wills that man seek him, starting from the natural conditions in which he placed each man (26f). Yet there is no indication in the text that the particular way the Athenians sought the Unknown could promise success. On the contrary, Paul's critique of their cult suggests clearly enough that they were following a wrong course. In this respect there is a sharp contrast between the Athenians and Cornelius who did not know the goal but was on the right track. In the religion of the Athenians — which is representative of paganism in general — truth and grave aberration were jumbled together. It was not easy for them to discern the truth. Accordingly, the majority of them kept a hesitant and derisive attitude, and Paul's appeal did not find much positive response (17:34).

Still, St. Paul did not merely criticize the Athenians' religion. He made use of elements of truth which they already possessed. In speaking of man's quest for God, he alluded to ideas of Stoic philosophy. He said that men "should seek God, in the hope that they might *feel after* him" (27). The verb "to feel after" (ὑπακούω) suggests corporeal touch. Stoic pantheism could imagine to touch God immediately in material things, and the immanence of that philosophy actually included the conviction that God was "not far from each one of us." But while approving of the truth inherent in the movement of seeking, Paul did not sanction the pantheistic context that obscured and disfigured the truth. The drift of his sermon transmuted and reoriented the concepts he took from philosophy. — Paul went on to say that God "commands all men everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed" (30f). Such decrees are certainly beyond the competence of a Stoic deity. Here is the point where St. Paul's sermon is passing from natural theology on to the gospel proper. And he begins with the same call with which, according to St. Matthew, St. John the Baptist as well as Jesus himself started the proclamation of the gospel, namely with the call to repent (μετάνοιε, Matt 3:2; 4:17). This call shows the true way of seeking God.

To support the theory of "anonymous Christians", the sermon on the Areopagus has been interpreted as intimating that the fact of worship was decisive, whereas the mode of worship and the Athenians' ignorance have been passed over in silence. But such an interpretation is quite incompatible with the text on hand as well as with the whole of Holy Scripture. Firstly, it is evident that what Paul approves of is not the worship in its own right but the quest of God manifested in it. Secondly, Paul expressly censures the mode of worship as practised by the Athenians. Thirdly, in the view of Scripture ignorance regarding God and regarding right worship is anything but a negligible trifle. According to Wisdom 13:8 as well as according to Rom 1:20 it is inexcusable. It is the



consequence of a willful aberration that has darkened man's understanding and "alienated him from the life of God" (Rom 1:21; Eph 4:18).

In Paul's sermon includes two quotations, one from a philosopher ("For him we live and move and have our being") and one from a poet ("For we are indeed his offspring"). Like the inscription on the altar, these quotations are far from Christianity in their original context. The first conveys a pantheistic doctrine; the second, referring to Zeus, brings out the idea that the nature of man is essentially divine. Paul uses the first quotation to justify and encourage the quest for God. The Christian, too, can say that we are "in" God, though in a sense different from the pagan concept. We are in God because he created us and keeps us in being — in the words of the sermon on the Areopagus: God "made the world" and "gives to all men life and breath and everything" (24 f). And precisely from these facts our quest should start. As regards the second question, a Christian, to be sure, cannot describe himself as God's offspring in a univocal sense. But an analogical conception of man being God's child is familiar to both Testaments. Man is created "in the image of God" (Gen 1:27), and since this image-character is restored in him through the grace of the New Covenant, New Testament texts speak not only of an "adoption" of men as sons of God (Gal 4:5) but even describe the regenerated as "born of God" (1 John 3:9) and "begotten by the word of truth" (James 1:18) and "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). Thus it may be said that the pagan poet's saying expresses a half-conscious and half-misled longing and presentiment. In the proclamation of the gospel the quotation receives a new orientation which sets free the truth contained in it. The idea that "we are indeed his offspring" was certainly misoriented in its pagan context; yet it brings out the high dignity that God has bestowed on man (*mirabiliter condidisti et mirabilis reformasti*). Therefore Paul's sermon can utilize this word to make his audience realize what a folly they commit in practising idolatry: "Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the Deity is . . . a representation by the art and imagination of man" (29).

The sermon thus elucidates the aberrations of polytheism and idolatry by utilizing elements of truth included in the beliefs of the gentiles themselves. The movement of the evangelical proclamation, while taking in concepts of pagan origin, makes them correct each other and readjusts them all. This is the inchoate stage of a method that was going to be developed and profusely practised by Clement of Alexandria and, following him, by Eusebius and Theodoret.

The climax of the Areopagus sermon is reached with the *now* (*τὰ νῦν*) of v. 30: "Now God commands all men everywhere to repent." The same *now* also forms the conclusion of St. Paul's critical review of the conduct of Jews and gentiles in Romans 1-3: "Now (*νῦν*) the righteousness of God (*δικαιοσύνη*) in the sense of the Hebrew *sedāqāh* has been manifested" (Rom 3:21). This *now* is "the day of salvation"

(2 Cor 6:2) which Deuteroisaiah had announced (49:8) and which the Apostles' message proclaimed as having arrived. It marks the borderline between the old and the new aeon, the irruption of eternity into time. Every man who comes to know the gospel is placed on this borderline. Since the New Covenant involves individual option, the realization of the *now* summons each man to ratify or reject the Covenant. Those who accept the call of the "day of salvation" are received into the Covenant (Eph 2:13). They are reconciled with God by receiving his mercy (Rom 5:10; 1:13-30; 1 Peter 2:10). They come to know God (Gal 4:9). The *now* includes the claim on man to reorient his life — in the words of the Apostle: to *put away* the behavior of the past (Col 3:8) and to "yield his members to righteousness for sanctification" (Rom 6:19).

The *now* of the offer of grace is thus the turning-point both for the life of the individual and for the life of the Nations in general. It belongs to time and eternity alike. Neither of the two aspects should be lost sight of, neither time nor eternity. It is the vantage-point from which alone the economy of salvation can be surveyed in the proper perspective. Any theology, therefore, which claims to be Christian, has to take its stand at this point when trying to arrive at a reflected appraisal of the religions of the Nations.

Holy Scripture gives an example of this perspective when saying that God has condoned "the times of ignorance" (Acts 17:30), during which he "allowed the Nations to walk in their own ways" (Acts 14:16) under the emergency ordinance. He has condoned this ignorance not because it was insignificant if compared with the transcendental urge of man's spirit, but because *now* the time is *come* for repentance and salvation to be offered to *all* nations. If this offer is accepted, then and then only is the past annulled in its aberrations and reinstated in its remnants of truth and righteousness. The past is not redeemed by concepts but only in concrete reference to the "day of salvation" which is offered for the acceptance of faith in the message of the Cross and Resurrection of Christ.

If the past is contemplated in itself, without reference to the "day of salvation", then the religions of the Nations remain as perverse in the view of the New Testament as they were in the view of the Old Testament. To be sure, in the first two chapters of his Epistle to the Romans St. Paul acknowledges the possibility of pagans pleasing God. Paul not only says that the gentiles can know God from nature; he even admits that "what the Law requires is written on their hearts", so that they can "do by nature what the Law requires" (Rom 2:15,14). Yet we must not overlook the context of these positive statements. They belong to a textual unit that reaches from 1:18 to 3:20 where they are set in a sharply negative framework. The passage starts with the sentence: "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth" (1:18), and it



concludes with the sweeping verdict: "All men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin"; "all have sinned" (3:9.23). The comparison of the conduct of the Jews with that of the gentiles leads to the result that neither of the two groups has an advantage over the other. Both groups have the possibility of pleasing God, the Jews being instructed by the Law, the gentiles being guided by nature. Yet both of them have failed to fulfill the will of God and both are in need of the expiation that was wrought by Christ and is received by faith (Rom 3:25).

The extension of the Covenant from Israel to the Nations involved a constant temptation to relapse into, or make compromises with, the idolatrous and polytheistic habits of the Hellenic environment. This necessitated exhortations to elucidate the new exclusivity, which no longer could be misunderstood as the nationalism of an ethnic group but had become manifest as the uncompromising claim of the truth. Exhortations of this kind are included in lists of vices, in references to individual situations, in retrospects on the past of the faithful, in outlooks on their pagan environment, in apocalyptic prophecy (Rom 1:18—32; 1 Cor 5:11; 6:9f; 8:4; 10:9. 14. 19f; 2 Cor 6:14—16; Gal 4:8; 5:19; Eph 4:17—19; Col 2:8; 1 Thess 1:10; 4:5; 1 Peter 4:4; 1 John 5:21; Apoc 2:14; 9:20; 21:8). Wherever the Epistles of the New Testament consider the religions of the Nations, their judgment of condemnation is no less unqualified than was the verdict pronounced in the Old Testament. The gods that the Nations worship are "by nature no gods" (Gal 4:8). The idols, which paganism identifies with the gods, have no reality in them (1 Cor 8:4). "What pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God" (1 Cor 10:20; cf. Deut 32:17; Ps 105/106:37; Bar 4:7). Idolatry is one of the gravest sins in Christianity just as it was in the Old Covenant. The conscience of the Church in the first centuries was very sensitive on this point.

The gentiles "do not know God" (Gal 4:8; 1 Thess 4:5). But this ignorance contains a knowledge of God. They do not know God "although they knew God" (Rom 1:21). Even though they could and did know God from his works, "they did not honor him as God" (Rom 1:21). Thus their understanding was "darkened". They "exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images" of perishable creatures (Rom 1:23; cf. Deut 4:15—19; Ps 105/106:20; Jer 2:11). They "worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator... For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions" (Rom 1:25f). The obscuration of their mind and the vanity of their thinking has produced moral corruption as a consequence of religious aberration, although the gentiles knew God's will from the dictates of their conscience (Rom 1:21—32; Eph 4:17f; cf. Wisdom 14:22—29).

The universality of the New Covenant, foreshadowed in prophecies and wisdom speculations of the Old Testament, is grounded in the fact that eternal salvation is offered to all those who believe in Jesus Christ.

This involves two restrictions. First, salvation is not universal in the sense that "no man can prevent himself from being saved" (as Karl Rahner asserts<sup>2</sup>). Man has the grave liberty "to thrust from him" the word of God (Acts 13:46), "to refuse to love the truth and so be saved" (2 Thess 2:10). Secondly, the universality or catholicity of Christianity does not imply a general acknowledgment of all kinds of human religion. Nor is it based on the transcendental urge of human nature, since man's faculty of acknowledging and obeying God has been weakened by the Fall.

The Christians would however be misinterpreting the exclusivity of their religion if they secluded themselves to lead a sectarian life like the community of Qumran. And it would be a mistake to confine the attitude toward paganism to the condemnation of its depravity. He who wants to make the gospel accessible to gentiles has at all times to have recourse to the method which was initially practised in the sermon on the Areopagus and which is capable of manifold elaboration. This method is not a tactical device. It is based on two facts. First, the religions of the gentiles, corrupt though they may be, do contain elements of true knowledge of God, and the moral conscience of votaries of all religions does testify to the will of God. Secondly, the attitudes of pagans to the Divine, misdirected though they may be, are expressions of the urge to self-transcendence engrafted in man's spirit by his Creator who wills that man seek Him. These objective and subjective elements must be disentangled from error and selfishness. The truth that was "exchanged for a lie" has to be restored to its purity. The sermon on the Areopagus shows that such liberation is effected not in a contemplation of paganism in itself, not in static description, but in the movement of the proclamation of the gospel. This movement unveils the truth of the pagan thoughts in the proclamation which is utilizing them.

The same method has been practised in Paul's Epistles and in other writings of the New Testament, though in a less conspicuous way and discernible only by means of critical research. There are quite a number of concepts of Hellenistic origin which in the New Testament serve to expound the gospel, for example *σῶμα*, which is used by St. Paul to expound the mystery of the Church, *μυστήριον*, *σωεῖς*, *εὐαγγέλιον*, *σῶμα*, *σῶμα*. They are all reoriented by the proclamatory movement directed by the Holy Spirit. In a similar way, already in the Old Testament concepts of foreign origin had been assimilated into the religion of the one true God.

<sup>2</sup> Kein Mensch kann verhindern, daß er erlöst ist." *Schriften zur Theologie* VII, 387. I have rendered *erlöst* with the word "saved". Some readers may think that the translation *redeemed* would be more appropriate. Either translation supposes an interpretation. The problem involved here can be treated only in a critical analysis of Rahner's theories. I hope to take this up in a later study.



## THE RELIGIONS OF THE GENTILES AS VIEWED BY FATHERS OF THE CHURCH

In this Chapter we will study chiefly such ideas of the Fathers on paganism as carry on reflection on the line taken by Holy Scripture and thus unfold implications of principles inherent in the gospel. Speculations of this kind can certainly claim a validity independent of the times in which they were first conceived.

We exclude views that are essentially non-theological. Prominent among these is the Fathers' "historical" explanation of the similarities between Greek philosophy and biblical thought. Early apologists as well as later Fathers contended that Greek philosophers knew the Old Testament and borrowed much from it. This view had been taken over from Jewish and Gnostic literature and it tallies even with a statement of the Pythagorean Noumenios (cf. Clement Al., *Stromata* 1, 150, 4; 6, 53, 3 f.). Another non-theological idea is the Fathers' theory about the historical origin of polytheism, myths, and idolatry. Like the assertion of dependence on the Old Testament, this theory is not only irrelevant today but has no bearing on the essential theological reflections of the Fathers on the problem of the religions.

Neither do we intend to scrutinize here the works of all the Fathers. We confine ourselves to such writers as face the challenge of paganism in an attitude that is more than merely defensive, and from among them we select a few outstanding and representative figures, singling out some significant passages of their works.

As for editions and translations of, and studies on, the texts considered here, the reader is referred to the handbooks of Patrology. Otto Stählin's German translation of Clement's *Stromata*, along with his notes, has rendered substantial aid to the present writer. For some of the quotations from St. Augustine's *City of God* the translation by Marcus Dods, George Wilson and J. J. Smith (Edinburgh, 1872; 9th impression, 1949) has been adopted or slightly modified. Passages from other works have been translated by the present author, but some Latin, English, French and Spanish translations have been consulted.

### 1. *Justin Martyr*

St. Justin, in his two *Apologies* (155—165 A.D.), intended to defend Christianity against the accusation of atheism. He begins by stating that the Christians may indeed be called atheists if the word "god" is taken to refer to the supposed gods of the Greeks. For the Christians do not recognize these to be gods. But they do worship the most true God who is the Father of all virtues (*Apol.* I, 6, 1). Likewise, they worship and adore God's Son and "the Prophetical Spirit" as also the Angels (6, 2).

There is no indication that Justin thought that, although the Christians



were not permitted to practise Hellenic rites or hold pagan beliefs, these might be a legitimate religion for pagans. This has to be stated expressly today because advocates of the theory of Anonymous Christians make a distinction between legitimacy for pagans and legitimacy for Christians. Neither Holy Scripture nor the Fathers of the Church recognize such relativism. St. Justin is quite explicit on this point. Referring to Hellenic beliefs and rites, he writes: "We hold that this is not only irrational but also that practising it involves an insult to God" (*ὅτι οὐ μὴν ἄλογον ἡγοῦμεθα, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐπ' ὕβρει τοῦ Θεοῦ γίνεσθαι*, *Ap. I, 9, 3*). It should be clear that the insult to which Justin refers was perpetrated by the gentiles. Justin's *Apologies* do not intend to denounce cases of apostasy which occurred in Christendom. Regarding idolatry in particular, the Saint's judgment is no less clear and strict: "All Nations, who worshiped the works of their hands, were alien (*ἐξένηα*) to the true God. The Jews and the Samaritans, on the other hand, did possess the word of God that had been handed over to them through the prophets, and they did expect the Messiah; still, when he came, he was not recognized by them, except by those few of whom the Holy Prophetic Spirit had foretold through Isaiah that they would be saved" (*I, 53, 6*).

In several other places Justin rejects details of Hellenic beliefs and cults (*Ap. I, Chapters 23, 24, 25, 54, 64*). He describes all these elements of the Hellenic religion as a consequence of ineiglement by evil demons. The gods themselves are essentially evil demons (*I, 5, 2; 9, 1*). They cause men to believe in myths and practise cults corresponding to the myths (*25, 3*). Therefore pagan cult is worship of evil demons (*62, 2*) who institute cults (*64, 1*) and demand sacrifices and worship (*12, 5*).

Although the Christians renounce the service of demons (*I, 14, 1*) there is none the less a common ground on which Justin can meet the gentile and demonstrate to him the truth of the Christian faith. In a first approximation, the Saint pleads that the Greeks should tolerate the Christians because there are a number of affinities between Hellenic beliefs and some Christian doctrines. For instance, the Greeks speak of the sons of Zeus and describe Hermes as the "Interpreting Word and Teacher of all" and as the "Word that brings messages from God" (*λόγος ἐξηγῆναι τὸς καὶ πάντων διδάσκαλος*, *I, 21, 2; λόγος ὁ παρὰ Θεοῦ ἀγγελλόμενος*, *I, 22, 2*).

Justin's explanation of such resemblances is that the demons, who had heard that the Prophets foretold Christ's incarnation, inspired poets to invent myths depicting events of Christ's history in a distorted form. The similarity of some features of the myths with the gospel was intended to induce men, when they came to know about Christ, to attach no greater importance to him than to figures of fiction or marvelous stories. In this way the demons sought to delude men (*I, 21, 6; 23, 3; 54, 1 ff.*).

By this drastic theologoumenon St. Justin elucidated two facts. First, the final event in God's economy is foreshadowed even in the religions of the Nations. Secondly, the truth contained in these religions is hidden and disfigured by demonic contexts.

Man, according to St. Justin, has been endowed by his Creator with the faculty to know the truth and decide for himself what is right. Therefore Justin, using the same word as Paul, says that man is "without excuse" (*ἀναπολόγητος*; cf. Rom 1:20) in his religious and moral aberrations (*Ap. I, 28, 3*). But how is it possible for man to find the right path if he is ignorant of the true religion? To this question the following texts suggest an answer. If we read these texts as detached from their contexts in Justin's *Apologies*, our first impression may be that they speak a different language from the passages we have considered above. The Saint writes:

"We have been taught that Christ is the Firstborn of God ... He is the Logos, and all mankind has received participation in Him (*οὗ πᾶν γένος ἀνθρώπων μετέτοξε*). And those who lived with the Logos are Christians, even though they were considered to be atheists. Such were among the Greeks Socrates and Heraclitus, and men like them, and among the barbarians Abraham and Azariah and Mishael and Elijah ... Thus even in former times those who lived without the Logos were depraved (*ἀγχοτοί*) and hostile to Christ and murderers of those who lived with the Logos. Those, on the contrary, who formerly lived and those who now live with the Logos are Christians, and they are not affected by fear or disturbance" (*Ap. I, 46, 2-4*).

The second *Apology* complements the ideas of this text as follows:

"We know that some Stoics were hated and put to death because they held sound views at least in ethics, as also did some poets on certain points, by virtue of the seed of the Logos that is engrafted in all mankind. Such were Heraclitus ... and Musonius ... The demons have always sought to make appear hateful those who in whatever manner strove to live according to the Logos and to avoid evil. It is therefore no wonder if the demons, being convicted, seek to make appear far more hateful those who live not according to a portion of a germinal Logos but according to the knowledge and contemplation of the whole Logos, who is Christ" (*II, 7, 1-3*).

Thus our doctrine appears to be loftier than all human doctrine because [we teach that] what is logos-like, in its entirety (*τὸ λογικὸν τὸ ὅλον*) — namely Christ who manifested himself for us — became flesh and reason (*λόγος*) and soul. For all that which philosophers and lawgivers stated well and found out well, they elaborated in investigation and contemplation by virtue of a portion of the Logos. But they often contradicted themselves since they did not know all that which is of the Logos, who is Christ. And those who lived before Christ and, using their human faculties, attempted to contemplate and demonstrate things according to reason (*λόγος*), were brought before tribunals as being impious (*ἀσεβεῖς*) and temerarious (or: practising magic, *εργεγοῦν*). Socrates, who was more resolute in such research than all the others, was charged with the same crime as ourselves. For it was alleged that he introduced novel deities and did not acknowledge the gods that the city recognized. He had indeed taught men to renounce the evil demons who did what the poets described, and he wanted to expel from the State Homer and the other poets. Instead, he had



encouraged men to engage in a search by reason (or: through the Logos) and thus to strive after the knowledge of God, who was unknown to them. Thus he had said, It is not easy to find the Father and Maker (δημιουργός) of the Universe, nor is it safe for him who has found Him to tell it to all men (Plato, *Timaeus*, 28c). This is what our Christ did by virtue of his own power. For no one trusted in Socrates so as to give away his life for his doctrine<sup>1</sup> but Christ's case is different. He was partly known even to Socrates, since he was and is the Logos who exists in all. He predicted future events through the prophets and through himself, who became equal to us in his suffering (ἀποσταθής) and taught us this. In him not only philosophers and men of letters have placed their trust, but also craftsmen and men without culture, all despising fame and fear and death. For he is the Power of the ineffable Father and not a vessel of human reason" (*Ap* II, 10, 1—8).

"I confess that I pray and endeavor with all my energy to be found a Christian, not because the doctrines of Plato are foreign to Christ but because they are not altogether equal, just like those of others, the Stoics and the poets and the historians. Each one has spoken well if he saw his partial affinity to the divine germinal Logos (ἐκείνος γὰρ τις ἀπὸ μέρους τοῦ οὐρανίου θεοῦ λόγον τὸ ἀγγεῖν ὅσον καὶ ὁ ἐπὶ ἑσέτι)... Whatever, then, has been uttered well among all men belongs to us Christians. For next to God we adore and love the Logos who is from the unbegotten and ineffable God since he has become man for us that he might be a partaker of our sufferings and bring us healing. For it was by virtue of the seed of the engrafed Logos in them that all writers were able dimly to see that which really is. But the seed of something and the imitation which is given according to one's power is one thing, and a different thing is that whose communion and imitation are realized by virtue of the grace proceeding from him (or: it)" (*Ap*, II, 13, 2—6).

