

THE CHURCH AS COVENANT, CULTURE, AND COMMUNION

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[The Church is the primary sacrament of communion (koinonia) and thus also sign and model for the ways in which communion is to be lived. The secular concept most closely approaching this model is the common good. The Catholic Church, in the face of individualistic attitudes in the United States, is in a position to witness to the common good, nationally and internationally. One collective form of individualism is cultural exclusivity, the domination of the body politic or the ecclesial body by one particular culture. The Second Vatican Council and subsequent theologians of communion, especially J.-M.R. Tillard, have shown us how to bear witness to multiculturalism.]

FOCUSING ON THE PROBLEM of individualism not only in distinct persons but also in exclusive cultural groups, I wish to argue here that the theme of the “common good” in Catholic social ethics has a deeply sacramental dimension, and that this ecclesial sacramentality disposes the Church to serve as a model for a community of the common good which embraces all the cultures of the world. I appreciate also the fact that the Church, inevitably in its humanity a “cultural system,” can fall into the same trap of exclusivity as secular society, and in fact has often done so. Only if it is constantly attentive to the original covenant by which God established it as well as to its cultural responsibilities and its nature as communion (*koinonia*) can it transcend this trap and fulfill its sacramental role.

Theologically, the Church can serve as a model because it is a sacrament, the primordial sacrament (*Ursakrament*). In a famous article, Karl Rahner wrote even before Vatican II: “The Church is the continuance, the con-

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temporary presence, of that real, eschatologically triumphant and irrevocably established presence in the world, in Christ, of God's salvific will."¹ This basic definition of sacramentality came into its own at Vatican II, especially in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum concilium*), where the decree states: "The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify people, to build up the body of Christ, and, finally, to give worship to God. Because they are signs, they also belong in the realm of instruction."² Here I cite this statement about the final cause of the sacraments to describe the Church which as *Lumen gentium* calls it, is "the universal sacrament of salvation."³

It will clarify my point to examine a venerable authority on the topic, Avery Dulles, and his oft-cited *Models of the Church*. Of Dulles's six models the second is that of sacrament, in support of which he draws on an impressive list of theologians who describe the Church as the basic sacrament, after Christ himself.⁴ For the purpose of his overall theme, Dulles cast this model in a highly liturgical light and detailed the possible advantages as well as deficiencies of using this model. One of the deficiencies is that a community can fall into a preoccupation with ritual nicety—a "narcissistic estheticism," in Dulles's tongue-twisting phrase.⁵ However, he also saw the sacramental approach as effective in mediating the more extreme interpretations of the institutional and mystical communion models, with their tendencies, respectively, to rigidity and privatism.⁶ My approach here is to strengthen the socio-cultural dimension of the sacrament model through a concern for what Dulles would express in his fifth model, that of servant in dialogue with the world.

Casting the Church as a model calls for a further methodological statement, one that I take from the famous essay of Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System." Geertz's methodology for interpreting culture is semiotic, focusing on cultural symbols and, in turn, symbols as models. He has created a valuable distinction in types of models—models *of* and models *for*. The model *of* symbolizes what a reality already *is*, as in the case of a diagram of an existing dam, while the model *for* is like a blueprint for a

¹ Karl Rahner, "The Church and the Sacraments," *Inquiries* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964) 189–299, at 193.

² *Sacrosanctum concilium* no. 59. Translation from Austin Flannery, O.P., gen. ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, rev. ed. (Northport, N.Y.: Costello, 1996).

³ *Lumen gentium* no. 48.

⁴ Avery Dulles, S.J., *Models of the Church*, rev. ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1987).

⁵ *Ibid.* 75.

⁶ *Ibid.* 73.

new construction.⁷ While these functions are often interchangeable in the same model, my major emphasis here will be on Geertz's understanding of how a model *for* enables agents to manipulate external systems of symbolically expressed relationships—that is, to create new symbolic processes.⁸ Employing Geertz's method here, I argue that the Church is not only a model *of* communion, but a model *for* a richer historical development of that communion.