In view of the ideologies of our time the question how men outside the Covenant could be pleasing to God is, of course, of special interest. This is not exactly the problem Justin had in mind; nevertheless, the texts we quoted do include a contribution to its elucidation.

Let us first recall that in Justin's view all elements of the religion of his environment were predominantly demonic. Even the vestiges of truth contained in them had been brought in through demonic inveiglement. Still, Justin found that even outside of the Old and the New Covenants there were men who "lived according to the Logos". This is not, however, a contradiction.

We have to make a distinction here. We have to distinguish religion as a sociological entity from religion as a matter of personal conviction. The theory of Anonymous Christians explains religion as essentially tied to a sociological setting (cf. K. RAHNER, *Schriften zur Theologie*, vol. 5, p. 142).<sup>1</sup> The sociological structure of religion naturally includes customs and institutions (*op. cit.*, p. 154).<sup>2</sup> Now the customary beliefs and established practices of Hellenism were exactly the kind of religion that

Justin described as demonic, not because this religion was social but because it was corrupt from the point of view of the truth.

Justin's reference to "the poets" must not be misunderstood. The word "poet" does not have here the connotations it has for a modern European or American. The poet whom Justin had principally in view was Homer (II, 10, 6), and Homer was regarded as a theologian, as an authority in the matter of religion. Therefore, Justin's statement that the demons had inspired the poets is only one of several expressions of his conviction that the established religion of Hellenic society was controlled by evil powers.

On the other hand, St. Justin holds up Socrates as the model of a man who "lived according to the Logos" among the Greeks. Justin emphasizes that "through Socrates the demons were convicted (ἐπὶ ἑσέτι) by the Logos" (I, 5, 4). These demons were, according to Justin, the very gods recognized in the society of Athens. In exposing their demonic nature, Socrates disclosed the degradation of the religion of the Greeks. Socrates even strove to cause men to renounce the demons (I, 5, 3; ἀντρεῖν; II, 10, 6; παρὰ τῶν θεῶν), which of course involved abandoning their worship. All this inevitably entailed opposition to the society in which he lived. The demons took revenge by inducing this society to condemn the philosopher to death.

Now Socrates' attitude, as described by St. Justin, may of course also be called "religion". We must be cautious here to avoid equivocation. Socrates' religion, as seen by Justin, was at any rate radically different from the religion of his social environment.

St. Justin describes the religious character of men like Socrates by saying that they "were Christians". This seems to imply that he believed in the existence of "anonymous Christians". Yet his intention was very different from that of the advocates of the Anonymous Christians theory. For this theory includes the contention that the religions of the Nations are "legitimate" precisely in their "social institution and constitution" (*gesellschaftliche Verfasstheit*; K. RAHNER: *Schr. z. Th.* V 142).<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, what Socrates, as seen by Justin, criticized as pernicious, was religion precisely as practised in his society. What guided Socrates was not the customs of his environment but something like a private revelation, not a perfect but a dim and deflected or refracted light, yet nevertheless a light. In this respect the other gentiles whom Justin extols as having lived according to the Logos are quite similar to Socrates.

Therefore, the conclusion is inevitable that in Justin's view the social constitution of a religion has no bearing on its legitimacy. It is individuals who, in opposition to their pagan environment, allow themselves

<sup>1</sup> English translation (*Theological Investigations*, vol. 5, Baltimore and London, 1966), p. 120.

<sup>2</sup> *ibidem*, p. 131.

<sup>3</sup> The English translation (p. 120) renders "Verfaßtheit" with the single word *constitution*, which, however, does not bring out the full meaning of the original.



to be guided by the divine Logos in whom every human being has received participation and who at a definite point of time became incarnate in Jesus. Moreover, St. Justin is silent on the possibility for pious gentiles to reach final consummation in eternity.

St. Justin intends to vindicate *Christianity*, whereas the modern theory that speaks of "anonymous Christians" pleads for "legitimacy" in the case of *paganism*. It is quite natural that these opposite movements should touch each other at one point. This accounts for the similarity of terminology. The modern theory seeks to find reasons for a resignation to the fact of religious "pluralism"; St. Justin, on the contrary, had to counter the charge of novelty that had been leveled against Christianity. This is why he points out that the Logos has been existing from eternity and that even before the Incarnation the Logos was "the light that enlightens every man", as St. John's Gospel (1:9) says.

In some places Justin doubtless overstates the Greek meaning of λόγος (reason) and he oversimplifies the problem by identifying Christ with Reason. Nevertheless his theory is a magnificent approach to a theological evaluation of paganism. Extending the line that had been traced out in New Testament texts, he felicitously adapts an element of Stoic philosophy, in teaching that there are "germinal λόγος" or seeds of the one divine Logos, sparks of His light, in every soul.

St. Justin's theory also includes the idea that the majority of mankind do not allow themselves to be guided by the light of the Logos. They even persecute those who follow the Logos. This is why there were martyrs of the truth even in pre-Christian religions or nations.

Again, seeds are not the tree. If they justify a legitimacy, this legitimacy cannot, of course, be credited to those who are in possession of rudiments but only to those who represent, or are in communion with, the full stature. Moreover, the point at issue is not of a juridical nature, the term "legitimacy" intimates. Rather, today as in antiquity it is as the term "legitimacy" intimates. Rather, today as in antiquity it is the question of *truth* that has to be faced when the problem of the religions is discussed. Now religious truth is an integral whole. As such it essentially tends to the integration of all its parts. This is why St. Justin says that all truths that have ever been uttered by mankind belong to the Christians, for those who represent the whole can claim that the scattered fragments of the same whole belong to them. Therefore the seeds of the Logos among the gentiles, far from indicating a self-sufficiency of the religions within a "pluralism", testify to an urge from the fragmentary to the whole, from the deceptive plurality of the religions to the unity in Christ and his Mystical Body.

## 2. *Clement of Alexandria*

a. The *Stromata* (about 200 A.D.) — Clement's method of dealing with paganism may be described as an elaboration on a large scale of

principles whose indioate stage is discernible in Luke's account of Paul's visit to Athens. In fact, in his *Stromata* Clement refers several times to this account of Acts 17. Clement sets in relief two points. First, he says that Paul "acknowledges what has been said well among the Greeks"; secondly, he notes that the Apostle shows that this is a mere "adumbration" (σκιεγραφία) whereas real "knowledge" can be obtained only from the Son of God. This knowledge is mediated by the Apostle who is sent "to open the eyes" of the Gentiles "that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God" (*Stromata* 1, 92, 2; cf. Acts 26:18).

Paul's speech on the Areopagus includes two citations from pre-Christian Greek writers and one reference to an element of Greek cult. In Clement's *Stromata* alone there are more than 2000 passages where research has detected quotations of or allusions to non-Christian authors and doctrines. Most of these references are cases of "acknowledgment of what has been said well by the Greeks". To be sure, in a good many of his quotations Clement simply intends to display his erudition — which was quite necessary as an evidence that Christian faith can coexist with humanistic culture. Still, even if such cases are left out of account, there remain a vast number of citations and references to pagan authors which are an integral part of Clement's argumentation. The manner in which Clement has woven quotations and allusions into his presentation of Christian doctrine very often reminds one of St. Paul's speech on the Areopagus. Especially Clement's treatment of Christian ethics is full of quotations from Greek authors. Occasionally he can refer even to details of pagan religious practices with approval. For example, he appreciates the practice of bathing and adorning oneself before prayer (*Strom.* 4, 141, 4—142, 2). He is inclined to interpret this pagan custom as a prefiguration of Baptism, somehow under Moses' influence.

Clement concedes that "at all times all persons of sound thinking have had an innate awareness of the one and almighty God, and most men — those who have not entirely lost their sensitivity to the truth — have acknowledged the eternal boons bestowed on them through divine Providence" (*Str.* 5, 87, 2). Pagans have had an indistinct knowledge of God (εἰδησις τῆς ἀναγκῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ, *Str.* 6, 64, 6). Quoting the apocryphal *Kerygma Petri*, Clement states that "the most distinguished among the Greeks worship the same God as we, though not with perfect knowledge, since they have not learnt the tradition taught through the Son" (*Str.* 6, 39, 4).

While thus acknowledging that there has always been a true, if imperfect, knowledge of God among the Nations, Clement is no less severe than Holy Scripture in his attitude toward the views and practices of the religions. Mythology and polytheism are criticized especially in his *Protreptikos*; idolatry and pagan sacrificial cult are rejected without compromise also in his *Stromata*. Idolatrous rites are



forbidden (*Str.* 6, 40, 1—2). Idolaters who do not repent will be judged. Clement even quotes pagan authors — Zeno, Plato, and Euripides, “the philosopher on the stage” — to support his view that temples and sacrificial cult are futile or even sinful and that the only legitimate offering is “the sacrifice without fire” of which Euripides speaks and which Clement interprets to be Christ (*Str.* 5, 70, 2—6; 75—76).

Nevertheless, Clement was not an extremist even on this point. Alluding to Deut 4:19, he said that God gave to the gentiles the sun and the moon and the stars as objects for worship through which they were to work their way up to the knowledge of God. In accordance with the Book of Wisdom (13:8 f), however, Clement taught that judgment was decreed on those who failed to find, beyond the stars, Him who created them. But the position of the idolaters is lower still than that of the worshippers of stars. They are outside the number of those who are saved (*πρωτοὶ εἰς σωτηρίαν*). In this context Clement penned the sweeping statement, “Every action of the heathen is sinful” (*πᾶσα [πράξις] τοῦ ἐθνικοῦ ἀναγνῶσθαι*) (*Str.* 6, 110, 3—111, 3).

Adapting his terminology to that of non-Christians, Clement even called “philosophy” the salvific doctrine of Christ, much as he assimilated the language of the most powerful heretical movement of his time in describing the perfect Christian as the “gnostic”. In both cases, however, his adaptation does not imply a subsumption of Christian and pagan or heretical concepts under one and the same notion of a higher order. On the contrary, Clement claimed that the Christian revelation alone was the perfect philosophy and the perfect Catholicism was the true gnostic. Elements of pre-Christian philosophy are true in so far as they coincide or tally with revealed truth (*Str.* 6, 54, 1). Accordingly, Clement sketched out a theory to explain, first, the cause of such cases of coincidence or harmony, secondly, the way philosophy can lead a man to salvation. For he admitted that there is a possibility for the gentiles to be saved, though not within the domain of what we would call religion proper.

Clement was convinced that philosophy was a gift that God had bestowed on the Greeks. He hesitated, however, to attribute to philosophy the same dignity of a primary utterance of God that belongs to the Old and New Testaments; he seemed more inclined to see in it only a secondary effect of God (*Str.* 1, 99, 2 f). But at any rate philosophy is a good thing and must therefore be from God who is the author of all that is good (*Str.* 1, 37, 1; 6, 58, 1—3; 156, 4; 159, 1. 5—8; 7, 6, 6; 7, 7, 6; 11, 2). Perhaps God has given it through angels of a lower order (7, 6, 4). “Before the advent of Our Lord, philosophy was necessary for the Greeks to attain righteousness” (*πρὸ τῆς τοῦ Κυρίου παρουσίας, εἰς δικαιοσύνην* “*Εἰληνὴν ἀνερχομένη φιλοσοφία*,” *Str.* 1, 28, 1). It had a function similar to that of the Law among the Jews (6, 159, 9). But just as the Law was merely a prelude, so was philosophy. Philosophers could only

“imitate the truth” (*ἀπομιμνήσκειν*, 6, 56, 1). They saw the truth like something that appears in a mirror or shines through a transparent substance (1, 94, 7). “Even though they use the word ‘God’, they do not know God, because they do not worship God in a way that befits Him” (*ἐπεὶ μὴ σέβουσι κατὰ Θεὸν τὸν Θεόν*, 6, 149, 1). Moreover, they have divided the truth, with each sect regarding the portion it has obtained as the whole truth (1, 57, 1).

“The rise of the light” of Christ, however, both detects parts of truth in philosophy, and integrates them all in the one truth (1, 57, 1—6). “The road of the truth is one, but into it as into an ever-flowing river all streamlets flow, each from a different direction” (1, 29, 1). Similarly, “there are many and various roads to righteousness; for God is good and he saves men in different manners (*πολυτρόπος οὐδένως τοῦ Θεοῦ*). But all of them lead to the principal road and the main gate”. This “royal and authentic entrance” is offered “in Christ” (1, 38, 6 f).

The similes of the road and the streams bring out graphically the idea of a vigorous movement or current. The impelling force of this movement is the divine economy itself. What matters is not the fact that there is truth and righteousness even among the gentiles, but that the parts point to the whole into which they require to be integrated.

Accordingly, the relation of philosophy to Revelation is described by the concept of preparation. Time and again this idea recurs in the *Stromata* (e.g. *προαυδέλναι, προεργασμέναι, προδοκίμοινα* in 1, 28, 1—3). The philosophers are “not yet come of age” (*νήπιον*), “unless they are made men by Christ” (*ἀναρδομένον*, 1, 53, 2). Philosophy is not indispensable but helpful to find the one truth “in which we are instructed by the Son of God” (1, 97, 4). If God gave philosophy as his bequest or covenant (*διαθήκη*), he did so because pre-Christian philosophy was to become a basis or starting-point (*ὑποβάθρα*) for the “philosophy agreeing with Christ” (*κατὰ Χριστόν φιλοσοφία*) — or a ladder (*ἐπιβάθρα*) for Christianity, if a plausible textual conjecture is right (6, 67, 1). Clement urges that one must go beyond philosophy. It must progress to faith, which is its perfection (6, 118, 1; 119, 2; 154, 1—3). “Philosophy also was given through divine Providence as propaedeutics for the perfection through Christ provided that philosophy be not ashamed to learn from barbarian knowledge and thus progress to the truth” (6, 153, 1).

Clement deems it possible that there is a kind of justification through philosophy (1, 27, 3; 28, 1; 99, 3; cf. 6, 159, 9 and other passages). But this justification is only relative and is not yet “total righteousness” (*σὺν ὅλῳ δικαιοσύνῃ*). Philosophy is not a substitute for faith, which alone leads to eternal life. Nor does philosophy cleanse a man from his sins. After all, those who were “righteous through philosophy” were still addicted to idolatry (6, 44, 4). But there were men who in their lifetime had no occasion to know the gospel and yet strove after perfection under the guidance of philosophy. According to Clement, such men obtain a chance



for conversion in the Hades where Christ and the Apostles preach the gospel to them. To attain final salvation, it is indispensable that the souls of the righteous gentiles in the Hades should do penance and accept faith in Christ (2, 43, 5; 44; 6, 44 ff; 48 ff).

b. The *Protreptikos* (about 190—200 A.D.) — In his *Protreptikos*, Clement addressed the Greeks, urging them to become Christians. He did not defend his religion, as the early apologists had done, against accusations which pagans were leveling at the Christians. He wrote as a messenger of the sole true religion, and only with a view to his positive aim did he expose the delusions and absurdities of Hellenism. The pagans had accused the Christians of atheism; Clement, however, did not deem it necessary to refute this charge. Instead, he showed that it was Hellenic religious practices that were virtually atheistic. He expressed this view in a startling juxtaposition of the words "sanctuary" and "godless", in saying: "Do not make a fuss about godless sanctuaries" ( $\delta\theta\upsilon\tau\alpha\ \tau\omicron\iota\omicron\upsilon\nu\ \delta\theta\epsilon\alpha\ \mu\eta\ \pi\omicron\lambda\alpha\tau\epsilon\gamma\gamma\iota\upsilon\omicron\upsilon\epsilon\iota\tau\epsilon$ , 2, 11, 1), or in the sentence, which must have jarred scarcely less on the ears of devotees of mystery cults: "These are the mysteries of the atheists" (2, 23, 1). He even dared to write: "Zeus has died — don't take it amiss" (2, 37, 4). The bold confidence of such words becomes the more manifest when one considers that they were written at a time when all odds seemed to be against a final victory of Christianity.

Clement displayed an abundance of details of pagan myths and cults (Chapters 1—4), thus forcing his readers to credit to him an extraordinary familiarity with the subject. He denounced all these elements of Hellenic religion, and his criticism is no less severe than Scripture's verdict on paganism and no less uncompromising than the polemics of the early apologists. His main charges against the myths and mysteries include words like delusion ( $\gamma\omicron\upsilon\pi\tau\epsilon\iota\alpha$  2, 12, 1;  $\delta\tau\alpha\tau\eta\iota$  13, 3; 14, 1; 22, 3; 26, 6; etc.), inhuman ( $\alpha\tau\alpha\upsilon\theta\epsilon\omicron\tau\alpha$  2, 17, 2), shameful or shameless ( $\alpha\iota\omicron\chi\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$  20, 1;  $\delta\upsilon\alpha\iota\omicron\chi\upsilon\tau\iota\alpha$  21, 1; 22, 6; 5, 66, 2;  $\alpha\iota\omicron\chi\omicron\varsigma$  2, 34, 2; etc.), false piety ( $\epsilon\upsilon\theta\epsilon\beta\epsilon\iota\alpha$   $\nu\omicron\theta\omicron\varsigma$  2, 22, 3). The gods "seem to be inhuman demons, hating mankind" (3, 42, 1). Clement sympathized with such Greeks as had criticized mythology or idolatry and who were, accordingly, accused of atheism. Regarding them, he wrote: "Even though they did not understand the truth itself, yet they sensed the error. This is not an insignificant germ; it grows up, stimulating the mind to search after the truth" (2, 24, 2).

The corruption of the religions of the Nations, according to Clement, originated in ignorance. He wrote: "There was an ancient, innate communion of men with Heaven, but it was obscured by ignorance ( $\delta\gamma\iota\upsilon\omicron\upsilon\alpha$ ). Yet at times it suddenly pierces through the darkness and shines forth anew" (2, 25, 3). It was ignorance that caused men to invent polytheism and idolatry, and "it has imprinted on those who follow it the stain ( $\zeta\eta\mu\iota\varsigma$ ) of a long death" (10, 99, 2). The concept of ignorance as used

here may be of Gnostic and ultimately Indian origin; in any case it forcefully unfolds an idea of St. Paul (Eph 4:18). The context of the passage from 2, 25 does not say when and where the light of communion with God pierces through the darkness of idolatry and mythology. Probably Clement thought that the illumination occurred at a man's conversion to the Christian faith. In another place he describes conversion by saying that from the Nations who were petrified by idolatry God "raised up a seed of piety which was sensitive to virtue" (1, 4, 2).

Clement's vehement rejection of all strictly religious elements of Hellenism is counterbalanced by other features of his work. First, although there were atheists even among the philosophers (5, 64, 3), still a few of them as well as some poets, according to Clement, did perceive elements of the truth. Secondly, while Clement denounced the mystery cults in very harsh terms, he none the less profusely used the language of these cults to expound mysteries of the Christian faith.

Among the philosophers Plato is mentioned first. The passage is of prime importance. Clement quotes from Plato's *Timaeus* and from his letters two short excerpts which speak of the ineffability of God, "the Father and Maker of the Universe". Then he addresses Plato himself — that is to say, contemporary Platonists. He praises Plato for having touched upon the truth and he encourages him to search for what is good ( $\tau\epsilon\lambda\eta\rho\iota\varsigma\ \tau\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\upsilon\omicron\upsilon\sigma\alpha\iota$   $\pi\epsilon\rho\iota$ ) together with his Christian partner in the dialogue.

We may note here that Clement's style, especially in the *Protreptikos*, is eminently that of dialogue. But this dialogue is of a totally different nature from the "dialogue in a pluralistic society" which is recommended and practised today. "Dialogue in a pluralistic society" leaves each partner in his own system. It does not raise the question of truth or it understands truth as subject-related, with each partner having his own truth. It is thus essentially nothing but an exchange of monologues.

The society in which Clement lived was certainly no less "pluralistic" than the one to which we belong today. But Clement's dialogue is not determined by the society of his environment. With all his understanding openness for the partner and his adaptive readiness to accept information, his primary concern is truth — truth which is only one and which is objectively valid. His dialogue is an invitation for search after truth. It is a Christian adaptation of a great tradition of Greek Antiquity. The Christian does not in the least conceal his exultant conviction that he has found the truth — or rather, that the truth has taken possession of him. In his dialogue, he wishes to make this truth perceptible to his partner. At the same time he leaves no doubt that he acknowledges a common metaphysical ground on which he can undertake the "search for what is good" together with his partner.

This common ground is expressed by Clement in the words: "To men in general, but most of all to those engaged in studies, a divine effluence



has been instilled (*ἐνέστανται τὴν ἀνόρεον θεϊκὴν*). By virtue of this they admit, even against their will, that there is one God, and that he is imperishable and uncreated, somewhere in the heights above the heavens, always the one who really is, in his own personal observatory" (*ἔσω τοῦ περὶ τὰ νεῦρα τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἐν τῇ ὑψίᾳ καὶ οὐκ ἐκείνῃ πνευματικῇ οὐρῶν δυνάμει*, 6, 68, 2 f). In this very statement Clement adapts himself to the way of thinking of his partner. The style and terminology of the passage include a number of agreements with works of Plato. Still, the idea expressed is Christian. Clement is unfolding what St. John meant when speaking of the light of the Logos that illuminates every man, and what St. Paul said regarding men's faculty of knowing God. Thus both the content and the formulation of Clement's statement express the fact that there is a common ground from which the Gentile may start and on which the Christian joins him in their common movement toward the truth. In other passages Clement speaks of a divine inspiration (*ἐνέστανται* 6, 71, 1; 72, 5) which enables philosophers and also poets at times to see the truth. Even though the Greeks have not attained to the goal (*οὐκ ἐφύλαξαν τοῦ τέλους*), still they have received some light which has proceeded from the Divine Logos (*ἐκπορεύεται τὴν τοῦ λόγου τοῦ θεοῦ λαμπρότητα*, 7, 74, 7). This has enabled them at times to criticize even their own false gods (7, 75, 1).

Besides the language of Greek philosophy Clement also used that of the mystery cults, especially in the first and last chapters of his *Protreptikos*. But he did not justify this usage in reflections similar to those by which he vindicated philosophy. The reason for this different attitude may be that Clement acknowledged only objective truth. If there was any objective truth in the mystery cults, then it was hidden, not explicit as it was in the case of philosophy. This hidden truth was man's innate vocation to the "communion with Heaven". But this was "obscured by ignorance". Only by a reorientation could it be freed from its obscuration. Such reorientation, however, is effected not by reasoning but by practical use. This may have been the reason why Clement did use symbolical concepts of the mystery cults but refrained from reflecting on why he was justified in doing so. As a matter of fact, he regarded the conceptual symbols of the mysteries as capable of being reoriented so as to convey the truth of the gospel. Thus he could write the following sentence, which certainly describes the attitude underlying all use of pagan symbols in ancient Christianity: "I will show you the Logos and the mysteries of the Logos by explaining them according to an image that is familiar to you" (*κατὰ τὴν οὖν συνηθισμένην εἰκόνα*, 12, 119, 1).

### 3. Origen

Among the debris of Origen's works that have come down to us in the original Greek there is a letter written between 238 and 243 to

Gregory, surnamed the Wonderworker. This letter includes an idea that is of prime relevance to the subject of our study from both the theological and historical points of view. Origen is not speaking here to pagans, as Justin and Clement did, but to a Christian whom he himself had introduced into the faith. Thus the problem of the relationship of Christianity to paganism or Hellenism appears now under a new aspect. After our foregoing investigations it is understandable that Origen, like Justin and Clement and all later Fathers, could appreciate only one accomplishment of Hellenism, namely philosophy. But with Origen the question became prominent whether there is a legitimate relationship between theology, which is the rational and systematic exposition of the Christian faith, and Hellenic philosophy, which includes a natural theology. It is true that this question had loomed up already in Clement's works, but Clement's main problem was the compatibility of philosophy with faith rather than the function of philosophy in theology.

Origen answered the question in the affirmative, thus giving theology a turn that has endured throughout the centuries to come. At his time, liberal arts — geometry, astronomy, music, grammar, and rhetoric — were regarded as auxiliary (*πρωτεύον*) to philosophy. In a similar way, Origen wrote to his former pupil, philosophy could be a useful propaedeutic (*προαίμα*) for the study of Christian doctrine. Origen then justified and elucidated this idea by a symbolical exegesis of the Exodus story of the Israelites despoiling the Egyptians of jewelry and clothing (Ex 3: 21 f; 11: 2; 12: 35 f). The Egyptians, Origen explained, had not used these things properly (*οὐκ εἰς θεὸν ἐχούοντο*). The Israelites, however, made out of them implements to be employed in the worship of God. Similarly, Origen intimates, philosophy can be of use in the exposition of the word of God.

The symbolical interpretation of the *spolia Aegyptiorum* thus includes the idea of utilization (*χρησιμότης*). The Nations did not use their treasures adequately; only in the worship of the true God can these serve their purpose.

This is a strictly practical doctrine. It tallies excellently with the dynamism that we find in all reflections of Christians in antiquity on the relationship between Christianity and Hellenism. This dynamism, grounded in God's economy, implies that there is for the People of God only one legitimate direction of their spiritual movement, namely the one that leads them out of the land of bondage into the land of promise. True theology cannot but participate in this movement. It is therefore quite understandable that early theology treated the problem of paganism from a predominantly practical point of view. Reflection was needful in order to find out whether a certain practical attitude was in accordance with the faith. Thus Justin and Clement had already set forth ideas that imply an answer to the question *why* the treasures of



the Nations may be used by the people of the Covenant. Later thinkers were to take up this problem again.

#### 4. Gregory of Nyssa

In his meditation on the spiritual meaning of the life of Moses (Περί τοῦ βίου Μωϋσέως — Θεωρία, written about 390—392 A.D.) St. Gregory presents three symbols that demonstrate the role of pagan philosophy in theology. The first is Pharaoh's daughter (Ex 2:1—10; Gregory's *Life of Moses*, ed. Daniélou, 2, 10—12), the second is Moses' wife (Ex 2:16—22; 4:24—26; *Life of Moses* 2, 37—40), the third is the Egyptian treasures (Ex 3:21 f; 11:2; 12:35 f; *Life of Moses* 2, 112—116).

Pharaoh's daughter is barren. She rears the child Moses. Moses passes for her son until he has come of age. Then "he deems it shameful to be reckoned the son of her who is by nature barren" (2, 10). Gregory takes Pharaoh's daughter as the type of pagan philosophy (ἡ ἐξωθεν φιλοσοφία), whereas he sees in Moses the type of a Christian. Gregory explains: "In fact the culture that is extrinsic to the Church (ἡ ἐξωθεν παιδεία) is barren. It is always in travail but never gives birth to offspring. Philosophy has indeed been in travail for a long time, but has it produced a fruit worthy of so many and great efforts? Are not all its fruits unsubstantial (wind-like) and immature? Before they attain to the light of the knowledge of God, they are miscarried. They might perhaps have become men, if they had not been enclosed in the bosom of barren wisdom alone."

Moses stays with his foster-mother only "so long as it is necessary so that it may not seem that he has not profited from the values (αρεταί) that which those people possess". Then he returns to his real mother. But even while staying with the Egyptian princess he receives milk from his mother, whom the princess has engaged as a nurse. "This seems to teach us that, even though we may study extrinsic doctrines during the time of our education, we should not sever ourselves from the Church's milk and which makes us gradually grow up. This milk is the practices and customs of the Church by which the soul is nourished and strengthened for its setting out from here to ascend to the height" (2, 11—12).

The imagery of this passage seems to be somewhat confused. As it may happen in contemplation, the picture shifts its content. Barrenness is transformed into miscarriage. The fruit of philosophy, at first in the singular and possibly conceived as something spiritual, then turns out to be men — who, eventually, are no longer born prematurely but reared by philosophy.

But this confusion in no way affects the idea that Gregory wishes to express. The intertwining of the images, while combining the expressive values of them all, prevents the reader from overinterpreting one of them

or forming a too solid mental image. Gregory intends to say that philosophy, if left to itself, is essentially inefficient.

The problem of the Christian's contact with paganism appears here as a problem of education. The concrete aspects of this problem were treated by St. Gregory's elder brother, St. Basil, in his work, *To the Younger*. To evaluate the attitude of the Fathers toward such questions, we have to bear in mind that a spiritual weakness that misinterprets itself as "openness to the world" was totally alien to them. Alive to the warnings of the New Testament, the Fathers were keenly aware that profane culture — in their case, Hellenic culture — was extrinsic to the Church. It is true that they realized the theological necessity of assimilating this culture. But at the same time they knew that the assimilation required proper precautions and critical screening. Here, as already in the New Testament, the universality of the religion of the Covenant included an exclusivity. The evangelical dynamism which we find in all the Fathers of the Church includes both aspects, the universal and the exclusive.

The problem of the assimilation of pagan culture is illuminated by Gregory in the symbol of Moses' marriage. Moses' wife stems from a foreign race. Gregory interprets her figure as the type of "extrinsic culture". He writes: "Even in extrinsic culture there is something which may not be rejected. We can join it in a marriage (συνεμία) and it can give birth to offspring which is virtue. Moral as well as natural philosophy can very well become a consort and a friend to [those striving after] the higher life and a companion of one's existence, provided its progeny does not bring in defilement from the alien race." Therefore it is necessary that "all that which is noxious and impure should be removed". The story of Exodus 4:24—26 illustrates this by the circumcision of Moses' infant son. An angel threatened to kill Moses, whereupon his wife circumcised her child. Gregory interprets this as indicating that the angel of God can only be propitiated "if the characteristic mark that reveals the foreigner is removed". And he goes on to comment: "There is indeed something carnal and uncircumcised in the philosopher's products which are his teachings. When this is removed then what is left is of noble Israelitic lineage. For instance, even extrinsic philosophy says that the soul is immortal. This is a godly product of it." The doctrine of metempsychosis, on the contrary, "is carnal and alien prepuce". Another example is the doctrine that God is the Maker of the world. Philosophy combines this with the erroneous view that God requires matter for constructing the world. Thus there are "good doctrines in extrinsic philosophy", but "they are polluted by absurd additions. If these are removed, the angel of God becomes favorable to us" (2, 37—41).

In this interpretation philosophy is no longer barren. Obviously the condition for its becoming fertile is its association with the Christian faith. But even here caution is needed. The product of the alliance



between Christianity and pagan philosophy is impure and causes defilement unless it is properly cleansed.

In interpreting the symbol of the Egyptian treasures (ἀλούτους Ἀλύτους, 2, 112—116) St. Gregory does not essentially go beyond what Origen had said. He thinks that a literal understanding of the text would be improper because this would amount to accusing the Israelites of lie and fraud. For the same reason he rejects the explanation that by taking the treasures the Israelites obtained the pay due to them for their labor. Consequently, a higher sense or deeper meaning (ὁψηλότερος λόγος) seems to be intended in the text. A possible deeper meaning is that philosophy and other disciplines of culture are to be taken over from outside the Church "for utilization" (λόγῳ χρησέως). These spiritual treasures are to be used "to adorn (καλλωπιθῆναι) the divine temple of the mystery". Gregory quotes Basil as the example of a man who thus consecrated to God the "Egyptian treasures" he had acquired through the profane education that he underwent in his youth.

The term "utilization" (χρήσις and the verb derived from the same root) occurs already in relevant passages of Clement's works, and then in Origen's letter to Gregory the Wonderworker. With Gregory of Nyssa it is on the way to becoming technical. It denotes the legitimate assimilation of contents of pagan culture.

### 5. Theodoret

Probably between 420 and 430 A.D. Theodoret wrote his work *The Cure of Hellenic Maladies or the Truth of the Gospel Proved from Greek Philosophy*, which naturally touches upon the problems we are considering. From this treatise, which is the latest and greatest of the Greek Apologies, we may infer that a far-reaching consensus on our problem had come to be prevalent among those Christian writers who did not altogether deny the value of Hellenic philosophy. The fact of this consensus is all the more important for a final theological appraisal because the situation of the Church had changed considerably between the time of Justin and that of Theodoret. Christianity had prevailed in the meantime, and Theodoret even explained the victory of his religion as a token of God's salvific economy (6, 87 f.; 12, 95—97; ed. in *Sources chrétiennes*). It was no longer risky to be a Christian; on the contrary, the position of paganism was becoming more and more depressed. Yet there were still many "adherents of Hellenic mythology" (τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς μυθολογίας ἐξηγητήριον, Preface, 1), and Theodoret wrote his book to help them find their way to the faith. It is interesting to note that the arguments against paganism in this changed situation remained essentially the same as they had been throughout two or three centuries.

Theodoret's attitude toward polytheism, mythology and pagan cults is quite as uncompromising as that of any other Father of the Church. "I will show", he says, "that the myths of the so-called gods are not only incredible but also absurd and impious" (τῶν μυθολογούμενων . . . μὴ μόνον τὸ ἀπίστον ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ ἀνόητον καὶ θοῦαγές, 2, 96), and like other apologists he speaks of the ignominy of the myths (αἰσχος, 4, 4). The sacrificial cults are repulsive (7, 11—15) and they were rejected even by some Greek philosophers and poets (7, 36—48). The Devil inveigled men into forgetting the God of the Universe and taught them polytheism and idolatry (7, 3). Originally, the knowledge of the true God had been engrained on the nature of man (7, 3).

Even philosophy errs on many important points. Nevertheless some philosophers and poets did catch glimpses of the truth. Theodoret can therefore imitate the method of Clement and Eusebius and start his "cure" with sayings of Greek writers (1, 127). But how was it possible that philosophers could perceive elements of the truth without receiving a revelation? Theodoret's answer to this question is: The philosophers "simply resemble those songbirds which imitate the human voice without knowing the meaning of what they say. In a similar way these philosophers, when speaking of things divine, did not know that of which they were making statements. But I believe that they may be excused, since they enjoyed neither the illumination of the prophets nor the light of the apostles. [The Greek original has terms taken from the mystery cults to express the notions of illumination and light.] Their sole guide was nature. Religious aberrations, however, spoiled the characters that God had formerly imprinted on it. Nevertheless, their Creator renewed a few of them and he did not allow them to perish altogether. He showed to men through creation signs of his care and providence" (1, 120 f.). Theodoret then quotes Acts 14:16 and, after pointing to the privilege of the "race of Abraham", he remarks that God "led the other Nations to religion (θεοσέβεια) through nature and through creation" (1, 123). There may even be a "gift of knowledge" (γνώσεως δῶρον) among them. Taking as a symbol the notion of "rain" occurring in Acts 14:17, Theodoret says that both untilled and cultivated areas receive one and the same rain; so the fruits grown among the Nations resemble at times those that are the result of the agriculture which is the true religion. But they have an admixture of harshness and bitterness in them. This is because they did not receive a "prophetic culture" (πρωφῆτια προφητηνῆ, 1, 125). However, one can take of them what is good and leave aside the rest (1, 125 f.).

Obviously pagans, who had been told that Christianity was the true religion, often raised the query why, then, this religion had appeared so late. Theodoret replied that God acted like physicians. "These reserve the stronger remedies to the last. At first they administer the lighter medicines, at last they bring the more efficacious . . . (God) had indeed



brought various remedies, to all men through creation and through nature, and to the Hebrews through the Law and the Prophets. In the end he administered this all-powerful and salvific remedy, and he has expelled the malady" (6, 85 f). This is Theodoret's version of the movement of God's economy. The previous stages are not self-sufficient but foreshadow the Incarnation as their fulfillment.

In the main outlines, Theodoret's evaluation of paganism completely agrees with that of other Fathers, though in details his treatment looks like a pedestrian variant of the loftier thought of St. Justin, Clement, Origen, St. Gregory of Nyssa, and St. Augustine.

## 6. Augustine

a. *De doctrina Christiana* (first part, written in 397) — In Book II, Chapters 40—41, of his work *On Christian Doctrine* St. Augustine expounds the doctrine of the "Egyptian treasures" and of their "utilization" by Christians. The noun "utilization" (*usus*) and the corresponding verb (*uti*) occur six times in the short passage. This seems to indicate that the word, translated from Greek *χρησις*, had become something like a technical term since the time of Clement and Origen.

Like the Greeks, Augustine interprets the Egyptian treasures as symbols of philosophical doctrines. As regards the idols and myths of the pagans, he says that "everyone of us who under the guidance of Christ leaves the community of the gentiles must abominate and avoid them". These things are not the true wealth of the gentiles. The Nations also possess "liberal arts that are quite apt to be used in the service of the truth, and some most useful moral precepts... and even concerning the worship of the one true God some true statements are found among them". These things "are, as it were, their gold and silver", which the Christians are to appropriate to themselves. The pagans "did not themselves make them, but they extracted them, as it were, from certain mines of divine providence, which is infused everywhere. They misuse them perversely and illegitimately for the cult of the demons. When the Christian severs himself mentally from their miserable communion, he must take those things away from the gentiles." The gentiles are unlawful possessors of those treasures.

It may be interesting to note here in passing that this opinion was shared also by a Christian writer who made use of concepts of Greek philosophy perhaps in a greater measure than any other Father of the Church, namely by that Dionysius who identified himself with the Areopagite. Defending himself against the accusation that he was turning the doctrines of Neo-Platonists against their own authors, Dionysius pleaded that the Neo-Platonists themselves directed "the divine weapons against the divine realities when, on behalf of the same wisdom they received from God, they sought to spoil the respect due to God" (*Ep.* 7;

Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 3, 1080 AB; quoted by H. U. v. Balthasar, *Herrlichkeit*, vol. 2, p. 153). Dionysius' statement is additional evidence that on this point there was a consensus among early Christian writers.

St. Augustine quotes a number of Latin authors of earlier generations who successfully utilized pagan wisdom: Cyprian, Lactantius, Victorinus, Optatus, and Hilary (of Poitiers). But Augustine also warns that a Christian must not allow himself to be "puffed up" by philosophical wisdom (cf. 1 Cor 8:1). What makes a person a Christian is not the Egyptian treasures but charity, humility and the inspiration he derives from the Cross of Christ. Thus, while repeating Origen's doctrine of the Egyptian treasures and of utilization, Augustine has added some accents that are unmistakably his own.

b. *Letter No. 102* (written in 408 or 409 A.D.) — A priest in Carthage had sent to Augustine a number of questions, some posed by a pagan philosopher, concerning the Christian religion. The Saint's reply includes his most important and original contribution to a theological appraisal of the problem of the religions. The opponent had challenged the Christian doctrine that salvation is only given to those who have faith in Christ, which implies the claim of universal and exclusive validity for the Christian religion. This doctrine seems to entail that all Nations that lived before Christ, except the Jews, were excluded from salvation. The Carthaginian philosopher had asked: "Why did he who is called the Savior remain absent for so many centuries?" "What happened to so many souls that are without any guilt whatever?" "What, for instance, happened to the souls of the Romans or Latins who, up to the time of Caesar, were deprived of the grace of Christ, who had not yet arrived?" (Question 2, Section 8).

This is substantially the same sort of doubts or objections that had stirred St. Justin's reflections and which were also treated by Augustine's younger contemporary Theodoret. Augustine's solution, however, is more differentiated and circumspect than that of the second century martyr, and more penetrating than Theodoret's plain comparison of God with a physician. He argues as follows (2, 10):

"Why do our opponents challenge the Christian religion with their question" about why the innovation of the Christian religion was necessary? If the same question is asked regarding their gods, it is found that there were considerable variations in the pagan religions and it may be asked why it was necessary to introduce innovations if the old rites were sufficient for cleansing a man (2; 9). If we confront our opponents with this fact, "they either prove unable to answer or, if they find a reply, this turns out to be in favor of our religion also". They will say that "the gods have always been existing and have been capable of liberating their votaries everywhere in the same way; but as temporal and earthly things vary, they wished to be worshiped in different times,



places, and modes according as they knew would correspond to the several times and places". This entails "that it does not matter if there is no uniformity [of the rites] in different times and places. There may be any degree of diversity in holy rites, if that which is worshiped is holy. Similarly, it is of no consequence if there is no uniformity among the languages and hearers. There may be any degree of diversity in the words that are used, if that which is said is true. One difference, however, is of the greatest importance. Linguistic signs, which enable men to exchange their ideas, can be instituted even by a *societal convention*; in religion, however, those who have found true wisdom have followed the *will of God* to find out by which rites they could conform to the Divinity. This will has never failed to provide salvation for the righteousness and piety of the mortals (*Quae omnino nunquam defuit ad salutem iustitiae pietatique mortalium*). There may be differences in rites among different peoples who are united in one and the same religion; what matters most is that those things should be done by which human weakness is exhorted or tolerated and divine authority not opposed" (2, 10).

Christ, the Word of God, the coeternal Son of the Father and Immutable Wisdom, governs all spiritual and corporal creatures. He determined and determines by wisdom and knowledge what in each time and each place is to happen to each creature, even before the growth of the Hebrew race, then during the time of the Israelite kingdom, and finally when He became incarnate and after His Ascension till the end of the world (2, 11). "Consequently, at all times and in all places from the origin of mankind those who believed in Him, who came to know Him in whatever manner, and who led godly and righteous lives, have doubtless become saved through Him." In former times there were men who believed in His future Incarnation much as we now believe that He has become incarnate. But this difference, as also the corresponding difference in the holy rites prevalent at different times, does not involve a difference of faith or of its object. "The liberation of the faithful and pious is of the same kind" everywhere and at all times. "*Ubi mult, pious is of the same kind*" everywhere and at all times. "*Ubi mult, however, leave it to God to decide what is to happen for this end and when it is to happen; for us, we should keep obedience (Quid autem quando fiat quod ad unam eandemque fidem et piorum liberationem pertinet, consilium Deo tribuamus, nobis obediendum tenemus)*". Thus, it is one and the same true religion which was signified earlier by names and signs other than those we use now, and which was observed in a more hidden way previously and more manifestly later, by a few previously and by a greater number later" (2, 12). It is God alone who can and does provide for each time what is suitable for it (2, 13).

Therefore, regarding any religion or philosophy it is quite irrelevant to know when it arose. "But, whether the gods of that religion are real gods, or whether they are to be worshiped, and whether that philosophy

is of use for the well-being of the soul": these are the questions we wish to discuss with our opponents (2, 13).

Augustine thinks that it may well be maintained as a hypothesis that Christ appeared in the flesh not earlier than when he foresaw there would be at least a few who would believe in Him. In spite of His miracles the number of His disciples was rather small, and even after His Ascension

"we see many... who prefer to offer resistance with their human astuteness rather than yield to... divine authority... Therefore, what wonder if Christ knew that the world was so full of unbelievers in previous epochs that He had reasons for refusing to appear and preach to those who He knew could be brought to believe neither by words nor by miracles?" (2, 14).

"Yet none the less from the beginnings of mankind He never ceased to send prophecies, at times more hiddenly, at times more conspicuously, according as it seemed to God to correspond to the times. Nor were there ever men lacking who believed in Him, from the time of Adam up till Moses, both in the people of Israel itself, which was by a special mystery a prophetic race, and in other Nations, before He appeared in the flesh." The Old Testament itself mentions cases of men "who were partakers of this mystery" even though they belonged neither to the lineage of Abraham nor to the people of Israel nor to those who were associated with Israel. Therefore, "why should we not believe that there were some here and there at different times even in other Nations?... Thus no one worthy has ever lacked the salvation of this religion which is the sole true one and through which alone true salvation is truly promised; he who lacked it was not worthy. And, from the beginning of the growth of mankind till the end, this religion is preached to some for their reward and to some for judgment. Accordingly, those to whom it was not proclaimed were foreknown as not being future believers.<sup>4</sup> Those to whom it was proclaimed although they were not going to believe, are held up as an example to the others. Those, however, who hear the preaching as future believers, will be prepared for the kingdom of Heaven and the community of the holy angels" (2, 15).