Throughout the works of Robert N. Bellah over the last quarter of a century, one golden thread is woven, namely the quest to retrieve “the common good.” But interwoven with it is a darker thread, his lament over individualism in the United States. The dark thread was first mentioned in Bellah's 1975 volume *The Broken Covenant*.⁹ The bright thread began to appear in the collaborative works of Bellah and his associates, especially in *Habits of the Heart* and *The Good Society*, as well as in an anthology entitled *Individualism and Commitment in American Life*.¹⁰ In these later works, the Bellah team explored paths leading through the overgrowth of individualism to a stronger human solidarity. These writers have persistently asked themselves and us how we might again cultivate a growth of social responsibility hidden among the roots of this overgrowth. In all of this work the theme of ecclesiology is at least implied, if not directly discussed.

My hope is to assist the Bellah team's search for solidarity by means of an argument for multicultural unity within the Church in order that it might truly serve as a “sign raised up among the nations.” I direct my essay toward the United States but not because this country is by any means the worst example of individualism and cultural exclusivity. Indeed, this country has constantly served as a haven for refugees from tribal warfare, ethnic hatreds, and centuries-long social exclusivities. My article is concerned not so much with American sins against multicultural solidarity, but rather with challenging a nation that has built a *noblesse oblige* image so dramatically on serving as a “golden door” for refugees from “the teeming shores” and thus left itself open to criticism from the rest of the world. The theological

⁷ Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz* (New York: Basic Books, 1973) 87–125, at 93.

⁸ *Ibid.* 94.

⁹ Robert N. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial* (New York: Seabury, 1975).

¹⁰ Robert N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California, 1985); *The Good Society* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991); *Individualism and Commitment in American Life: Readings on the Themes of Habits of the Heart* (New York: Harper, 1988).

aspect of my article focuses on the Roman Catholic Church in the hope that it may better cultivate its own catholicity as a sign to the nations.

A final introductory note is in order. I realize that this article is one more in a spate of writings emphasizing ideas like “inculturation” and “multi-culturalism.” One could say that it follows upon the event cited by Michael Paul Gallagher, namely the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 which both marked the close of a historical period in which the ideologies of communism and capitalism were the central issue and inaugurated the central focus on culture as the chief hermeneutical instrument in the political search for better international relations.¹¹ While I grant the burgeoning interest in culture since that time, I believe it is also fair to point out that voices in the theological world have struggled since the late 1960s for a hearing on the matter of cultural diversity.¹² Even now, as mainstream theologians have begun to heed these protestations, they often still treat the problem as if it were an internal issue of the “first world.” My study is one more appeal to theologians (and to the Church as a whole) to attend to the issue of the place of non-European cultures in the work of shaping a theology that shares fully in the *koinonia*.

I develop three points: first, the central theme of *The Broken Covenant*, with further reinforcement by means of Sydney Ahlstrom’s massive work on American religious history.¹³ Secondly, I examine the problem of ideology that Bellah has uncovered and relate it to the role of Christian faith. Thirdly, with the help of the Ottawa based theologian J.-M.R. Tillard, I propose the theological theme of communion as a sacrament of the (multicultural) common good.

THE BROKEN COVENANT

History

In his 1999 article in *America*, originally part of an address at Regis University in Denver, Robert Bellah reaches back to engage in a reprise of

¹¹ Michael Paul Gallagher, S.J., *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture* (New York; Paulist, 1998) 1–3. Gallagher here cites in particular Samuel Huntington. “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (Summer, 1993) 22–49. Huntington’s article bears upon the theme of the present essay in two ways. First, it recognizes culture as a specific characteristic of civilizations, without at the same time equating them (23), and secondly, it calls for both coexistence and cooperation between the cultures of the world—a kind of secular *koinonia* (48).

¹² See especially Walbert Bühlmann, O.F.M. Cap., *The Coming of the Third Church: An Analysis of the Present and the Future of the Church* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1977) and *God’s Chosen Peoples* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1982).