Augustine then turns to the problem of cult. In this context he defines what legitimate religion is. His definition, strictly following the line traced out by Holy Scripture, certainly retains its validity, especially in a time of subjectivistic and anthropocentric confusion. He begins by stating that God himself

"gives inspiration and teaches in what manner he is to be worshiped" (3, 17). "Temples, the sacerdotal office, sacrifices, and other things pertaining to these, must be dedicated only to the one true God... When these things are exhibited to God, according to His inspiration and teaching, then there is true religion (*Haec cum exhibentur Deo, secundum eius inspirationem atque doctrinam, vera religio est*)... What those who know the Scriptures of both Testaments criticize in the sacrilegious rites of the pagans is not the fact that the pagans build temples, institute sacerdotal offices and offer sacrifices, but the fact that these things are exhibited to idols and demons" (3, 18).

<sup>4</sup> The idea of foreknowledge emerged already in Justin's *Apology* I, 28, 2.



The reasonings of St. Augustine's Letter No. 102, of which we have given an account, are certainly among the most important contributions to the theological problem of paganism. — In his evaluation of pagan rites, St. Augustine, like all the Fathers of the Church, keeps strict obedience to Holy Scripture. From among the vast number of Scripture passages that bear on this subject he selects four. He quotes Ps 115:5, "The idols 'have mouths but do not speak, eyes but do not see'; Ps 96:5, 'The idols 'in his version reads: "For all the gods of the peoples are demons"; which in his version reads: "For all the gods of the peoples are demons"; 1 John 5:21, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols"; and 1 Cor 10:19f, "What do I imply then? I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. And I do not want you to be partners with demons" (3, 19). No "elegant interpretation" can change the fact that the pagan rites are "impious" and "sacrilegious" (3, 20).

c. *De civitate Dei* (413—426 A.D.) — The leading theme of St. Augustine's greatest work is the opposition of the City of God to the earthly city. The criterion for the discrimination between the two cities is simple enough. They represent two races of men, not ethnic but spiritual groups, "the one consisting of those who live according to man, the other of those who live according to God" (15, 1). In other terms: "The two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self" (14, 28). Although the city of God has become manifest in the Church, the "two cities are entangled together in this world, and intermixed until the last judgment effect their separation" (1, 35). As far as the order of temporal things is concerned, the heavenly city sojourning on earth readily adapts itself to the laws and ordinances of the earthly city. But there is discord and dissension between the two cities in the matter of religion (19, 17). All religions of the Nations, with their gods, myths, and cults, belong to the earthly city. The gods of polytheism are "useless images, or unclean spirits and pernicious demons, or certainly creatures, not the Creator" (Book 6, Preface). To one part of the earthly city God granted that it become a foreshadowing symbol of the heavenly city, "which served to remind men that such a city was to be, rather than make it present". This was the city or commonwealth of the Old Covenant (15, 2). "There was no other people who were specially called the people of God; but they cannot deny that there have been certain men even of other Nations who belonged, not by earthly but heavenly fellowship, to the true Israelites, the citizens of the country that is above" (18, 47). Augustine thought that Job was an example of a holy man from among the Nations. We may doubt whether he was right on this point. But what matters is not the question whether Job was or was not a Jew by birth, but the following statements:

"It is possible that even among other Nations there were persons who lived according to God and pleased Him and thus belonged to the spiritual Jerusalem.

It cannot be believed that this was granted to anyone unless the one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, was divinely revealed to him. His advent in the flesh was pre-announced to the ancient saints in the same way as it is proclaimed to us as having occurred" (18, 47). Such holiness outside of Israel entails adoration of the one true God and abstinence from the cult of the false gods whom the whole world worshiped. It was granted "wherever through the most secret and most just judgment of God there were men worthy of divine grace" (3, 1).

When analyzing *De doctrina christiana*, we saw that Augustine, like many other Fathers, found much to approve in the doctrines of philosophers, especially Plato and the (Neo-)Platonists. In his *De civitate Dei* he discussed the views of philosophers at great length. He did not make a distinction between the views of the God of the philosophers and the God of Scripture (which is, after all, a somewhat subjectivistic differentiation, suggesting that God's divinity somehow depends on our behavior toward him).

The Neo-Platonist Porphyry had spoken of "the Great God", and Varro, the theologian of the Roman ethnic religion, had taught that Jove was the highest deity. St. Augustine readily admitted that both Porphyry's "Great God" and Varro's Jove were in reality the same God whom the Christians worship, even though Varro "did not know what he was saying" and Porphyry was "the bitterest enemy of the Christians" (19, 22). Evidently, what mattered to Augustine was the fact that what Varro and Porphyry had known included an objective truth, and this was quite independent of the other fact that the two thinkers had not acted up to what they had known.

Augustine distinguished between right and wrong in knowledge as well as in behavior. He examined the doctrines of the philosophers calmly and objectively. He found that even philosophers advocated idolatry and polytheism (10, 26 and other passages). Accordingly, he could not count Plato or any other philosopher among the citizens of the city of God. Only through faith in the mystery of Christ, whether before or after the Incarnation, can man attain purification in a saintly life (10, 25).

Regarding no man did Augustine in his reflections on paganism pass a final judgment in either direction. If he did not say that philosophers were saved, he did not declare them damned either. Obviously he intended to respect the mystery of God. This he expressed clearly enough in the words which we quoted above from his Letter 102: "Let us leave the decision to God" (*constitium Deo tribuamus*). The same idea recurs in another of his inimitably pregnant statements, which he made in a different context: "Let us allow God to be capable of something which we must admit we are incapable of scrutinizing" (*Deus Deum aliquid posse quod nos falcemur investigare non posse*, Ep. 137, 2, 8).



## 7. *De vocatione omnium gentium* (about 450 A.D.)

This work has been attributed with some probability to St. Prosper of Aquitaine, the patron of lay theologians, defender of the Church's doctrine of grace, and secretary to St. Leo the Great. Its title seems to indicate a discussion of whether and how the Nations are, or can be, saved, but the primary themes of the treatise are the gratuitousness of grace and the universality of God's offer of grace. St. Prosper contends that there is no salvation except through God's grace alone (1, 23 f; 2, 1; and *passim*), with the very beginning of faith being effected by grace (1, 8). On this point we need not enlarge here. It is presupposed everywhere in the present study. Neither is it controversial today.

Two among the subjects discussed in *De vocatione omnium gentium* have a direct and special bearing on the theme of the present investigation. These are Prosper's defense of the thesis that God wills that all men be saved (1, 12, 20; 2, 1, 25; and *passim*; 1 Tim 2:4), and his emphasis on the inscrutability of God's judgments (2, 1; and *passim*).

As regards the second of these subjects, it seems in place that we duly appreciate this attitude, not only because it may need rehabilitation after it was disparaged as "fideism", "agnosticism", etc., by Father De Letter, the author of the annotated English translation of *De vocatione* (in *Ancient Christian Writers*, 1952). In fact, St. Prosper's reverence for God's mystery forms the keynote of his reflections on the problems of the universality of grace. We will select here two out of many passages where Prosper voices his awareness, and his view on the meaning, of the fact that the details and reasons of God's decrees exceed man's grasp. Prosper writes:

"It is most profitable for us to believe that all good things, especially those that are conducive to eternal life, are obtained, increased, and preserved through God's benevolence. Once this faith is firmly fixed in our hearts and unshakably grounded, then, I think, pious minds should not be worried over the question whether all or not all men will attain to conversion. This attitude is possible if we do not allow that which is clear to be obscured by that which is hidden and if we do not allow ourselves to be excluded from what is open by impertinent attempts to penetrate what is closed" (1, 9).

"What God willed to remain hidden, should not be scrutinized, and what he made manifest should not be disregarded, so that we might be preserved from both illicit inquisitiveness and condemnable ingratitude" (1, 21).

These passages reveal another aspect of the evangelical dynamism. The gospel is not a collection of riddles for irreverent researchers to exercise their conceited acumen, but its message involves an appeal to do something. And the very first thing to do is the acknowledgment of the incomprehensible God in the adoration of love (cf., e.g., Deut 6:4-9; Matt 22:37 f; Mark 12:29 f; Apoc 14:6 f). Prosper urges especially to heed the difference between what is clearly stated in Scripture and what is not revealed.

In perfect agreement with the New Testament (e.g. 1 Peter 2:9 f; Eph 2:12 f; 5:8; Col 1:12 ff. 26 f; Tit 3:3 ff), Prosper states that after the Incarnation grace was given or offered to more persons and more abundantly than before (1, 15; 2, 9; 2, 14 last sentence; 2, 17, 18, 19, 25). Yet even in earlier times God did not withhold his mercy from all Nations. Prosper writes:

"It is our faith and most devout confession that the whole of mankind never lacked the care of Divine Providence. Although God chose one people to be His own and guided them to the practice of religion (*pietas*) by special institutions, yet He did not withhold the gifts of His goodness (*bonitatis suae dona*) from men of any Nation. Thus it can be made clear to them that they have received prophetic pronouncements and legal precepts in the services and testimonies rendered them by the things of nature (*in elementorum obsequiis ac testimoniis*). Therefore they are left without excuse for making into their gods the gifts of God and worshipping in religion things that had been created for being used" (1, 5).

Prosper summarizes here teachings of Rom 1:19-23, 2:14-16, and Acts 14:17. In the following, he elaborates his position further:

"It is certainly true that through God's special care and forbearance the people of Israel was chosen whereas all other Nations were allowed to take their own ways (Acts 14:16), that is, to live according to their own will. Still, the Creator in his eternal goodness did not withdraw himself from those men in such a way as to omit giving them any intimations that might lead them to know and fear him. For the sky, the earth, the sea, in fact every created thing that can be seen and known, is so disposed as to render to humankind this principal service that rational nature might be imbued with veneration and love for its Maker when contemplating so many beautiful forms, when experiencing so many good things, and when receiving so many favors. For the Spirit of God fills all things and it is He in whom we live, move, and have our being (Acts 17:28). Even though 'salvation is far from the wicked' (Ps 119:155), nothing is devoid of the presence of His salvation and power... And yet the greater part of mankind who were permitted to walk in the ways of their own will, did not understand or follow this law" (2, 4). Those, however, "who from among whatever Nations at whatever time were able to please God, were doubtless singled out by the Spirit of God's grace" (2, 5). "Of the whole of mankind... God's multiform and ineffable goodness has always taken care and is still taking care. Therefore no one who perishes can plead that he was denied the light of the truth, nor can anyone boast of his righteousness. The one group incur punishment for their own wickedness, while the others are led to glory by God's grace" (2, 29).

From these quotations it should be clear that Prosper is more reserved than Augustine regarding the question whether men from among the Nations can attain eternal salvation. Prosper keeps strictly to the line of the New Testament. He points out that the Nations have always enjoyed the gifts of God's goodness and this fact can open their eyes and lead them to know God, to worship Him and to observe His law. But the majority of them have failed to yield obedience. Those, however, who did fulfill God's will, were saved through His grace. Prosper's



reverential theology remains silent on the question which pagans were elected.

Thus Prosper is somewhat inarticulate or reticent as to the eternal lot of those outside the Covenant. On the other hand, however, he is quite explicit in professing that all Nations will eventually come to know the gospel and thus have the opportunity to find salvation through faith. He writes:

"We know that in former times certain peoples were not adopted among the children of God. It is quite possible that likewise even now there are in the more remote parts of the world some Nations on whom the light of the Savior's grace has not yet shone. But we have no doubt that God's hidden judgment has appointed for them also a time in which they are to be called when they will hear and accept the gospel... Even now they are not denied that amount of general help that is bestowed from on high upon all men at all times. But human nature has been wounded so severely that no one's independent speculation is fully sufficient to reach the knowledge of God unless the darkness of the heart is dispelled by the true light which God, who is just and good, in his inscrutable judgment did not shed in past ages in the same way as he has been doing in recent times" (2, 17).

Here, as elsewhere, Prosper respectfully abstains from either denying or emphasizing the possibility of a knowledge of God and, consequently, of salvation, outside the Covenant.

In a way, St. Prosper's reflections on the salvation of the Nations may be taken to be an exposition of St. Paul's words which speak of "the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to his saints" (Col 1:26).

### III

## THE CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE TOWARD NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS

### Some critical and positive reflections

In the present Chapter we intend to reflect on the Christian attitude toward paganism, not on the individual Christian's attitude toward individual non-Christians. As regards the latter, all agree today that Christians should meet with non-Christians in a spirit of dialogue. To be sure, there is no unanimity among writers about what dialogue is or should be. There are, however, some official statements on this matter by the Second Vatican Council, by Pope Paul VI and by the Secretariat for non-Christians. Reflection on the Christian attitude toward non-Christian religions seems to be an indispensable prerequisite for the meeting of Christians with individual non-Christians and for evangelization.

The Christian attitude toward paganism has a doctrinal and a practical aspect. The practical attitude is an expression of dogmatic presuppositions, whether these be reflected upon or not. We therefore treat the doctrinal aspect first.

#### 1. *A Critique of the "Anonymous Christians" Theory*

The most noteworthy contribution to this subject in the last years has doubtless been KARL RAHNER's essay *Christianity and the non-Christian Religions*<sup>1</sup>. One cannot deal with our problem today without discussing RAHNER's position. The vast number of articles and books which over recent years have dealt with non-Christian religions have to a great extent been occasioned by Rahner's essay or were composed under its influence.

A critical analysis of any of Rahner's essays is not an easy task. The main difficulty stems from his peculiar style of thinking. He can begin by stating traditional doctrine with great emphasis, but then he goes on to evolve novel ideas that virtually neutralize or nullify his foregoing statements; at the same time he surprisingly intersperses passages which

<sup>1</sup> This essay is included in vol. 5 of KARL RAHNER's *Schriften zur Theologie* (1962). In the present Chapter, quotations from this volume and reference to it are given according to K. H. Krüger's accurate English translation (K. RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 5, Baltimore and London, 1966, repr. 1969). After each quotation two page numbers are given in brackets; the first refers to the English translation and the second to the corresponding passage of the German original. Passages of other works of RAHNER have been translated by the present author, and references to their sources are given in the footnotes.



represent traditional opinions but which do not seem to be too coherent with the new context. In order to do full justice to Rahner, it would therefore be necessary to analyze his writings almost sentence by sentence. In the case of the essay concerning us here, an additional difficulty lies in the fact that its principal statements presuppose certain positions in philosophy, in Christology and in the doctrine of grace. Hence, a thorough critique of the article would be possible only as part of a critical analysis of the whole system of Rahner's philosophy and theology. Since we cannot undertake all this within the framework of this book, we must content ourselves with a compromise and treat Rahner's essay more summarily than it would deserve.

There are two points on which no Catholic can possibly disagree with Rahner's ideas. Rahner is certainly right in emphasizing, first, that the present situation of the world demands a reconsideration of the problem of the Christian attitude toward non-Christian religions; secondly, that a man who cooperates with the grace that God offers him can be saved even outside the Church. It is open to question, however, whether Rahner's new treatment of the subject — in particular, the way he construes the possibility of salvation for non-Christians — provides an acceptable solution.

The present situation of the world is characterized by the fact that "everybody today is determined by the intercommunication of all those situations of life which affect the whole world. Every religion which exists in the world is . . . a question posed, and a possibility offered, to every person" (117; 138). Rahner contrasts our time with a former epoch, namely the Middle Ages, when the West was more or less "shut up in itself". It is surprising, however, that he does not ask whether there are essential differences or similarities between the present situation and the situation of Antiquity. In point of fact, there is at least one striking similarity. In the first four centuries the Church lived in a "religious pluralism" scarcely less multifarious than the pluralism in which we find ourselves today. On the other hand, there is a difference in that atheism was not as great a factor in the pluralism of antiquity as it is today. But as far as the Christian attitude toward other religions is concerned, there is another, more important difference between our time and Antiquity. Rahner, doubtless voicing the feeling of many Christians of our day, states, "The fact of the pluralism of religions, which endures and still from time to time becomes virulent anew even after a history of two thousand years, must . . . be the greatest scandal and the greatest vexation for Christianity" (116; 137). This is a feeling of frustration which, according to all we know, was quite alien to the Christians in Antiquity. Nor does the opposite feeling, the hope of a final victory of Christianity in the whole world, seem to have determined the Christian consciousness in any noticeable measure. As long as to be a Christian meant to risk one's life, there could be no question of a hope of external triumphs

anyhow; and even after Christianity had become the principal religion of the Roman Empire, Christian writers took up a much calmer attitude toward the survival of paganism than many of us would perhaps expect today. Obviously the theology underlying the Fathers' attitude toward paganism was essentially different from the one that Rahner proposes.

The problem of the *true* religion was of prime importance for the Fathers; in Rahner's essay, however, it is not posed at all. Instead, Rahner states "that Christianity understands itself as the absolute religion" (118; 139). This expression suggests that there may also be a relative religion or relative religions. The idea of relativity is evoked once more by the formulation, "Christianity understands itself as . . ." instead of, "Christianity is . . ." Thus Christianity is represented as "the absolute religion" in so far as it understands itself to be such. This implies that the very notion of absoluteness is included in the domain of relativity. There is in fact a thoroughgoing, though not explicit, relativism in the argumentations of Rahner's essay. If this precludes the question about the *true* religion, it tallies very well with the idea of *legitimacy*. For, in relation to changing situations, laws can change, while truth is essentially immutable. Rahner uses the notion of legitimacy to explain why Christianity is "the absolute religion". Christianity, he says, "cannot recognize any other religion beside itself as of equal right", i. e., of equal legitimacy. The concept of "lawful" or "legitimate" religion dominates the whole essay. Non-Christian religions, Rahner contends, are lawful "until the moment when the gospel really enters into the historical situation of an individual" (121; 143). This moment occurs "where and when" Christianity "enters with existential power and demanding force into the realm of another religion" (118; 139), "wherever . . . Christianity reaches man in the real urgency and rigor of his actual existence" (120; 142). These expressions can only be interpreted as implying that both the "absoluteness" of Christianity and the "legitimacy" of non-Christian religions ultimately depend on the impression that Christianity produces on men. Thus both absoluteness and legitimacy are relative. The other alternative, described by Rahner as the prevalent or common view, would hold that "the beginning of the objective obligation of the Christian message for all men" occurred "in the apostolic age" (119; 140f).

It seems, however, that we need not accept either alternative. What Rahner calls the common view may easily lead to the misunderstanding of redemption as a legal decree occurring within time. Rahner's alternative, on the other hand, seems objectionable on account of its anthropocentrism and situational relativism. If we leave out of account the notion of obligation, then what the sentences quoted refer to turns out to be the moment of conversion. It seems significant that Rahner's essay does not use the word *conversion* in a positive context (it occurs only in the negative phrase, "avoidance of immature conversions", 120; 141). We shall see presently that Rahner's system virtually precludes the term



*conversion* to denote the act of becoming a Christian. To the sentences we quoted others of a similar tenor could be added. Rahner's existentialist terminology refers to the human side of conversion only. We may paraphrase his statements by saying that Christianity becomes a man's obligatory religion when the impact of a situation brings it home to him that Christianity is, or ought to be, his religion.

According to Holy Scripture, however, the conversion of gentiles is of an eminently theological nature. It is a "mystery hidden for ages in God" but "now made manifest to His saints" (Eph 3:9; Col 1:26). This *now* of the manifestation of the mystery, this "day of salvation,"<sup>2</sup> does not, of course, occur at the same chronological moment for all mankind and for each individual. Thus far we can agree with Rahner. But we must criticize his phraseology as not fully adequate to the subject. To be sure, Rahner's existentialism or existential idealism is not a pure humanism. Nevertheless, theology must take into account that the "day of salvation" is grounded in God's providence or predestination which, being eternal, is not a process within time. The Fathers realized this and were thus immune to both defeatism and triumphalism. Christ's deed of expiation, decreed from eternity and manifested within time in His suffering and death, is eternalized in his "holding the priesthood permanently", and in virtue of this priesthood "he is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him" (Heb 7:24f). Thus the occurrence of the day of salvation at different points of time for different individuals cannot, as Rahner would have it, be grounded in "the real historicity of Christianity and salvation-history" (120; 141). Historicity, if it means anything at all, connotes occurrence within time, originating and perishing. Con- version, however, is the point where time and eternity meet. The eternalized reality of Christ's expiation brings salvation into equal proximity to every moment of time and to every individual. And "those who draw near to God" are themselves elevated into eternity in this very act of conversion. For the same reason, even persons who lived before Christ are not outside the reach of the effect of His redemptive passion. This would be impossible on the basis of mere "real historicity".

It is quite natural that Rahner's peculiar intertwining of the notion of obligation with a situational relativism leads straight to what modern jargon calls "dialectic". A contradiction is boldly interpreted as having a positive value. The Church, Rahner states, is opposed by non-Christian religions. In this antagonism, however, the Church "cannot feel herself to be just *one* dialectic moment". On the contrary, she "has already overcome this opposition by her faith, hope and charity. In other words, the others who oppose her are merely those who have not yet recognized what they nevertheless really already are (or can be) even when, on the surface of existence, they are in opposition; they are already anonymous Christians" (134; 157).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. above, pp. 30ff.

In evaluating this theory we must note first that it is simply irreconcilable with a great number of statements in Scripture and Tradition, unless these are reinterpreted in a sense which the hagiographers and Doctors certainly did not intend. The whole Apocalypse, for instance, would be meaningless if, as Rahner intimates, even those who oppose the Church are already secretly saved, and Our Lord could not have said to the prophet that, at the end of all things, idolaters are to remain "outside" (Apoc 22:15). Idolaters, in the vision of the Apocalypse, are persons who oppose the Church. If they were already, or could be, anonymous Christians, they would not be banished from the City of God. Other texts inconsistent with Rahner's theory are those which refer to the conversion of Saul. As long as Saul — who was to become the Apostle Paul — persecuted the Church, he was "in opposition" to her not only "on the surface of existence" but in full reality. Otherwise Our Lord could not have said to him, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:5). True, Saul was "a chosen instrument" of Christ (9:15), but his election included his conversion. If he had only been brought to realize what he already was, the story of his conversion would be quite different from what we read in the New Testament. The Pharisee Saul had been just as zealous in the service of God as was the Apostle Paul. Hence, if Rahner's theory were correct, one would expect that Paul should be the model case of a person who arrived at a reflex consciousness of what he had been before. But there is not the slightest hint of such an explanation in the Bible. On the contrary, St. Paul, looking back to his past, frankly repents of it, in saying, "I am... unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God" (1 Cor 15:9).