¹³ Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University, 1972).

his work prior to the project of the *Habits of the Heart* team.¹⁴ With a reference to the thought of David Hollenbach, Bellah develops an argument hailing the value of the Catholic idea of “the common good” as an antidote for what ails American society. In that article, he is rather hard on Protestant America but as an active member of the Episcopal Church allows himself this license. Since I am convinced that all Christians should probe and critique their own traditions, I wish to focus here my own theological sights on Roman Catholic responsibility. But first, a brief summary of Bellah’s essay.

Bellah contrasts “the Catholic imagination,” which he sees as sacramental and expressive of an ordered social relationship, with “the Protestant imagination,” which he sees as focusing on the sinful corruption of society and thus on the inability of the individual person to truly embrace membership in that society.¹⁵ He only hints at the massive contribution of Protestant social ethicists, such as the Niebuhr brothers, Tillich, and Barth, who employed “the Protestant principle” as a creative critique of society, and he locates the flaw in our cultural code within the American Protestant tradition. What is this flaw? In contrast to his team’s later works, which employed the metaphor of language (e.g., utilitarian and expressive individualism plus biblical and civic republican responsibility), Bellah returns to the theme of *The Broken Covenant* in order to charge American Protestantism with a cultural failure. He suggests that the adamic ancestor of this flaw was the religious rebel Roger Williams, the founder of the Rhode Island Colony based on freedom of conscience and the right of dissent by the individual. Bellah goes so far as to assert that “Roger Williams was a moral genius, but he was a sociological catastrophe.”¹⁶ This failure showed itself in his constant rejection of church bodies in general, even to the point where his own family became his actual church. In this quest for individual freedom, Bellah sees the loss of any sense for the common good.

In the passion to defend God’s transcendence, Bellah argues, Protestants have denied the doctrine of transubstantiation, which they see as submitting the transcendent God to human control, and in turn, under the influence of Calvin, have emphasized the sovereignty of God who predestines us according to his will. Thus, only by accepting Jesus as my personal Savior, can I hope to find salvation. This version of the Protestant principle, whatever its theological power, explains for Bellah the fatal fall into social individualism. There is also an unspoken Weberian tone in Bellah’s argument, as he connects the doctrine of predestined salvation with economic achievement and eventually with free-market economy. In turn, the col-

¹⁴ Robert N. Bellah, “Religion and Shape of National Culture,” *America* 131 (July 31–August 7, 1999) 9–14.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 10.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 11.

lapse of various Protestant and Catholic associations in the late-20th century left us and our families as “porous institutions” from which individuals slip away into the harsh world of disconnectedness and failed commitments. Bellah complains that “Just when we are in many ways moving to an ever greater validation of the sacredness of the individual person, our capacity to imagine a social fabric that would hold individuals together is vanishing.”¹⁷

Addressing his predominantly Catholic audience and readership, Bellah challenges them to be faithful to their traditional teachings on sacramentality and the common good. This is a tradition rooted in the papal encyclicals and other church social teachings but even more deeply in the “religious imagination,” as Andrew Greeley named it.¹⁸ To illustrate the point, Bellah praises the devotion of grassroots Catholics to the Mass as “the overflow of the Lord’s presence”: “The Mass is part of the world and the world is part of the Lord.”¹⁹ As an Episcopalian, Bellah finds himself in a good position to understand how this “high” tradition can join hands with the values of Protestant tradition—personal freedom, responsibility and assurance of salvation, in an endeavor to recreate a social vision of America. But the most serious need now, he argues, is that the sacramental imagination should more deeply vitalize our cultural codes.

It is only fair, in an essay emphasizing communal, “Catholic” sacramentality, to offer a response to Bellah’s critique of Protestantism, from a Catholic who has long admired so many of the values in the Protestant ethic. That is, we should keep before our eyes (as I believe Bellah has done in his overall methodology) the difference between strong individuality and individualism.²⁰ True individuality is that quality dear to the “Protestant principle” that responds to the Word of God addressing each unique person. Paul Althaus paraphrases it well in describing Martin Luther’s theology of the Word of God: “God’s word speaks to me as an individual who is directly related to God. No other person or group stands between

¹⁷ Ibid. 13.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid. 14.