Rahner's surprising theory becomes understandable only on the basis of his doctrine of grace and, ultimately, his philosophy. We can only briefly indicate these doctrines here. Rahner contends that in man's spirit there is a tendency which always, even before objects are known, anticipates unlimited being (*Sein, esse*) in general. This movement of the spirit or mind does not aim at an object; rather, it is the precondition for any cognition of objects.<sup>3</sup> This conception of an anticipating movement or a transcendental anticipation (*Vorgriff*) of the human spirit reaching out for being has an eminently theological relevance. For the absolute Being toward which the urge of the anticipation moves, is God. The anticipation implicitly affirms the existence of Absolute Being or God, even though in this movement the mind has no explicit awareness of God.<sup>4</sup> Thus man, who is spirit, "lives his life in constantly reaching out toward the Absolute, in an openness to God... He is man solely by his always being already on the way to God, no matter whether he knows this explicitly or not, whether he wills it or not."<sup>5</sup> The anticipating movement

<sup>3</sup> K. RAHNER, *Geist in Welt* (2nd ed., Munich, 1957), pp. 153ff.

<sup>4</sup> K. RAHNER, *Hörer des Wortes* (Munich, 1941), p. 82.

<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 85.



toward being, ultimately toward Absolute Being or God, "belongs to the basic constitution of human existence,"<sup>6</sup> i. e., of human nature.<sup>7</sup>

Rahner's doctrine of grace is nothing but a theological transposition of this metaphysical schema. Man's transcendence, if seen from the side of God, is grace, and "in the experience of his own transcendence, of his own unlimited openness", man even "experiences the offer of grace." He can accept this offer "by really and wholly accepting himself," because through his self-transcendence revelation "speaks even within him." And this accepting is an "act of supernatural faith."<sup>8</sup> Thus nature has become supernatural. By accepting his own nature, man has a valid substitute for supernatural faith, quite as effective as real faith.

In 1940, Rahner asked whether man's faculty of self-transcendence would not make a word-revelation superfluous. And he tried hard to show that this was not the case.<sup>9</sup> In his later essays, however, the danger inherent in his metaphysics has become more and more manifest. If man's transcendence is sure to reach God in the mere act of his accepting his own existence or nature, then the essential distinctions between Christianity and paganism, as well as between moral conduct and sin, become ultimately irrelevant. Nor is there any necessity for conversion if a man in becoming a Christian only arrives at a reflex consciousness of what he already is. Rahner's philosophical description of man's irresistible self-transcendence is strikingly similar to, and in fact virtually coincident with, what he says about "those who have not yet recognized what they already are". In 1940, the philosopher wrote that man is "always already on the way to God, no matter whether . . . he wills it or not." In 1961, the theologian can speak of "the deed of God which bursts open and redeems the false choice of man by overtaking it" (124; 146). Though nominally acknowledging that man can refuse the offer of grace and that there are depravities in paganism, Rahner uses very emphatic formulations which virtually represent all depravities as irrelevant and exclude the possibility of a refusal of grace. He can say, for instance, "that every human being is really and truly exposed to the influence of divine, supernatural grace which offers an interior union with God and by means of which God communicates himself, whether the individual takes up an attitude of acceptance or of refusal towards this grace" (123; 145). In this way Rahner constantly blurs the difference, carefully observed by sound

<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 81.

<sup>7</sup> Rahner's term "existence" is a misnomer. It is a case of that essentialization of existence which is the inescapable tragedy of all existentialism. When he speaks of "existence" he is often referring to what in more adequate terminology would be called "nature" or "essence". His "existence" includes "existentials" (*Existentialien*). These are qualifications. Real existence, however, has no qualifications. What possesses qualifications, is substance or essence or nature.

<sup>8</sup> K. RAHNER, *Schriften zur Theologie*, vol. 6 (1965), pp. 547 and 549.

<sup>9</sup> *Horer des Wortes*, Chapters 7-8.

theology, between objective redemption and man's subjective appropriation of it. Thus redemption and salvation become virtually identical.

From the foregoing it should be clear that it is Rahner's metaphysical project — which we may label "existential idealism" or "spirit-dynamism" — which has dictated his theory of Anonymous Christians. This predominance of philosophical speculation is also responsible for the atrophy of positive theology, i. e., theology based on Scripture and Tradition, and for the absence of any reference to concrete non-Christian religions in Rahner's essay. Rahner pleads that he need not refer to data of the history of religions because he is treating his subject as a dogmatic theologian (117f; 139). But can any science yield reliable results if it neglects the study of materials to which it has to refer constantly? As a matter of fact, Rahner can only dispense with the reference to facts — and to Scripture and Tradition — because he is evolving deductions from prior metaphysical speculation. In this respect too, his reasoning differs radically from the way of thinking of the Church Fathers who, when evaluating paganism, had in view definite doctrines and cults.

Rahner is inclined to see the Old Testament "in many respects as a divinely interpreted model of pre-Christian religion rather than as an absolutely and in every respect unique and incomparable quantity" (106; 125). This sentence includes some qualifications: "in many respects", "absolutely and in every respect". Such indefinite restrictions, characteristic of Rahner's style, seem to leave a vague margin for statements to the opposite effect. Nevertheless, the sentence is revolutionary. It undermines the very basis of that vision of the economy of salvation which has been authoritative in the Church right from the time of the New Testament. Even Clement of Alexandria, with all his appreciation of Greek philosophy, did not attribute to it the same dignity as to the Old Testament. The New Testament becomes fully intelligible only if read against the background of the Old Testament, much as the Old Testament discloses its meaning only if it is seen as the preparation for the gospel. If the New Testament is unique as the message of the Incarnation, then the Old Testament is just as unique as the message of God's economy that was preparatory for the Incarnation. Rahner's view might be true if the Old Testament ended with the story of the Noah Covenant. But there are also the records of the covenants which God made with Abraham, with the Israelites at Sinai, and with David. What distinguishes the Old Testament from documents of other religions is not only the fact, which is certainly essential, that in its history is "divinely interpreted"; rather, this interpretation reveals the unique nature of the *events* related and imparts *knowledge*, not obtainable from any other source, of God, of His will and designs.

God's economy, according to Scripture, takes account of the fact that "the imagination of the thoughts of man's heart is evil continually" (Gen 6:5; 8:21). This fact necessitated a narrowing of the range of



holy history. In the case of Noah as well as in the case of Abraham one single man was the recipient of God's revelation and salvific promise. The Israelites were a small and insignificant ethnic group as compared with the great contemporary nations. Yet it was this group that God chose as His own people. If this seems too narrow a view to our human speculation, we must ask ourselves if our speculation really serves to elucidate revelation or whether, conversely, we are trying to adapt the data of revelation to our speculative project. Such adaptation was practised on a large scale by Hegel. Rahner's theological transposition of his existential idealism or spirit-dynamism bears a disconcerting resemblance to Hegel's adventure.

We cannot discuss Rahner's Christology in detail here. But we must note that his Christology, an application of his philosophical spirit-dynamism rather than an interpretation of the facts of revelation, makes it impossible for him even to describe the uniqueness of the New Covenant in adequate terms. Rahner thinks that the mystery of Christ's two natures, traditionally described in "ontic-substantial categories", can also be expressed in "existential categories". These latter refer, as Rahner explains, to man's "*geistigen Selbstvollzug*", i. e., to the spiritual act or event of man's self-realization. But Rahner's existentialism disregards the fact that an act presupposes a being that is able to perform it and that the basis of such an ability is the nature or essence of the being concerned. It is not true, as Rahner would have it, that a statement in terms of substance or essence or nature can be transposed into a statement in terms of event or process or act. As a matter of fact, as far as Christ's humanity is concerned, Rahner does make statements about His nature. Instead of treating of Our Lord's divine nature, however, he contends that two acts or events — God's self-communication and Jesus' perfect acceptance of it — have reached their absolute goal in Jesus. But Rahner also holds that God offers His self-communication to all men and man's spiritual self-transcendence responds to it. Thus there is no difference in nature between Jesus and other human beings. The difference between Him and us concerns only the success of self-transcendence. This success is perfect in Jesus' case, and this is why He becomes God's "pledge of grace to us" (184; 212: *Zusage der Gnade an uns*). Rahner can say, "In the depths of his existence man is divinized (at least in the manner of an offer). The history of the spatio-temporal tangibility of man's finding himself in God ... reaches its historical culmination and its supreme goal ... in Him whom we call the God-Man *par excellence* in the midst of divinized mankind".<sup>11</sup> This implies that the divinity of Christ is reduced to an *event* which, though in a far lower degree, occurs in all human beings. If Rahner's Christology is correct then either Christ is by nature not God at all or every human being is God, though at a far

distance from Christ. It can hardly be maintained that this reinterpretation brings out the uniqueness of the Person of Christ as defined by the Council of Chalcedon.

Neither is the uniqueness of Christ's work treated adequately in Rahner's system. The meaning of Christ's passion is watered down to the exceptionally successful case of a man's self-transcendence in which God's self-communication becomes manifest. For Rahner, the decisive event is not Christ's passion as a whole but the abstract fact of His death because this is the completion of Jesus' self-transcendence.<sup>12</sup> The "possibility of forgiveness" of sin "comes from that power of God's self-communication on which, on the one hand, depends the development of the whole history of the cosmos and which, on the other hand, ... by establishing its own goal, becomes manifest in the existence and existential realization of Christ. And this is the meaning of the proposition which states that we have been redeemed by Christ from our sins" (186; 215). Thus the concepts of expiation, redemption and sacrifice, hallowed by Christian tradition right from the time of the New Testament, become virtually meaningless. As an inevitable corollary, sin loses its fatal character of severing man's relationship with God. Rahner can say, "Sin is from the outset embraced by the will to forgive" (186; 215). This minimization of the gravity of sin is a necessary consequence of the doctrine that man's spirit is always reaching out toward God, whether he wills it or not.

Thus it is in the thin atmosphere of Rahner's existential idealism that his theory of Anonymous Christians could thrive. This philosophy makes it impossible to see the uniqueness of Christ's person and work and, accordingly, the uniqueness of both the Old and the New Covenants as compared with other religions. As an inevitable consequence, Christianity is reduced to the "explicit expression of what the Christian hopes is present as a hidden reality even outside the visible Church" (133; 156).

But Rahner's metaphysics is not the sole support of his theory of Anonymous Christians. In addition, he maintains the principle of the necessary social constitution of religion. He admits that he deduces this idea from the nature of Christianity; but he thinks this principle can be extended so as to apply to all religions (120; 142). This implies, however, a misinterpretation of both Christianity and non-Christian religions. The social constitution of Christianity is incomparable because it is grounded in the supernatural reality of the Body of Christ. A special social organization and specific kinds of social behavior are therefore an essential and exacting reality in Christianity, distinguishing it from all pre-Christian religions. The Bible teaches us that the Nations live under the Noah Covenant. This covenant is an emergency ordinance

<sup>10</sup> K. RAHNER, *Schriften zur Theologie*, vol. 8 (1967), p. 215.

<sup>11</sup> *O. c.*, pp. 160f.

<sup>12</sup> K. RAHNER, *Schriften zur Theologie*, vol. 4 (1960), pp. 164f.



which does not institute a social structure on a religious basis. The same nations which live under this covenant are also under the curse that divided mankind (Gen 11:1—9). St. Justin and St. Augustine were well aware that precisely the depravities of the pagan religion were intimately tied up with the society in which it was practised. Moreover, both the Old and New Testaments teach us that he who wants to fulfill God's will must in certain situations even risk a rupture with the society in which he lives (Gen 12:1; Matt 10:37; Luke 14:26). Such a break can be a prerequisite for a man's incorporation into the supernatural society of the Covenant. Rahner's vindication of the legitimacy of paganism on the ground of the social nature of religion seems untenable. As a consequence of the Fall, it can and does happen that precisely the aberrations and depravities of religious practices are tied up with a social structure.

There are still more objections which may be raised against Rahner's essay. What prevents us from assenting to him is not primarily and essentially the term *anonymous Christians*. This expression is indeed a misnomer or even a contradiction in terms. There is a rich symbolism in the concept of "name" which forms an important part of the theology of the New Testament, cf. Luke 10:20; John 10:3; Apoc 2:17; 3:5; 13:8; 17:8 and other passages. God's personal relationship to the Christian is expressed in the doctrine that the Christian has a new name by which Christ calls him, which is written in the book of life, and which Christ confesses before His Father. This whole theology is destroyed if there are anonymous Christians. Neither can a true Christian's religion ever be *implicit*. On the contrary, the Christian is obliged to make his religion explicit by professing it in word and deed. More fateful, however, than the terms "anonymous" and "implicit" are the doctrines connected with them. If the proclamation of the gospel is nothing but the bringing of men to a reflex realization of what they already are, then a large part of Christian doctrine is virtually invalidated.

## 2. *Reflections on the Doctrine of the Second Vatican Council*

If, then, we cannot agree with our time's most original and fascinating presentation of a "Christian attitude toward non-Christian religions", how and where are we to find guidance in formulating such an attitude? Before venturing speculations, we have to ask what Scripture and Tradition say about our theme, and we must take due cognizance of the declarations of the *magisterium*. Moreover, we must take into consideration the results of research on non-Christian religions. Unlike Rahner, the Fathers of the Church had in view concrete religions when they reflected on the Christian attitude toward paganism. While utilizing the Fathers' writings as testimonies of Tradition, we have to ask whether their judgments need modification so as to accord with the results of our historical experience.

In the first Chapter, we studied relevant statements and narrations of Holy Scripture. In the second Chapter, we found a far-reaching consensus among the Church Fathers regarding essential points of our theme. We will now consider statements of the Second Vatican Council, while keeping in mind what we found in Scripture and in the Fathers. There are a number of documents in which the Council has touched upon the question of the Christian attitude toward non-Christian religions.<sup>13</sup> Rahner, who acted as a *peritus* for the Council, certainly cooperated in formulating some of the texts; but this does not imply that the Council has sanctioned his personal views. We must take the Council's documents as expressing what they say explicitly. We may not single out individual statements from their context but must interpret the documents as a unity, with certain statements qualifying or complementing others.

In conformity with Scripture and Tradition, the Council affirms that men who without their guilt are ignorant of the gospel and the Church can attain eternal life if they, guided by God's grace, seek God and follow the dictates of their conscience<sup>14</sup> (E 16). Without faith, however, man cannot be pleasing to God. We must assume that God can lead those ignorant of the gospel to faith by ways which He alone knows (*visi sibi notis*, M 7). This implies that the salvation of non-Christians is ultimately a mystery which we cannot unveil by scrutinizing.

It may be in place here to reflect for a moment on this mystery. Former generations found it easier to construe the possibility of salvation outside the Church, and in our day some scholars have ventured new theories to elucidate this mystery. We cannot, however, accept certain legends as historical, nor can we speak of "holy pagans of the Old Testament" as examples of saints outside of God's salvific covenant, nor can we attribute to the Noah Covenant a significance beyond the one which is expressly described in Scripture. We have to accept at face value the words of Scripture about the darkness in which the Nations live (Is 60:2; Luke 1:79) and about "the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God" (Eph 3:9; cf. Col 1:26). The darkness does not only consist in the Nations' ignorance. It is darkness for our vision too. In the more ancient writings of the Old Testament even the eternal destiny of those within the Covenant is left in the dark. To a much higher degree the same holds for those outside the Covenant. The darkness is dispelled and the mystery is made manifest not earlier than when — whenever — the gospel is proclaimed and accepted. Theology can do nothing but interpret the contents of this proclamation and acceptance. The gospel

<sup>13</sup> An important complement of the Council's statements on non-Christian religions is the Papal *Adhorratio Evangelii nuntiandi*. It will be studied in the beginning of Chapter 4.

<sup>14</sup> Documents of the Second Vatican Council are referred to with the following abbreviations: E = Const. dogm. de Ecclesia (Lumen gentium),

M = Decr. de activitate missionali (Ad gentes),

NC = Decl. de Ecclesiae habitudine ad religiones non-christianas (Nostra aetate).



does not reveal that the past of a convert or the life of an infidel is condoned without his knowing it and in spite of his aberrations. On the contrary, in so far as the gospel sheds any light at all on the past, it uncovers men's sin and invites them to repent (Matt 3:2; 4:17). Positively, the light of the gospel opens the prospect of eternity in bringing men to believe in Christ, and it reveals that through faith both Jews and Gentiles are incorporated into the Mystical Body of Christ. In this way "the old has passed away" through the light of the gospel, and "the new has come" (2 Cor 5:17). We must certainly assume that even in the darkness of the Nations some persons, enlightened by God, can and do follow the guidance of His grace. But the Council, in conformity with Scripture, warns that we should not take this as the normal case. "More often (*at saepius...*), a Council text says, it happened that men "became futile in their thinking and exchanged the truth about God for a lie, in worshipping the creature rather than the Creator" (Rom 1:21,25). Thus the Church is ever concerned to make the gospel known to all men (E 16).

But the question of the possibility of salvation outside the Covenant is not the only, and perhaps not even the most important, aspect of the problem of the Christian attitude toward non-Christian religions. We are not allowed to set limits on God's mercy by condemning the non-Christians. Neither is it the task of theologians to work out an expert opinion to be used by the council for the defense when the case of the pagans comes up before the court of heaven. We have simply to face the reality of the non-Christian religions as they are.

The documents of the Council admit that there are positive values in the non-Christian religions (NC 2; M 9). The Church does not reject anything which is "true and holy" in the other religions. "For not seldom do they reflect a ray of that Truth which illuminates all men" (NC 2). But the values contained in non-Christian religions are intermixed with negative elements. Although it was the purpose of the Council to make positive statements only, the negative features of paganism have not been passed over in silence or in any way condoned. These features are mentioned within the framework of positive statements on the Church. Thus one of the documents says that men's religious efforts need to be "illuminated" and "healed" by the Church (M 3). There is much in the religions "which differs widely from what the Church holds and proposes" (NC 2). It is doubtless the consideration of the negative features of non-Christian religions which prevented the Council from stating that pagans are saved *through their religions* or that their religions as such have a *salvific significance*. The thesis of the "legitimacy" of pagan religions has received no sanction or support by the Council.

In the documents of the Second Vatican Council the *magisterium* has for the first time enunciated certain principles which had been known to the Church from the time of the Fathers. On one or two points only does the Council go beyond what the Fathers had said expressly. The

Fathers condemned all myths and rites of the pagans. In saying that the Church does not reject anything that is true and holy in other religions, the Council has not approved as true and holy any of the myths and rites of these religions. But it does acknowledge something in them. A document says: "In Hinduism, men scrutinize and express the divine mystery in an inexhaustible abundance of myths and penetrating philosophical efforts, and they seek emancipation from the plight of our situation through forms of asceticism or deep meditation or through taking refuge with God in love and confidence... Similarly, the other religions also... strive in various ways to remedy the disquietude of the human heart by proposing ways of life, i.e. doctrines and precepts, as well as sacred rites"<sup>16</sup> (NC 2). If we analyze these texts carefully, we find that they refer to the anthropological aspect of religion. They describe religious efforts undertaken by men of various religions and they approve of the fact that men thus seek God; but they remain silent regarding the possibility of reaching the goal through these efforts, nor do they say anything about whether the myths contain truth or whether the rites and practices are in conformity with the will of God.

The Church Fathers saw in the myths of their time a claim to express objective truth and, in the rites and practices, their intimate connection with idolatry and polytheism. From these points of view myths, rites and practices had to be rejected uncompromisingly. Nor can the Church ever take up a different attitude as long as myths are believed to be objectively true and practices are performed in a religious framework which is objectionable from the point of view of the truth. Even the Second Vatican Council, with all its understanding openness and reserve, has not hesitated to state or indicate that there is inveiglement by the Devil and evil defilement in non-Christian religions (*a Maligno decepti*, E 16; *imperium diaboli* and *contagia maligna* M 9). It may also be noted in passing that two of the Council's documents expressly state that no one can be saved if he has come to know the Church as necessary for salvation and still refuses to join her or remain in her (E 14; M 7).

The fact that today we can evaluate non-Christian myths, symbols, rites and practices in a more positive sense than Scripture and the Fathers did involves no abandoning of the fundamental principles which guided the hagiographers and saints and which remain valid. It is only a consequence, (1) of a differentiation, (2) of a widened perspective, (3) of historical experience.

<sup>16</sup> Ita in Hinduismo homines mysterium divinum scrutantur et expriment in exhausta fecunditate mythorum et acutis conatibus philosophiae, atque liberationem quaerunt ab angustiis nostrae conditionis vel per formas vitae asceticae vel per profundam meditationem vel per refugium ad Deum cum amore et confidentia... Sic ceterae quoque religiones... inquietudini cordis hominum variis modis occurrere nituntur proponendo vias, doctrinas scilicet ac praecepta vitae, necnon ritos sacros.



(1) We make a distinction between the human or anthropological and the strictly theological or dogmatic aspects of religion. Even St. Paul, speaking on the Areopagus, appreciated the fact that the Athenians "in every way" were "very religious" (Acts 17:22) and he could use a Stoic term when he said that men "should seek God in the hope that they might *feel after him*" (17:27). This appreciation, however, in no way involved an approval of the way in which the Athenians sought God and practised their religion. On the contrary, the Apostle told the Athenians in plain words that their ways of worship were a gross aberration. His censure did not invalidate his appreciation, nor did his approval imply a condonation of the depravities in the Athenians' religion. Evidently, the Apostle was judging the pagan religion from two different points of view. We may differentiate them as the anthropological and the theological points of view. If seen in the light of revelation, the Athenians' religious behavior came under the verdict of the First and Second Commandments. Again, the anthropological evaluation has two levels. Not only does it appreciate the good will and earnestness of those who practise the pagan religion, but it sees this earnestness under a theological aspect also. Such an evaluation enables us to discover in the other religion an element which, though distorted in its pagan context, is still expressive of man's quest for God and thus exhibits a reflection, however dim and deflected, of that Light which "enlightens every man" (John 1:9). God himself has engrated in man a restlessness that impels him to seek after his Author. This movement is misoriented in non-Christian religions. The Christian, therefore, cannot dispense with pointing out that the First and Second Commandments never cease making their stern demands on man. On the other hand, he cannot but recognize with joy that the one true God, who wills that man seek Him, is at work even in the adherents of non-Christian religions. If the movement of their yearnings and practices is misdirected, it can nevertheless be reinstated and reoriented.