²⁰ I have addressed Bellah’s work in this area before, but without the ecclesiological emphasis of the present article. See also, *Beyond Individualism: Toward a Retrieval of Moral Discourse in America*, ed. Donald Gelpi, S.J. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1989). In this volume, the John Courtney Murray group presents essays in response to *Habits of the Heart*. My own article there sought to expand Bellah’s argument through a deeper cultural contextualization. See Starkloff, “Beyond the Melting Pot: An Essay in Cultural Transcendence,” in *Beyond Individualism*, ed. D. Gelpi, 157–87.

us.”²¹ It is also the individuality that permeates H. Richard Niebuhr’s modern classic *The Responsible Self*.²² To be responsible, for Niebuhr, citing Aquinas as his source, is to realize oneself as most fully human.²³ Responsibility includes the capacity to respond authentically to events, to interpret those events, to let ourselves be held accountable morally for them, and to commit ourselves to social solidarity. All of this is in response to Jesus Christ, who lived, died, and rose again “for me”²⁴ and is now the paradigm,²⁵ the “symbolic form” of responsibility dwelling within our own minds and hearts.²⁶

The individualism that Bellah so deeply mistrusts is not, of course, anything of the above, but rather the self-centeredness that grew out of certain dimensions of later Enlightenment thinking, reaching its nadir in the radical liberalism of laissez faire economics, theories of absolute private property, and the “survival of the fittest” (including cultures!), that developed even before the work of Darwin. If Bellah chides Protestant theology and ethics with their susceptibility to this kind of individualism, Catholics are wise to recognize the proportionate danger latent in communal sacramentality of losing respect for individual initiative. Here I would like to integrate the strengths of each of these classic Protestant and Catholic principles.

Certainly the same regard for individuality shows itself in traditions of Catholic spirituality. Ignatius Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises* dramatically emphasize the necessity of personal response and decision making. In particular, Ignatius’s insistence on deep respect for the individual retreatant stands out boldly in his twenty “annotations” or “preliminary remarks” as Ganss renames them.²⁷ Ignatius’s insistence that retreat directors must always facilitate a direct relationship between the Creator and the creature may have a different ecclesiological cast from that of Luther, but the desire for authentic personal response is equally intense.²⁸ Karl Rahner found this deeply personal aspect of the *Exercises* in the meditation on the Kingdom of Christ, and wrote: “The purpose of the meditations on the life of Jesus is not just to discover the general principles of the ‘new law of following Christ’; rather, the purpose is to discover the imperative in the life of Jesus

²¹ Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966) 53.

²² H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self: An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy* (New York; Harper and Row, 1963).

²³ *Ibid.* 49.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 44.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 162.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 175.

²⁷ George E. Ganss, S.J., trans. and ed., *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992).

²⁸ *Ibid.* 25. See the 50th introductory explanation.

that applies to me alone, and then to make the choice to carry it out in my life."²⁹ In sum, then, any balanced ecclesiology must testify to an integration of individuality and communal solidarity.

Ideology and *The Broken Covenant*

Since it is my intention to interrelate covenant, culture, and communion, and to suggest ways in which the Catholic Church might exercise its role as sacrament of the three, I focus on Bellah's *The Broken Covenant* as my primary historical commentary, with support from Ahlstrom's work already cited, which lends further support to Bellah's more homiletical argument. Since both Bellah and Ahlstrom, in a less dramatic sense, both demonstrate the way in which conflicts of culture enter into the problem of individualism, I propose a theology of communion as a theme for integrating unique cultures within one system that lives the covenant between God and humankind.