(2) Such differentiation already involves a widened perspective. The Fathers confined their appreciation to philosophers and certain poets because they found in their works statements which they could accept as true without any readjustment. Today we could cull such statements especially from the writings of Indian philosophers. Yet there were in pre-Christian philosophy many doctrines which the Fathers could not approve of. Actually, however, the Fathers, and even the hagiographers of the New Testament before them, took over quite a number of concepts which, though objectionable in their pre-Christian context, still contained precious germs of truth. These concepts could be used to enrich the exposition of the truth of revelation if their partial truth was set free by their inclusion in the new context. Now if we take the proper precautions, we may very well extend the procedure of assimilation and

reorientation to pre-Christian symbols and to elements of myths and religious practices.

(3) We are all the more justified in doing this because we can observe that in the course of time the Church, certainly not without the guidance of the Holy Spirit, has actually, though without really thinking it through, exercised such utilization on a large scale. It may suffice here to recall that Christian rites are in a great measure reorientations of pre-Christian customs, and as for myths and symbols, we limit ourselves to referring to Hugo Rahner's works *Friedrichsche Mythen in der Kirche* (Salzburg, 1964).

The theological justification and the purpose of such reorienting utilization are succinctly expressed in the following sentences of a decree of the Second Vatican Council: "Through a sort of secret presence of God, elements of truth and grace are found already among the gentiles. (Missionary activity) liberates all these elements from evil defilements and restores them to Christ who is their Author. He overthrows the dominion of the Devil and wards off the manifold malice of evil deeds. Therefore, all those good elements which are found in a germinal form in the hearts and minds of men or in the rites and cultures peculiar to particular peoples, are not destroyed; on the contrary, they are healed, elevated and perfected for the glory of God, for the humiliation of Satan and for the beatitude of man"<sup>17</sup> (M 9).

Thus the study of relevant texts from the Council documents eventually leads us to the practical attitude toward non-Christian religions. This attitude presupposes discrimination between truth and error, between virtue and sin, and this discrimination in its turn presupposes careful investigation of non-Christian religions. The Church Fathers did all this with the methods at their disposal. If we wish to remain faithful to the tradition of the Church, we must follow their lead. We must learn from them the fundamental principles that can guide us in our attitude toward non-Christian religions. But while applying these principles we must also utilize materials and practise methods which they could not yet know.

The practical attitude toward non-Christian religions consists mainly in what the Fathers called *utilization* (*χρησις, usus justus*). Utilization connotes, (1) that the assimilated elements are made subversive to an end different from the context from which they were taken, (2) that they can be taken over because some truth is contained or hidden in them,

<sup>17</sup> Quidquid autem veritatis et gratiae iam apud gentes quasi secreta Dei praesentia inveniebatur, a contagiis malignis liberat et Auctori suo Christo restituit, qui imperium diaboli everit et multimodam scelerum malitiam arceat. Itaque quidquid boni in corde mentisque hominum vel in propriis ritibus et cultibus populorum seminatum invenitur, non tantum non perit, sed sanatur, elevatur et consummatur ad gloriam Dei, confusionem daemones et beatitudinem hominis.



(3) that they must be reoriented in order that the truth might shine forth unimpeded. It is thus a much more deliberate process than the mere reception of influences. As a matter of fact, the Fathers, when using concepts of pagan origin, knew what they were doing and why they were justified in doing it. Similar processes of assimilation can of course be traced outside the domain of Christianity too. This shows that *chrêsis* has an anthropological basis. Nevertheless, within the Church *chrêsis* has a unique aspect which is grounded on its theological foundation. *Chrêsis* is no obstacle to dialogue. On the contrary, since it makes Christian thinking easier to understand for non-Christians, it can essentially contribute to the success of dialogue. True dialogue, after all, is not non-committal talk but engagement in a common search for the truth. In practising *chrêsis*, the Christian shows to his non-Christian partner the truth he can acknowledge in his partner's way of thinking and, at the same time, the framework of reference into which he is convinced this truth must be placed in order to be safe from misuse. Clement of Alexandria certainly knew what true dialogue is, and he practised *chrêsis* profusely. Even today we still can learn from him.

The study of *chrêsis* in the history of Christianity would be an immense task. The utility of such a study for us today would be to show us what we still have to accomplish in our relations with the great religions of the world. As we stated in the beginning of this article, our situation resembles that of the Fathers in that we are, as they were, constantly faced with the reality of other religions. The Fathers knew, and we have to learn anew, that this is even the normal situation of Christianity in the world. There is, therefore, no reason for a feeling of frustration. In the Middle Ages the situation was objectively the same. But because of the lack of communication with the outside world, the Christians had simply come to overlook the fact that they were a minority among the Nations. Therefore, since Catholicism essentially lives on tradition and since the immediate past does not throw much light on our problem, would it not be necessary to seek guidance from the Fathers whose situation was so similar to ours? Would it not be necessary to study their practice of *chrêsis* in order to learn how to adapt it to our situation?

I cannot enter here into details concerning studies on *chrêsis*. I confine myself to mentioning one or two works of scholars who freed themselves from the simplistic method of tracing "influences" and who have investigated cases of what the Fathers called *chrêsis* (though these scholars did not use this term). JEAN DANÉLOU has treated the mystical theology of Gregory of Nyssa in his work, *Platonisme et théologie mystique* (revised ed., Paris, 1944; reprinted 1953). One of the main intentions of this book is precisely the demonstration of how St. Gregory, while using neo-Platonic concepts, transformed and transposed them so that they might enrich the expression of Christian truth. With a similar

intention, ENDRE VON IVÁNKA wrote his book, *Plato Christians*, (Einsiedeln, 1964) investigating the thought of Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius, Maximus Confessor and some other authors. Even though *chrêsis* naturally was an urgent task primarily for the Christians in antiquity who were in constant contact with living paganism, it can also be applied in other cultural situations. ETIENNE GUSON, in his work, *L'être et l'essence*, (2nd ed., Paris, 1962) has shown how St. Thomas Aquinas, carefully weighing and screening the results of many non-Christian philosophers and of St. Augustine, arrived at his conception of being which, while indebted to the truth contained in the achievements of his non-Christian and Christian predecessors, was at the same time a perfect expression of the Christian belief regarding God and creation.

*Chrêsis* is not only a subject for learned investigation; it can be, and is, practised even in our day. An example of this has been presented by the American mystic THOMAS MERTON. In his work, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, (British ed., London, 1962) he has felicitously adapted from Indian metaphysics the concept of "illusory person" or "false self" (p. 26 f)<sup>18</sup>. Merton's case seems instructive because it shows, first, that today Christianity is newly aware of the fact that it coexists with pre-Christian religions; secondly, that a contemplative attitude, concentrated on the truth as such, is a prerequisite for the practice of true *chrêsis*. While keeping our mental gaze focused on the content of revelation, we must allow our discursive thinking to move in the framework of symbols, linguistic or other, which are offered by a pre-Christian religion or metaphysics. The symbols that are taken up in this process are placed into a new framework of reference. This preserves the truth that is contained in them and, to use a term from a Council text, "recalls" it. The attention of the hagiographers and Fathers was certainly concentrated on the content of revelation when they tried to express this content with the aid of concepts taken from Hellenic thought. But *chrêsis* cannot always be brought about within the process of meditation. In many cases, it requires a prior thoroughgoing scrutiny of the religious or metaphysical system whose symbols are to be "utilized".

<sup>18</sup> See also: TH. MERTON, *The New Man* (London, 1962), pp. 44 ff.



## THE SITUATION OF THE CHURCH IN INDIA

In October, 1974, the third Synod of Bishops took place. It dealt with evangelization. The opinion of most of the Indian bishops (in accordance with the views of an advisor, Rev. Amalorpavadas, who was one of the two Special Secretaries of the Synod) did not find the Pope's approval. A resolution could not be passed. The bishops had to leave the decision to the Pope. More than a year later, on December 8, 1975, the Holy Father promulgated the *Ahortatio apostolica* "*Evangelii nuntiandi*", which authoritatively treated the subject of the preceding year's Synod.

The Second Vatican Council was a Pastoral Council. If this means anything, it indicates that the Council wanted to present the Church's teaching so as to attract and invite people and to make the Church's doctrine more easily accessible. Thus it had to speak a language different from that of a legislating or dogmatic Synod. Certain truths and, especially, differentiations and dangers, were not much emphasized; moreover, certain negative terms, though belonging to the indispensable stock of the language of Catholic teaching (e. g. infidel, pagan, heretic) were omitted or expressed in discreet periphrasis. Thus, in speaking of non-Christian religions, their demonic traits were indeed hinted at, but their positive values were elaborated at great length; and it was not forgotten to say that God can save even people who neither belong to the Church nor profess the Christian faith. All this is true and, except for some shades of emphasis, tallies entirely with the Church's tradition.

Karl Rahner, however, interpreted the Council texts as if they expressed his ideas, of which a brief sketch is given in the preceding Chapter, and a very large number of theologians, many among them working in India, followed his interpretation. It is understandable that the illustrious advisor of Council Fathers should think so; nevertheless, on careful reading we cannot but detect that the texts as they were finalized do not bring out his opinion. The Council's appreciative statements on pagan religions refer only to the anthropological side of religion. As to the possibility for an infidel to attain eternal salvation, two Council texts (Decree on Missionary Activity, no. 7; Pastoral Constitution, no. 22) say expressly that God knows how this comes to pass, and the *Ahortatio* (n. 80) repeats the same idea in even more emphatic terms: "This salvation God can effectuate in those on whom He wills to bestow it, by extraordinary means which He



alone knows".<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the *Adhortatio* expressly rejects the opinion, advocated by Rahner and others, that non-Christians can reach eternal salvation through practising their pagan religion. Much as St. Paul had acknowledged the religious mind of the Athenians, the Pope praises the non-Christian religions, not as means of salvation but as the expression of a religious quest, that is, as an anthropological fact: "They have sought God, imperfectly, it is true, but often sincerely and in a right manner".<sup>2</sup> Thus, in agreement with the views of the Fathers, the *Adhortatio* clearly expresses the inadequacy of the pagans' quest. Moreover, the document declares with the same precision the Church's faith "that through our religion communion with God is really established, surely a true and living communion, and that other religions cannot bring this about, though they, so to speak, seem to lift their arms up to heaven".<sup>3</sup>

This clarification of the Council documents surely excludes misunderstandings and, joined to the Council texts, could have prepared the way for a *chrêsis*<sup>4</sup> in the area of theology. But it came too late – ten years after the end of the Council. In the meantime other tendencies had become predominant in missiology, and evangelization had been entirely "reinterpreted", so that it had become for the most part extinct. The new tendencies found expression in the Indian clergy review, whose then assistant editor, a Belgian Jesuit working in India, relentlessly excoriated the Pope's exhortation<sup>5</sup>, thus paralyzing its effect on the mind of Indian priests.

But before entering upon the Indian reinterpretation of evangelization it seems in order to take a look at the missionary situation of India. India is the unique case of a country in which the Church has been existing for more than one and a half millennia but which is still a mission land. Only a

<sup>1</sup> Hanc salutem in iis, quos vult, Deus operari potest per extraordinarias vias, quas Ipse novit. – The Catholic doctrine concerning the possibility of salvation for non-Christians has been expounded succinctly and with great clarity, in opposition to ideologies of our day, by Professor Johannes Dörmann in his article "Gibt es christliche Verheißung für andere Religionen?", included in, *Erwartung, Verheißung, Erfüllung*, ed. by Wilh. Heinen and Jos. Schreiner, Würzburg, Echter-Verlag, 1969. I translate only one important sentence (p. 315): "It is a fallacy to infer from the occurrence of grace-inspired subjective religious acts, that [any] religion as an institution is grace-imbedded".

<sup>2</sup> Deum imperfecte quidem, sed saepe sincere ac recte quassiverunt. n. 53.

<sup>3</sup> . . . per nostram religionem reapse cum Deo instituti commercium, verum nempe vivumque, quod aliae religiones instituere nequeunt, etiam si sua, ut ita dicamus, brachia ad caelum attollere ipsae videantur. n. 53.

<sup>4</sup> Recent investigations of Professor Christian Gnika (Münster) have shown that the peculiar content given by the Christians to the term *chrêsis* (Latin *usus*) and cognate words provides a key for perceiving the essential characteristics of the transition from pre-Christian to Christian Antiquity not only in theology and philosophy but in all areas of culture, such as poetry, plastic and graphic arts, etc. <sup>5</sup> J. Dupuis in *Vidyayoti*, Journal of Theological Reflection, May 1976, especially pp. 228–230.

few decimals more than 2 % of the Indian population is Christian, the majority of which is Catholic. In the present crisis of the Church, India exemplifies the special case of a crisis of evangelization. A distinctive feature of India is its ancient spiritual culture of a high order.

In the light of this culture, India seems to resemble the Greco-Roman world of Antiquity. If things are seen theoretically or structurally, it would seem that *chrêsis* must be possible in christianizing India just as it was successfully practised in making the achievements of the Greco-Roman culture subservient to the Church. The intense spiritual quest of India might even be expected to facilitate the task. Yet there are specific conditions which render the practice of the method so difficult that up to our day no successful *chrêsis* has been effected in India.

To assess, in a concrete case, the problems of evangelization in general and of *chrêsis* in particular, we must first widen the conceptual equipment of our reflection. I adopt some terms used by Dom Thomas Ohm in his book, *Machet zu Jüngern alle Völker*<sup>6</sup>. By accommodation or *adaptation* Ohm intended considerate conformation to the way of life, as far as not expressive of pagan religion, of the people among whom the missionary is working (pp. 695ff.). *Assimilation*, according to him, actively adopts habits, customs, etc. of the foreign people. It must carefully avoid syncretism (pp. 695. 702). To these two ways of behavior Ohm adds *transformation*, which transmutates or converts what is good in paganism into Christian values by eliminating elements that are tied up with the pagan religion (p. 702). Ohm does not describe transformation in more detail, but it seems that what he had in mind was much the same as what the Fathers called *chrêsis*. With all his sympathetic openness, however, Dom Thomas Ohm saw the danger – into which theorists and hierarchs in India today have fallen. He knew that what matters in Christianity is not the fact that it can profess certain truths in *common* with pre-Christian religions but its essential *newness* as compared with all other religions (pp. 710ff.). And he warns: "The doctrines, cult forms and customs of the pagans are pervaded by pagan spirit in greater measure and depth than it would seem" (p. 716).

In order to illustrate the importance of adaptation and assimilation in India, let us take a brief look at the most successful period in the missionary history of this country. The most outstanding among the missionaries who worked in India is doubtless the Italian Jesuit Roberto De Nobili (1577–1656). The success of his work and that of his assistants was considerable: ten years after his death the mission of Madurai in South India is said to have numbered 40 000 Christians<sup>7</sup>. Unfortunately, up to the present day the exact details of De Nobili's method of evangelization are not

<sup>6</sup> Published by E. Wewel Verlag, Freiburg i. B., 1962.

<sup>7</sup> This number is given in the 1st edition of the *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 7 (Freiburg i. B., 1935), column 606. The *Handbuch der Kirchengeschichte* ed. by H. Jedin, vol. 4 (Freiburg i. B., 1967), p. 630, gives the same number for the time "at De Nobili's death".



known. A few documents consisting in letters and reports he sent to the ecclesiastical authorities have been published in part, but the bulk of the sources still lies buried in archives, and, most importantly, the many works he wrote in Indian languages (Tamil, Telugu, Sanskrit) are not yet accessible in print and in translation. So we are still far from an exact theological appraisal of De Nobili's work.

Nevertheless, what we know for certain allows us to come to certain conclusions, and these show graphically the enormous impact of rites and customs in the world of Hinduism.

There is no doubt that the group of religions called 'Hinduism' differs from Christianity even phenomenologically on a very essential point. Hinduism, though it has produced mystics and deep thinkers, is for the vast majority of Hindus a religion of rites and religious practices. Christianity, on the other hand, is the religion of the spirit, the religion of faith, hope and charity. This difference becomes manifest the moment a Hindu performs a rite that is distinctive of another religion. Thus a Hindu may abandon the belief in myths and doctrines of his religion, he may even adopt Christian dogmas and pray to Christ; all this will not put him to any inconvenience; but if he receives the sacrament of faith, i. e., if he has himself baptized, Hindus will regard him as an outcast from their society, and no trace of the much praised Hindu toleration is left. The rite of Baptism is essential; beliefs are indifferent.<sup>8</sup>

In Catholic Christianity rites and dogma and mysticism are organically interconnected. Thus the sacraments, which are rites, are based on *dogma* and can give rise to *mysticism*. In Hinduism certain rites (*samskâra*, often mistranslated with 'sacraments') are compulsory (their number is usually stated to be 18), but there is no theological doctrine as to their spiritual essence and no explanation of their effect, except for the negative warning that their omission causes misfortune, especially rebirth after death at a lower stage of existence. Thus there is very little intrinsic connection in Hinduism between the basic constituents of religion, namely cult and rites, doctrine, and myths.

<sup>8</sup> "While it [Hinduism] gives absolute liberty in the world of thought it enjoins a strict code of practice", writes S. Radhakrishnan (in his book, *The Hindu View of Life*, 9th impr., London, 1954, p. 77). Here, for once, Radhakrishnan is right (most of his ideas are his personal version of Hindu modernism rather than real Hinduism). See my book, *Kleine Schriften*, Wiesbaden, 1978, index s. v. *Radhakrishnan*. But it has to be added that within the groups that make up Hinduism, there are systems structurally very similar to Christian dogma, and the "code of practice" is not so much moral, as R. would have it, but ritual. The intolerance of Hindus in the area of ritual can take on furious, menacing, or intimidating forms. I know by experience that there are Hindus, belonging to high castes, who live and pray like Christians but do not dare to have themselves baptized because this would expose them to most annoying inconveniences, which a few, who were courageous enough to receive the Sacrament, actually endured.

Evangelization has to take due account of all these facts. The question of rites presents a peculiar problem, because there is no sharp borderline between mere customs and ceremonies that are religious symbols. Only if deities are invoked during the ritual, is the religious character beyond doubt. Now Hindus are very sensitive in the matter of rites, customs and habits. Adaptation and assimilation in the sense these terms have with Dom Thomas Ohm are indispensable if a foreigner wishes to gain a Hindu's confidence, and confidence is the first prerequisite for stirring a man's interest in listening to the gospel. We know for certain that De Nobili perfectly practised adaptation and assimilation to the Indian way of life and thought. But since we are still in the dark as to his literary works and no scholarly study of these is available, we do not know to what extent he practised what Dom Thomas Ohm called transformation or what the Fathers meant by *chrêsis*. Only so much is certain that his religious, pastoral, and catechetical activity and even the way he practised adaptation were of impeccable orthodoxy; the Apostolic See cleared him of all suspicion. The controversies over the 'Malabar Rites' belong to a later time. But De Nobili's method was not long to be continued after his death.

The success of De Nobili's evangelization illustrates the significance of adaptation and assimilation, both combined with Christian orthodoxy, for missionary work in India. But we must not forget that both assimilation and adaptation, though indispensable, are not sufficient for Christianizing an ethnic group of an ancient and deep spiritual culture. Even when evangelization is not intended, adaptation and assimilation can serve to gain a Hindu's confidence. Ancient spirituality cannot simply be ousted; it must be redeemed from its pagan dilemma by way of *chrêsis* so that its truth and beauty may shine forth and add new facets to the "Catholic system"<sup>9</sup> founded on the gospel. Thus certain Neo-Platonic ideas would today be nothing but a feast for the mind of a tiny number of scholars, if the great Unknown who hid himself under the name of Dionysius the Areopagite had not by means of *chrêsis* transformed those ideas into expressions of an adoration-inspired Christian theology, so that they then could be used in Odes sung in the Canonical Hours by monks of the Greek-speaking Catholic Church. This is a glorious spiritual fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 60:5-6: "The wealth of the nations shall come to you . . . They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD." Again, the spiritual correlation between the prophecy and the fulfillment agrees with the Fathers' conviction that the Church's essential universality not only justified but necessitated *chrêsis*. All that they found, even outside the Church, to be good according to Christian standards, they felt obliged to "utilize" in the Christian context, even if it could not be verbally based on or derived from a Bible

<sup>9</sup> If I remember rightly, this expression is used by John Henry Newman. In any case, it brings out the intrinsic consistency of all objective constituents of Catholicism.



text. Thus *chrēsis* is the essential procedure through which, especially in the case of a highly developed culture, the gospel can definitively contract the "marriage" (to use the metaphor of St. Gregory of Nyssa) with what is good in pagan culture.

But in our time and in the case of India there are at least two problems that vex us. The first difficulty consists in the fact that Catholicism has already contracted a "marriage" with pre-Christian Western culture and this cannot be dissolved. The second difficulty arises from the spiritual weakness of the Church of our day which, in spite of the descriptions of the Council, cannot even realize what *chrēsis* is.

Describing the first difficulty in the language of the Fathers, we could say that the spiritual temple of the one true God which is to be adorned by Indian "treasures" has already been decked out by precious achievements of the Western mind, Christian and (incorporated through *chrēsis*) originally pre-Christian. It is inadmissible to denude the spiritual sanctuary of all these riches which elucidate the gospel, express people's love for God and are an homage to His glory. It would be contrary to the fundamental spiritual law of the Church, if, for instance, the Church in India tried to dispense with the trinitarian and christological dogmas as decreed by Councils in Antiquity on the ground that these dogmas are not couched in Indian terms. To be sure, it is not necessary that *all* the spiritual wealth of the West should be a living possession of India. Even among the countries of the West the Latin way of thinking differs considerably from the Greek and the Oriental; but nonetheless there is an intrinsic harmony between the two spiritual areas, and occasional exchange is possible at any time. This harmony is based on the common *dogma*.

When Christians, warding off aberrations under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, were reflecting on what our understanding can grasp of the Triune God and the Incarnation, they practised no adaptation but *chrēsis* and this in a very large measure. A number of Greek and Latin words had to become subservient to the spiritual reality of the Christian revelation and they received a definite meaning in the context of the Christian profession of faith (examples would be *ousia*, *physis*, *hypostasis*, *substantia*, *persona*). The definitive result of these reflections has been sanctioned by the Church's *magisterium*. The act of sanctioning was the fixing of dogmas, and these cannot be replaced by a second *chrēsis*. They must be *translated*. Even in the West translation became increasingly necessary because not every ethnic group understood Greek or Latin. Not seldom the Greek or Latin word was even retained when ethnic groups speaking other languages were being evangelized. Thus the Greek words *episkopos* and *presbyteros* were retained in Latin (in the forms *episcopus* and *presbyter*) and later in the evangelization of the Germanic tribes so that in English the words *bishop* and *priest* developed as the result of historical evolution. Such cases illustrate the essential *newness* of the Christian religion (cp. Dom Thomas Ohm, *op. cit.*, pp. 710ff.). Even in Greek the words *episkopos* and *presbyteros*, taken from the domain of profane life, indicate

that to the mind of primitive Christendom there was nothing in non-Christian religions comparable to the character of the Christian ministry. And probably the early missionaries in India were right in retaining *espiritu santu* for "Holy Spirit" instead of attempting misleading translations as used today (for instance *pavitra ātmā* in Hindi, which literally means "the pure soul", "pure" understood in a religious sense).

Translation can be regarded as a special kind of adaptation. As a matter of fact, no communication, religious or other, with foreign people is possible without knowing their language. Thus every evangelization presupposes the translation of at least the most elementary notions of the Christian religion into the foreign language. But the translation of typically Christian ideas can never sound elegant or idiomatic to a hearer whose language has not yet been imbued with the spirit of Christianity by the conversion of its speakers. The otherness of Christianity from all other religions inevitably produces the impression of strangeness, if not awkwardness, for Christian texts which are couched in a language whose speakers have not yet been christianized. Thus the intelligentsia in Antiquity simply ridiculed or scorned the New Testament, and in our day educated Hindus, though many of them are keenly interested in the New Testament or later Christian writings, hardly ever read them in a Hindi translation but prefer English renderings. The reason is that only a very small proportion of the Hindi speakers have been christianized, and Christian usage, which alone would be able to pervade the language with Christian ways of thinking, is practically limited to sermons and confession, which in many cases are administered by foreigners. Therefore Christian Hindi sounds somewhat artificial. But it would be an error to try to eliminate this artificiality by using expressions familiar to the Hindus. This would be no *chrēsis* but syncretism. We must not forget that the style of the New Testament is in many passages simply bad according to the standards of Antiquity and that the reason for this is the intention of the authors to keep close to the language that Our Lord spoke, namely Aramaic. Yet the New Testament texts have not remained artificial language. They have proved abundantly fruitful not only in practical life but also in thought. And in expounding the inexhaustible content of the inspired text *chrēsis* was practised by many authors in various languages. In principle, the same could be done in India, with the difference that not only the Bible but also the dogmas sanctioned by the *magisterium* as exposition of the gospel would have to be the basis of meditative and speculative *chrēsis*. Many profound ideas defiled by pagan admixture await redemption by such *chrēsis*; and thus they can lead Indians (and all who wish to share their thought) to a deeper understanding of the gospel.

But such *chrēsis* would presuppose two things. First, the thinker would have to be familiar with Indian thought, just as Western Christian thinkers in Antiquity were well acquainted with Hellenic philosophical and religious thought. Secondly, such intellectual work can only be done by men "full of grace and power" (Acts 6:8), who, after meditating on the Chris-



tian truth, proclaim it and in this very act set free the truth of the pre-Christian concepts they use. The mind of a person "utilizing" *pagan* "treasures" is absorbed by the truth whose succinct expression is the *Christian* dogma.

However, where are such thinkers to be found nowadays? First, the compartmentalization, so characteristic of Indian life and thought is common to both non-Christian and Christian Indians. Christian Indians know very little of Hindu thought. It is true that recently this state of things has gradually been changing, but unfortunately not in a hopeful manner. For, secondly, there has hardly ever been a time when faith was weaker and spiritual intelligence more opaque than today. Consequently, Indian and Western theologians who nowadays take up the study of pagan teaching and pagan life, do so not, as St. Basil and St. Gregory of Nyssa warned, with alertness to the fact that the subject of their studies has to be weighed and sifted from the point of view of the faith; on the contrary, they read the texts as if they were already Christian, in a more or less hidden manner. The fatal change in the attitude toward non-Christian literature may be described in the pointed opposition: Early Christians wrote apologies to defend Christianity against paganism; present-day Indian adapters and indigenizers produce apologies of paganism. Instead of being "utilized" after due screening, Hindu ideas and even scriptures are simply put on the same level with Christianity. There can be little doubt that it is Rahner's Anonymous Christians theory that is ultimately responsible for this confusion. For as soon as this theory is stripped of its philosophical make-up and reduced to what everybody's mind can grasp, it turns into an equalization of all religions: all lead to the same goal.

Karl Rahner has enlisted numerous followers for his novel ideas in India. But the man who took the lead in indoctrinating and re-educating bishops and priests of his country is D. S. Amalorpavadass, an energetic Indian priest imbued with European-made ideas.<sup>10</sup> Since 1967 he has been Director of the "National Biblical, Catechetical and Liturgical Centre" in Bangalore, and he is Secretary of the three Episcopal Commissions for Bible, Catechetics and Liturgy of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India. He even managed to extend his influence beyond India in being appointed one of the two Special Secretaries of the Roman Bishops' Synod in 1974, and there are reasons for the conjecture that he forcefully contributed to the failure (not to say scandal) of this Synod.

<sup>10</sup> D. S. Amalorpavadass hails from the former French colony Pondicherry. He studied in France and wrote two books in French, both containing valuable information and reflections. But the French-writing Amalorpavadass seems to be in many respects a different person from the priest who is now Director of the National Biblical, Catechetical, and Liturgical Institute in Bangalore. His French books do not seem to exercise any notable influence on what is happening today in the Church in India. So we need not deal with them here. The programmatic statement for his activity is given in his book, *Towards Indigenization in the Liturgy*, Bangalore, (1973?), referred to as "Indig." in this Chapter.

The common trait of both Rahner and Amalorpavadass is their basically anthropocentric way of thinking. Anthropocentrism is no philosopher and has no originality as a theologian. Anthropocentrism with him also has the form of religious nationalism. This makes it possible for him to combine in his person both the tendencies which are at present devastating the Church in India: progressivism (I mean the undermining of dogma, also called neo-modernism or liberalism) and syncretism or paganization. Such an attitude makes evangelization meaningless, because conversions are scarcely expected at all (in Rahner's ideology the very concept of conversion does not occur). Consequently, the concept of evangelization is "reinterpreted", as we shall see.

To characterize Amalorpavadass' anthropocentrism, it may suffice to note that he (like many theologians in the West) thinks that liturgy "is a celebration of concrete events in the reality of the world, in the movement of history and in the actual situation of our life", and that he stresses "the 'worldly', secular, existential, temporal, historical, anthropocentric and community-centred character of the Liturgy" (Indig. 170). His religious nationalism, which is the specific feature of his anthropocentrism, is revealed in a general form in the stress he places on the importance of the "local Church" (and the claim to "autonomy" made by Indian bishops at the Roman Synod of 1974<sup>11</sup> echoes Amalorpavadass' idea). He concretizes his idea of "local Church" by insisting that it should become "incarnate in its soil, enter into the mainstream of its national life, express its faith and worship through signs drawn from its religious and cultural heritage . . ." (Indig. 171). This nationalistic misunderstanding is Amalorpavadass' fundamental error. He often quotes Council texts. But the Council's positive statements about the religions of the gentiles intend to say, not that the particular (pagan) religion of every nation has a right to exist, but that in all individual pagan religions there are vestiges of the one

<sup>11</sup> See Giovanni Caprile, *Il Sinodo dei Vescovi 1974*, *Terza assemblea generale* (27 settembre - 26 ottobre 1974). Edizioni "La Civiltà Cattolica" (1975?). Referred to in the following as "Caprile". The importance of the "Local Church" was emphasized by Mgr. (now Cardinal) Picachy, Archbishop of Calcutta (p. 215) and Mgr. Fernandes, Archbishop of Delhi (p. 433), who asserted the legitimate autonomy of every particular Church or diocese. Cardinal Parecatti (p. 181) demanded: "Theology must be reformulated in the intelligible native idioms and with indigenous philosophical terms" - a fine idea indeed, but no hint is given as to how to set about it. Is this "indigenous" theology perhaps meant to show that, as Mgr. Fernandes thinks, the practice of the pagan religion of India, "which comprises also their sacred books and their sacramental acts, can be a means through which the risen Christ encounters them" (p. 432f.)? If this were true, so many martyrs of Christian Antiquity acted not only stupidly but sinfully in preferring death to performing the most insignificant pagan rite. - The speeches delivered especially by Cardinal Parecatti and the Archbishops Fernandes and Picachy show in an alarming manner to what extent Rahnerism and Amalorpavadassism have already corroded and decomposed the Catholic substance of the Church in India.



true religion. Amalorpavadass seems to subordinate religion to nation – and in this he agrees with the pagan modernism of his native country.<sup>12</sup> It is clear that in such an ideology there is no room for *chrēsis*, which is an indispensable procedure for evangelization especially in a country of high spiritual culture. On the contrary, Amalorpavadass holds the strange opinion that Christ's mission was to save not only men but also all religions (Indig. 15). This is, as we have seen in the first two Chapters, a doctrine totally alien to Holy Scripture and Tradition. Right from the Apostolic time, missionary work has been understood and practised as liberation *from* alien religions because all of them include grave sins as constituents of their religious practice and doctrine. *Chrēsis* preserves what can be preserved of pagan religions, after due cleansing and reorientation, but as for the rest, pagan religions are doomed to perish. Amalorpavadass asserts that the Church "has to lead the religions themselves through the mystery of Incarnation, Death and Resurrection" (Indig. 16) in misty and ambiguous. It may simply be rejected by pointing to the fact that the Savior has come to save men, not sinful institutions. Amalorpavadass thinks that the Church should also assimilate the "ways of thinking and expressing, praying and worshipping" (*ibid.*). This might be accepted, first, if ways of worship – which are in paganism always sins against the First Commandment – were not included, and secondly, if the other practices were "healed" and duly cleansed from satanic delirium, as the Council prescribes.<sup>13</sup> That is to say, if *chrēsis* were practised. It is true that Amalorpavadass admits that, according to the Council, we have "to liberate from all taint of evil whatever truth and grace is found among the nations" (Indig. 16). But the way in which he explains this statement amounts to repaganization; the passage (Indig. 17f.) where he speaks of "entering into the mainstream of its national life" has already been quoted above. It is true that the Council exhorts the faithful to participate in the national, social, economic and cultural life of the pagan environment in which they live<sup>14</sup>; but it does not leave the slightest doubt that this is a matter of employing (to use Dom Thomas Ohm's terms) adaptation and assimilation in order to gain the confidence of pagan fellow-citizens. The chief task, for which all the rest only prepares the way, is and remains the proclamation of the gospel: all the faithful are called upon to testify to their faith by word and deed (no. 11 of the Decree), and all material progress and prosperity is ultimately to serve as a means to teach religious and moral truths of Christianity (no. 12). Amalorpavadass, however, enunciates that indigenization and acculturation – his terms to denote the national trend of adaptation – have to be *identical with* missionary activity (Indig. 18f.). Thus, what according to the Council's teaching is the neces-

sary basis of missionary activity or evangelization, is by Amalorpavadass represented as identical with it. This is a gross misunderstanding of the Council texts.

If we consider these tendencies, we shall not be astonished at the climax of the nationalistic and, at the same time, paganizing deformation of the Church and her cult, namely the reading of pagan texts during the celebration of Holy Mass (Indig. 26, 51 etc.)<sup>15</sup> and the introduction of Hindu feasts (Indig. 145ff.). Feasts that Amalorpavadass recommends for celebration are Divālī, the Feast of Lights, and Sarasvatī-Pūjā, the feast of the goddess of Wisdom. I have no information on the extent to which these suggestions of the Director of the Bangalore Institute have been executed, but what matters in our context is the fact that they could be made and that the Director still holds the Church in India under his sway. As regards pagan feasts, it is well known that the Church in Antiquity fixed as the date of Christmas a day on which a very popular pagan feast – the Feast of the Undeclared Sun – was observed. This was a real case of *chrēsis* inasmuch as the content of the feast was entirely reoriented. People might – and most probably did – each for himself transfer the idea of "Sun" from the material sun to Christ, the spiritual Sun. But the Christian meaning was to oust the pagan. There was nothing in the liturgy of the Christian feast to remind one of the transition from the pagan to the Christian idea of the feast. Amalorpavadass, on the other hand, obviously *wants* that people be alive to the connection of the Hindu and the "indigenized" Christian feasts. It is true that the liturgical texts proposed by him are Christian; nevertheless, there was no Christian motive for these feasts, least of all for the feast of a pagan goddess. The Christian meaning is artificially grafted on these Hindu feasts, obviously with a view to having some feasts in common with the Hindus.

The idea of reading pagan scriptures in the Liturgy of the Word in Holy Mass was propagated by Amalorpavadass and others especially in 1974, the year when the Bishops' Synod treating evangelization was held. The then President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, Cardinal Parecattil, said in a speech before the Bishops' Synod that "theoretically" there was no objection to the introduction of texts from non-Christian sacred books in the Breviary and in the Liturgy of the Word<sup>16</sup>. J. Dupuis, now the editor of the Indian clergy review *Vidyajyoti*, extended the propaganda for this idea to the West<sup>17</sup>. In one of his articles he gave a selection of pagan texts which in his opinion could be read in Holy Mass. The first two of these texts are hymns from the *Rigveda*, in which false gods are in-

<sup>12</sup> See my book, *Kleine Schriften* (Wiesbaden, 1978), pp. 569–579, 581f., 584, 594, 607f.

<sup>13</sup> Decree on Missionary Activity of the Church, n. 9.

<sup>14</sup> Decree on Missionary Activity, ns. 11–12.

<sup>15</sup> See also *Research Seminar on Non-Biblical Scriptures*, ed. by D. S. Amalorpavadass, Bangalore, National Biblical, Catechetical and Liturgical Centre (1975?).

<sup>16</sup> See Caprile, p. 182.

<sup>17</sup> In *Studia Missionalia*, vol. 23, Rome 1974, pp. 127ff. Cp. also *Revue théologique de Louvain*, 6e année, 1975, fasc. 3, pp. 324ff.



voked<sup>18</sup>, that is, which invite to practise idolatry in words. The next five texts are English translations, by J. Mascaró, from Upanishads and the Bhagavadgītā. False doctrines are included in every text. Moreover, all the texts have been manipulated, so that from a scholarly point of view they are not worth noticing. But the religious hybridity of these texts is an interesting instance of what I was hinting at above when I contrasted Christian Antiquity, which defended Christianity against paganism, with our time which virtually produces apologies of paganism. In other words: In Antiquity Christian thinkers utilized what they found to be good in paganism, and they could do this only because their mental gaze, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, was unswervingly fixed on the Christian mystery. In our day, on the contrary, writers concentrate their attention on pagan texts or doctrines, and imagine to discover Christian elements in them. It is a consequence of spiritual weakness that the impact of Rahner's theory could in such a sweeping manner turn the direction of attention, as it were, by 180 degrees.

But even before the Council attempts were made at an evaluation of paganism as a preparation for evangelization. The most famous among these, as far as India is concerned, is Father Johans' book, *To Christ through the Vedānta*<sup>19</sup>. It presents Vedāntic doctrines, cleansing them so as to be unobjectionable from a Christian point of view. But the result was neither real Hindu philosophy nor Christian theology. Paganization was avoided, but it was a hybrid product, courting misconception on both sides, and rousing indignation or, generally, simply disregard, from the side of scholars of Indology. Thus even before the Council there were misoriented studies which prevented a method corresponding to the *chrēsis* practised by the Fathers from being discovered.

It is true, there were also some promising starts, if not to practise *chrēsis*, at least to prepare for it. Outstanding among these are a number of studies by Father Joseph Neuner, S. J. (listed in my *Kleine Schriften*, p. 742). These studies confronted Hindu and Christian doctrines and practices, with a delicate perceptivity for Hindu religious feelings (for the Hindu *deśidamonia*, cp. Acts 17:22), but at the same time with a clear-sighted awareness of the differences of the two religions. But unfortunately, these studies were not continued after the 1950s, and in 1962 the triumphant success of Rahner's Anonymous Christians theory made such studies appear preposterous, so that the progress from contrasting to utilization was not even envisioned, far less attempted.

In our time, the ancient method of *chrēsis*, adjusted to our time, could have been learned anew from the Council texts, which, as we have seen in

the preceding Chapter, perfectly agree with the Fathers on this point. But unfortunately the impact of Rahner's theory and of Amalorpavadass' propaganda, both of which leave no room for transmutations such as *chrēsis*, was stronger than the authority of the *magisterium*. In this atmosphere alleged translations such as those of Mascaró could arise.

It is true that Indian philosophico-religious and mystical thought could lend itself to *chrēsis* much more easily than the thought of the ancient Greeks, including Neoplatonism, actually did.<sup>20</sup> But accuracy – which does not imply rivalry – is the indispensable requirement in practising *chrēsis*. In Greek Antiquity the fact that both pagans and Christians spoke the same language, kept thinkers from manipulating and blurring ideas, whereas translation easily enables the translator to slip his own ideas into the text.

Let me summarize: Religious *chrēsis* requires, first, that the Christian dogma be the thinker's mental treasure; secondly, that he have an exact and comprehensive knowledge of the pagan system in whose area he is working; thirdly, that he be able to think in the language which is the medium of expression of this pagan system; fourthly, that he have the spiritual power to reorientate pagan notions which will inevitably occur to his mind as he is pondering on the mysteries of Christianity in a non-christianized language. And let me repeat: There is hardly any theologian today who could fulfill all these requirements.

Raymond Panikkar was probably gifted enough to solve the task, but unfortunately his writings have reached the climax of hybridity or syn-

<sup>20</sup> In order to give at least a glimpse of the possible *chrēsis* of a Hindu idea, let me refer to the Prahāda legend of the Viṣṇupurāṇa. The Viṣṇupurāṇa is a collection, compiled about 1500 years ago, of myths, legends, and prescriptions of the sect that adores Viṣṇu as the Supreme God, in a form of quasi-monotheism. The work is interspersed with theological reflections. Now it is part of this theology that the transcendent god is at the same time in all things and in all persons. True, this is a form of that monism which pervades, with very few exceptions, all Hindu theologies and which can even be intensified to the extent that the human soul is believed to be identical with the god. But the pagan ideas which St. Paul utilized and reoriented in his speech on the Areopagus were in their original context not closer to Christianity than the theology of the Viṣṇupurāṇa. The striking feature of this theology is the ethical consequence which it deduces from the doctrine of the transcendence and immanence of God. The typical attitude of Viṣṇu's devotees to their god is *bhakti*, which is veneration imbued with love. Accordingly, the theology of the Viṣṇupurāṇa teaches that man must have *bhakti* not only for the transcendent god but also for all human beings, even one's enemies, because Viṣṇu is in everyone of them. True, the idea, typical of Christianity, that God loved us first (1 John 4:10) is lacking; Viṣṇu's love for the devotee presupposes the devotee's love for Viṣṇu. But in paganism we can nowhere expect to find more than what Clement of Alexandria called an adumbration of the truth. Anyhow, there are not a few expressions in this Viṣṇu theology which can, without the risk of misunderstanding, be incorporated in Christian proclamation provided the central truths of the Christian religion are duly emphasized so that the error of spirit-monism is unambiguously precluded.

<sup>18</sup> Names of Hindu gods occur and a plurality of gods is mentioned in the translation of *Rigveda* X, 125,3–8; a goddess is adored in *Rigveda* VII,77 (Studia Miss., p. 137f.).  
<sup>19</sup> Father Pierre Johans, S. J., lived 1882–1955. The book mentioned in the text appeared in installments in Calcutta and Ranchi, 1922–1934.



cretism. For his book, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* we even have the testimony of a Hindu scholar who argues against Panikkar's contention that Christ is already in Hinduism (see my *Kleine Schriften*, p. 799 with footnote 2). On the other hand, it is quite out of the question, that a Catholic could accept Panikkar's thesis.

Thus it becomes clear that this hybrid literature is absolutely sterile. Neither a Hindu nor a Christian nor a scholar can derive any profit from it. It is a consequence of this sterility that many Catholics in India today react passionately against the "indigenization" imposed on them (as I note in footnote 22).

Returning to the texts<sup>21</sup> quoted by J. Dupuis in his abovementioned article, we need not analyze them here in detail. It will suffice to point out that much in the texts is simply false translation; that parts of the original have been omitted, while others have been retained, although they express Hindu doctrines (for instance, that God is the "inmost soul" of all things, p. 139; the concept of Atman in the text, p. 139f.; the concepts of Brahman and Brahman; the idea to be "free from the bonds of karma", p. 142); that Christian notions have been slipped into the text (for instance, "God of love", p. 138; "who fulfills the prayers of many" and "loving protector", both p. 139; "life eternal", p. 140). For the Hindu, such texts are either ridiculous or a detestable falsification, as we have seen in the case of R. Panikkar's book, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*: the Christian is either inveigled by them into pagan doctrines, or, if he notices the difference, the firmness of his faith is shaken. All this is even more deplorable insofar as great portions of the text could actually be "utilized" in a Christian context, after being deliberately cleansed from pagan dross.

The last text is taken from R. Tagore's *Gitanjali*. It adores the sun. Such a text has of course to be evaluated primarily as poetry. The reading of it in Holy Mass would be comparable to reciting a poem to "the gods" by Hölderlin in Christian worship – an aberration of the kind that actually happened in decaying liberal Protestantism.

In December, 1974, a one-week "Research Seminar on non-Biblical Scriptures" (that is, non-Christian scriptures), organized by Amalorpavadass, was held in Bangalore, and the papers read were published immediately in a volume of 707 pages. This book testifies to much scandalous confusion. There is, for example, the confession of a Christian priest who avows that he cannot neglect the religion of his homeland and so he goes to Hindu temples not for sightseeing but for prayer. Then there is an article

that delves deep into the fictitious problem as to what extent and in what sense non-Christian scriptures can be regarded as inspired. . . .

The result of it all was that in May, 1975, the competent Roman dicasterium forbade the use of non-Christian scriptures in Holy Mass<sup>22</sup>. But there is reliable news that in some places the above described kind of idolatry is still being practised.

In the present situation of India evangelization can take place only exceptionally and in out-of-the-way places; *chrēsis* is not only excluded but, if it were attempted at all, would be misunderstood. Instead, the peculiar kind of adaptation which is designated by the words *indigenization*, *indianization*, *acculturation*, *inculturation*, is indoctrinated by the infatigable Director to laymen, priests and even bishops in an unending series of "seminars". Here adaptation, which is of itself a psychological procedure, becomes a serious theological problem. It consists in the fact that *indigenization* as conceived by the progressive, nationalist pagans of present-day India is the opposite of *chrēsis* and therefore drives Indian Catholicism back to a pre-baptism stage. At this point it seems in order to reflect a little on symbols in Catholicism.

Symbols, particularly visible ones, are of tremendous significance for the living religion of the Catholic people. Now there is unanimous evidence from progressive, conservative and official (ecclesiastical) quarters in India today that laymen and priests react with bewilderment and indignation to the "indigenization" of symbols which has been imposed on

<sup>22</sup> Only in the conservative review "The Laity", January 1976, pp. 12ff., did I find the full text of the Letter, dated June 14, 1975, from Cardinal Knox, Prefect of the S. Congregation for Sacraments and Divine Worship, to the President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, with an annexed Report of the Secretary of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India. This document expressly forbids "the use of non-Biblical readings in the liturgy and use of the Ordo Missae containing the Indian eucharistic prayer". In the clergy review *Vidyajyoti*, December 1975, pp. 512-514, the Secretary General of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, Bishop Patrick D'Souza, published the same letter, this time dated October 20, 1975, which had been enclosed with Cardinal Knox' letter to the President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, dated June 15, 1975. He said that the texts had been "printed for the specific and limited purpose of study", but that their use was – at least for the time being – "forbidden to all". But the matter does not appear to have been so simple as it would seem to one who reads only Bishop D'Souza's letter. In the *Report of the General Meeting of the Cath. Bishops' Conf. of India*, Hyderabad, January 4-13, 1976, p. 75, under the head "Liturgy", I found the remark: "In view of the delicate matters to be considered, the discussions were held 'in camera' and dealt mainly with the background leading to the letter of Cardinal Knox and its implications. . . ." And in the *Report of the Standing Committee of the Cath. Bishops' Conf. of India*, Bangalore, April 27-29, 1976, pp. 14f. a brief report can be found of a discussion that seems to reflect a certain irritation at Cardinal Knox' letter.

<sup>21</sup> These are taken from *Śvetāśvatara-Upaniṣad* 6,7-13; *Kātha-Upaniṣad* 1,2, 22 (inaccurately designated as *Kātha Upaniṣad* II); *Muṇḍaka-Upaniṣad* 2,2, 7-10 (erroneously designated as *Bhagavad-Gītā* XI, 36-45); *Bhagavadgītā* 11,36-40 and 43-45 (erroneously designated as IX, 26-34); and *Bhagavadgītā* 9,26-34. These Sanskrit texts have been translated by J. Mascaro, evidently for being used by Christians, because the English texts are interspersed with a number of Christian terms. The last text is a hymn from Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali*.



them<sup>23</sup>. People are well aware that the symbols, now introduced into the Church by way of indigenization, are used in idolatry. So they feel themselves the object of an attempt at repaganization. This does not, of course, contribute to increasing their faith and their conviction that their religion is the only true one.

Thus the experiments made in India demonstrate the necessity and at the same time the relativity of religious symbols in Christianity, and we see that the theories which we had constructed by speculation or by analysis of ancient texts, are in need of differentiations and modification.

First of all, even psychologically there is no absolute necessity that the symbols used should be "indigenous". Much less does such a necessity exist from the theological point of view. Otherwise the English, for instance, would have to re-introduce symbols from ancient Anglo-Saxon paganism and abolish the great number of symbols which they have adopted from southern countries and which have become sacramentals in the Church. Adaptation or assimilation, which includes the adoption of symbols, is even ambiguous. It can be, as it was in Antiquity and in the case of De Nobili, an act of charity; but it can also be, as it is in not a few places in India today, an act of spiritual oppression and confusion.

<sup>23</sup> The conservative review "The Laitiy" in every number bears testimony to the offense the faithful take at the oppression exerted by indigenization. The Director of the Bangalore Institute himself admits that "the vast majority of the Church with their traditional formation and mentality maintain a negative attitude and react adversely to such a practice", namely the reading of pagan scriptures in Christian worship (p. 14 of the book mentioned above, footnote 15). In the "Guidelines for liturgical renewal, given by the Cath. Bishops' Conf. of India at their Ordinary General Meeting, Mangalore, 9-17 January 1978" and reprinted in "Vidyajyoti", April 1978, pp. 186f., the Conference tenaciously insists on the principle of "indigenization" and its determination to set up (and maintain) "ex-pertimentation centres". But in the same document the Conference admits "that the liturgical renewal in our country in the application of these principles has given rise to certain fears and a sense of uneasiness among sections of our people", and the chief editor of the review, M. Amaladoss, in his commentary on the "Guidelines", underscores the fact of opposition to "all change and renewal". In "Vidyajyoti", August 1977, pp. 329ff., a document is printed with the title "Conclusions of the National Seminar on Crisis of Faith . . ." This document, rather rationalistic in its outlook, regrets that "indianization" "is sometimes misconceived (. . .) and sometimes even poses a danger to the faith of some individuals" (p. 332). In the *Reports of the Commissions and Committees of the Cath. Bishops' Conf. of India for the years 1976-1977*, Mangalore, January 9-17, 1978, there are quite a number of statements to the effect that (instead of the much extolled "renewal") "opposition" (p. 103), adverse activity (p. 104), "doubts" (p. 114) and "confusion" (p. 118) have been the result of the imposition of "indigenization", and "people begin to question the *raison d'être* of the changes that have been taking place in the Church during the past thirteen years" (p. 117). Testimonies to the same effect from progressive (paganizing) and ecclesiastical sources could easily be multiplied. Thus one could ask quite soberly how an apparent decay of religion can be called a renewal.

*Chr  sis*, on the other hand, is indispensable, because, as St. Justin already saw, all truth that at any time became known to men, rightfully belongs to the Christians, to the Church (see above, Ch. 2, § 1). It need not be completed immediately after the time of conversion. It can be executed even long after the religion or philosophy whose achievements are utilized has ceased to be a living force. This is shown by the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas in relation to the philosophy of Aristotle.

The situation of the Christians in India today is characterized by the fact that they live among an overwhelming majority of pagans. If evangelization had made headway at the same pace as it did as a result of De Nobili's activity, the Church might have come to outnumber the non-Christians or have grown to be a strong minority. In such a case Christian reorientation of originally pagan symbols would have presented as easy a problem as it had done earlier in the West. But the history of evangelization in India was to take a different course from that which it had taken in Europe and Western Asia. For reasons that we need not enter upon here, adaptation and assimilation ceased, there were many apostasies, and the number of conversions became smaller and smaller. Nevertheless, as the result of the patient efforts of missionaries of the Latin rite, there arose in India a Catholic Church coexisting with the ancient Church of the St. Thomas Christians, most of whom remained united with Rome but retained, though with some Romanizations, their Syrian rite. The missionaries brought to India all their Western rites and customs, and Hindu rites were not adapted. There was no *chr  sis*. Yet, a living Church came still into being. As is generally known, an index of the religious zeal in Catholicism is the percentage of vocations to the priesthood in proportion to the total population. Now the number of vocations in India, especially in the South, was extraordinarily great in the years immediately preceding the Council.<sup>24</sup> This fact certainly shows that the Indian Catholics did not feel oppressed by westernization. Though some Indian hierarchs, repeating what they had learned from Western theorists, complained of the Western appearance of Indian Catholicism and of the influence of colonialism, Indian Catholics themselves certainly had no idea that their rites and customs, being of foreign origin, needed to be nationalized, that is in this case, Hinduized. After all, their own religion was alien from that of the Hindus in another than a national sense. So all the symbols of Catholicism, down to the architecture of their neo-Gothic churches, represented to them the otherness of the true religion from paganism. What I am analyzing here, was certainly not part of the consciousness of the average

<sup>24</sup> The German *Herderkorrespondenz*, year 10, no. 8, May 1956, p. 369f., portrays the ecclesiastical situation of India, as far as it can be expressed in statistics, as extraordinarily hopeful. The number of vocations to the priesthood, especially in South India, according to the review's report, was perhaps the greatest in the world and more than 70 % of the applications for admission to Seminaries had to be refused because the existing ten Major Seminaries were overcrowded.



Catholic, but I think I am justified in presenting this interpretation as an inference from the fact of their religious zeal and the fact of their attachment to the (originally Western) religious symbols.

Adaptation and assimilation would have been very valuable at the time of first evangelization and conversion. But now, generations after the Church has been established, it is a grave error, and lack of charity at the same time, to induce Christians to adopt symbols which everybody knows are used in pagan rites, and to give up symbols which so far served as means of Christian cult and piety. Thus what would have been meaningful centuries ago, is a scandal today. The pagan meaning cannot be forgotten in a pagan environment by Christians who have inherited their religion from their forefathers. Many faithful feel that they are to be repaganized. This calamity has befallen the Church in India today.

In the present Chapter we have been considering Catholic Christianity in India as it confronts Hinduism (Indian Islām and tribal religions being excluded). The concrete data of the present time and comparatively near past, together with the uniqueness of the position of the Church in India, allowed us to complement, to differentiate and in some measure to modify what we had found in the first three Chapters.

Let me now briefly summarize the main results of all four Chapters.

1. The theology of evangelization presupposes a theology of the attitude of those within the Covenant to those without.

2. Therefore, the theology of evangelization should be evolved from a theology of the Covenant.

3. After the preceding Covenants, the New and Eternal Covenant includes evangelization as an essential constituent, namely as the means to extend the Covenant to all gentiles.

4. Under the New Covenant, the attitude toward paganism takes on a new aspect. This attitude leads to the "utilization" of what is found good in paganism. Though foreshadowed in the Old Covenant, utilization is characteristic of the New Covenant.

5. The theological reason for practising utilization (*chrēsis*)<sup>25</sup> is that all that is true and good belongs to Christ and His Mystical Body.

6. With all that is good in paganism, the fact that sinful actions belong to its religious practice (that is, not only are there sins, but certain sins are

<sup>25</sup> When I was writing my article "Protestantische Akkommodation" (in *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft*, Münster, vol. 48, 1964, pp. 206 ff. – now reprinted in my *Kleine Schriften*, pp. 780 ff.), I was not yet aware of a number of differentiations which I point out in the present Chapter. Especially the difference between adaptation and *chrēsis*, the possibility of nationalism mating adaptation, the impossibility that a *chrēsis*, sanctioned by the *magisterium* as authentic exposition of Revelation, be abrogated and replaced with attempts starting afresh from the Bible – all this was not yet clear to me. What I call "adaptation" (in German: *Akkommodation*) in that article, is in the main *chrēsis*, but the concept has not yet been clarified.

regarded as part of religion itself) makes the gulf between Christianity and pre-Christian religions unbridgeable. Utilization is comparable to conversion: just as in a human being conversion does not destroy nature, but heals and cleanses it, so *chrēsis* transforms and reorients what is found good in paganism.

7. Utilization cannot be initiated in our day, for instance in India, in the same way in which it was practised in Antiquity in the West. The results of Western *chrēsis*, as far as it was guided by the Holy Spirit and sanctioned by the *magisterium*, have to be accepted and translated. But on this basis, utilization, for instance in India, remains not only possible and desirable, but necessary.

8. *Chrēsis* essentially presupposes contemplation of the divine truth as revealed in Christ (contemplation understood in the sense the word has with St. Thomas Aquinas, S. th. 2-2, 180, 3 ad 1: *simplex intuitus veritatis*, pure mental gaze on the truth), and it is an attempt to express the result of such contemplation in a language that has not yet been christianized. Thus *chrēsis* is the christianization, the redemption, the "baptism" of pagan language<sup>26</sup>.

9. *Chrēsis* is distinct from adaptation (and assimilation). The first is a theological procedure, the latter is a psychological means to gain confidence.

10. While *chrēsis*, for the reason stated above, is necessary, adaptation is not. Adaptation can be very helpful, but there are situations in which it must be dispensed with, namely when its practice would cause disturbance instead of confidence. Westernized Indians can be good Catholics just as, for instance, Romanized Celts or Visigoths were.

11. Adaptation as an expression of nationalism or as adoption of symbols and customs that are generally known to belong essentially to paganism is to be rejected because it is a road leading back to paganism.

12. The practice of *chrēsis* and thus the completion of the Catholic religious system is blocked when Catholicism is being deformed by nationalistic adaptation (indigenization). Thus our analysis of the Catholic Church in India helps us discern the true nature of evangelization precisely because the course officially pursued here is, when seen from a theological point of view, obviously a grave mistake that must, if God's grace does not intervene, inevitably lead to the ruin of the Church in India.

At least one problem remains to be pondered in our context. To illustrate it, let me begin by translating a passage from Joseph Dahlmann's *Travels in India*<sup>27</sup>. Father Dahlmann writes: "There is only one hope for

<sup>26</sup> The term "language" is understood here in a wider sense, comprising also expression in poetry, other literature, and arts. A special study could be made of how the greatest Christian writers of Antiquity (for instance St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Augustine) made the rules of rhetoric, which had to be observed in literature at their time, subservient to expounding the Christian mystery.

<sup>27</sup> Joseph Dahlmann, S. J., *Indische Fahrten*. 2 vols. Freiburg i. B., 1927. The quotation is from vol. 2, p. 294.



India's future in the culture of humankind, namely that India might join the indissoluble alliance of the principal civilizations of Antiquity, which are Israel, Hellas, and Rome. It was the languages of this alliance which on the inscription on the Cross of the Savior proclaimed, for East and West, the greatest of all historical facts as the starting point of a new mankind."

This is the old style idea of acculturation. One might be inclined to describe it as an outcome of colonialism. But this would be ineffectual. Dahmann's view does not imply that India should be politically subject to or allied with any Western power. Even Charles de Foucauld was of the opinion that civilization must precede christianization<sup>28</sup> and, as a matter of course, civilization for him was Western civilization. In fact, up to the recent past many Catholic theologians held that there was a sort of pre-established harmony between Christianity and the Greco-Roman civilization. One may even concede a partial truth to this view. Where a natural unity exists, specifically in the domain of political or social order or in civilization, it is often easier to build up the supernatural unity which is the Church. Already Fathers of the Church had thought that the Roman Empire was a providential means of facilitating the spread of the gospel once the Emperor had become a Christian. There is no prohibition for the missionary to make use of the natural conditions of his time for the benefit of evangelization. What matters, is only his faithful observance of Our Lord's commandments: that he teach, and baptize, and make disciples of all nations, and that he seek first God's Kingdom and his righteousness (Matt. 28:19f. and 6:33). Evangelization is, however, disfigured when missionaries think they must first bring about natural conditions which they expect will facilitate later evangelization. This amounts to attempting, before seeking the Kingdom, to create things which, according to the Lord's promise, will be "added" (Matt. 6:33). This mistake has been made almost regularly by missionaries in the last century and in the first decades of this century. Civilization certainly is among the things that will be "added". The result of the mistake was calamitous. The efforts, undertaken not only by missionaries, to bring the boons of Western civilization to India did meet with an overwhelming success, but people were converted to Western ways of thinking, not to the Christian religion<sup>29</sup>.

Gradually, however, missionaries and missiologists began to see that this was a wrong method, and the pioneer work which De Nobili had done three centuries ago was appreciated anew. Adaptation became the object of much reflection and even experimentation. But the sort of adaptation – also called acculturation, inculturation, indigenization, indianization – that is practised in India today and even advocated by the Indian

Bishops' Conference is clearly a case of false application of a sound principle. Centuries ago, at the time of christianization, such a program could have been carried out with profit. But just as there is no prohibition for the missionary to make use of existing natural conditions, so there is no commandment enjoining the utilization of pre-Christian customs by way of adaptation. A man can very well be an Indian in the area of politics, he can even be a patriot, and yet in his religious practice he can make use of elements that are all of foreign origin. At any rate, introduction of pagan symbols, habits, etc., after christianization is an offense to the religious feelings of the People of God. As regards *chrēsis*, a time may come when it can be successfully undertaken by an Indian (or a Westerner thinking in Indian concepts). The indigenization, however, as practised and propagated today, commits essentially the same mistake as the old style acculturation had done. The ultimate motive for the latter had been the haughtiness of the Westerner who felt superior to the East; modern indigenization is clearly an outcome of Indian nationalism. Neither of the two attitudes is compatible with evangelization.

The "re-interpretation" to which evangelization is subjected in India today does not belong to our main theme, but we must briefly treat it because it rounds off the picture of the official Church in India today.

In 1970, a document released by the Indian Bishops' Conference<sup>30</sup> expressed the view that it was necessary "to re-evaluate the motivation for mission work which is no longer only 'the salvation of souls'". Now salvation (in the verbal forms "save yourselves" and "to be saved") figures most prominently in all evangelizing, right from St. Peter's sermon at the first Pentecost (see Acts 2:40, 47). If this is pushed aside by a "not only", then evangelization has become a word to denote something it never designated before. Then the paper speaks of "Christ's glad tidings", but one wonders what these tidings may be, if "our whole attitude towards evangelisation" needs a "radical re-orientation". Among many misty and enthusiastic sentences the phrases "reverently discovering the seeds of the Word in the soil of India" and "God's Kingdom that is already come" seem to indicate that this reinterpreted evangelization is really something different from what had always been understood by this word. The next sentence corroborates the impression of novelty: "Evangelization must also be integrated into the wider context of building up the nation and mankind at large". This subordination of evangelization to political aims is certainly a novel determination of its purpose.

<sup>30</sup> All the material I use here is taken from official Reports of the Cath. Bishops' Conf. of India. At the Conference's General Meeting in Ernakulam on January 7-16, 1970, the "Follow-up Committee of the All India Seminar Church in India" presented recommendations which, among other subjects, treated evangelization. The 1970 Report of the Conference's General Meeting contains excerpts from the recommendations of the Committee. From these excerpts the quotations given in this paragraph are taken. They are to be found on pp. 107f. of the Conference's Report.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Ohm in his work, *Machet zu Jüngern alle Völker* (cp. above, footnote 6), p. 398, quotes Charles de Foucauld as saying: "Il faut civiliser avant de christianiser".

<sup>29</sup> See my essay, "Das heutige Indien und wir Christen", now reprinted in my *Kleine Schriften* (Wiesbaden, 1978), pp. 732ff.



At the General Meeting of the Bishops' Conference in Calcutta in January, 1974, evangelization was the principal topic in view of the Roman Bishops' Synod of that year.<sup>31</sup> In the diverse papers included in the Report statements like the following can be found: "In a country like India, which is in the process of economic liberation and development, evangelization should take the concrete form of liberation and integral development of man. That is possible only through a revolution of hearts and transformation of lives according to the pattern of Jesus the 'poor'". Thus, while other statements reinterpret evangelization in a political sense, here it is even identified with socio-economic liberation!

The communication sent by the Bishops' Conference to the Synod in Rome does say a few words about preaching the gospel and Baptism, and even contemplation is not forgotten; but the key note of the new conception of evangelization recurs again and again, as may be illustrated by the following quotations: "Salvation is not restricted to spirituality and pure eschatology" – as St. Peter thought when preaching at the first Pentecost; on the contrary, it "includes the renewal, liberation and fulfilment of the human person and human society", thus, a purely thisworldly event. "It is a liberation from the effects of sin, from all forms of oppression and injustice . . ." Christian salvation liberates from sin; reinterpreted salvation from its effects. Clearly the notions of evangelization and salvation have been totally perverted, and the real ideal of the authors of this document is worldly socialism. On the one hand there is a strong leaning to materialism – camouflaged with Christian words and with the term "the whole man" (which camouflages the denial of the immortal soul), and not without Marxist terms; on the other hand, the authors of the document bow to paganism in what they call "dialogue". This is not understood, as one might expect, as a preparation for evangelization (not "in view of conquest or proselytization", as the document says); no, it is "the response of Christian faith to God's saving presence in the religions and traditions of mankind". Nay, what is more, dialogue, according to one Conference paper, "should not be understood in terms of truth and error, good and bad, salvation and damnation", but "it must be a positive relationship of mutual understanding . . . and confidence that sharing of experience will be mutually enriching". Fortunately, the Pope's *Adhortatio* "*Evangelii nuntiandi*" has, though disciplinary measures were not taken, at least in teaching destroyed this disastrous plan which amounts to the suicide of Catholicism.

<sup>31</sup> The passages quoted in this and the following paragraphs are taken from the *Report of the General Meeting of the Cath. Bishops' Conf. of India* in Calcutta, January 6-14, 1974, on pp. 18, 19, 124ff., 135f., 147, and [56].



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