What was Robert Bellah struggling with in the early 1970s? In the preface to *The Broken Covenant*, he mourned the loss of the powerful utopian expectations upon which the country was founded, and the erosion of the 18th-century principles of liberty, justice, and charity deriving from the divine order.³⁰ For Bellah, the amnesia of common religious and moral understandings found its symbol in the semantic deterioration of the word "virtue," which no longer expresses any common meanings such as our ancestors may have held, even if they were no better at putting these meanings into practice. The rise of utilitarianism, originally as an antidote to repressive social and psychological mechanisms, soon led to a decline into the utilitarian individualism later examined in *Habits of the Heart*. Bellah's intention in *The Broken Covenant* was to re-cast the idea of "an imaginative, religious, moral, and social context" to counterbalance the emphasis on the science and technology that have led American society to seek its identity in technical rationality.³¹

Bellah was seeking in his work to reappropriate the religious and moral self-understanding of the 17th-century founders of America. Again alluding to the fact that, even with their high ideals, these forbears were no more virtuous than their descendants, he lamented: "The Pilgrim Fathers had a conception of the covenant and of virtue which we badly need today. But almost from the moment they touched American soil they broke that covenant and engaged in unvirtuous actions."³²

²⁹ Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966) 127.

³⁰ Bellah, *Broken Covenant* ix-x.

³¹ *Ibid.* xiv.

³² *Ibid.* xv.

Sydney Ahlstrom, conscious of the same issues that disturbed Bellah, and writing at approximately the same time, describes a “federal theology,” grounded in the Calvinist idea of covenant, that guided America’s Puritan ancestors: “The heart of covenant theology was the insistence that God’s predestining decrees were not part of a vast impersonal and mechanical scheme, but that, under the Gospel dispensation, God had established a covenant of grace with the seed of Abraham.”³³ Significantly, indicating a fragmentation problem even at the very founding of the country, he adds that one vexed argument of the early colonies dealt with whether local churches needed any *formal* covenant, or whether the emphasis should be placed on a *national* covenant for an entire committed commonwealth.³⁴ Ahlstrom, unlike Bellah, does not blame Roger William’s passionate defense of individual liberty for the fragmentation of society, and he denies that religious indifference was at the root of Williams’s policies. But he agrees that movements such as those promoted by Williams did in fact sow the seeds of future problems in maintaining a commonwealth.

Like Bellah, Ahlstrom sees how, by the beginning of the 18th century, “the ideal of a Holy Commonwealth standing in a national covenant with its Lord, was fading.” He continues: “The Enlightenment, meanwhile, was eating away at the federal theology: the national covenant, once a mainstay of Puritan thought, was yielding to moralistic individualism.”³⁵ What Ahlstrom does not seem to recognize here, however much he grieves the colonists’ abuse of aboriginal peoples, was that the hoped-for new covenant, along with its Enlightenment nemesis, represented a wholesale transmigration of European culture into the new soil of America. This, I suggest, is a kind of “original sin” of the founding of the whole colonial world of the Western hemisphere and it has not left the churches untainted.

Such a problem did not escape the attention of Bellah, who focused on it through the lens of myth, “America’s myth of origin.”³⁶ Mircea Eliade, whom Bellah cites in a general reference, had also made an explicit point of highlighting origin myths as a medium that expresses a nostalgia for a lost paradise to be found in a new utopia, and considered this fact to be part of the motive for colonization.³⁷ Bellah describes how the first “Americans” were conscious of themselves as a “people” in the classical and biblical sense of the word. But he turns a harsh light onto this ideal: “They hoped they were a people of God. They often found themselves to be

³³ Ahlstrom, *Religious History* 113.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 132.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 280.

³⁶ Bellah, *Broken Covenant* 1.

³⁷ Mircea Eliade, *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1975; original ed. 1969) chap. 6, at 89–90.

people of the devil.”³⁸ We can better understand Bellah’s vehemence if we realize that he was composing his book in “a time of trial” for American civil religion, one that was “at least as severe as the those of the American Revolution and the Civil War.”³⁹

If we recall how all tribal myths image a sense of their originators as being “the people,” we can not only appreciate Bellah’s concern, but we can also grasp how cross-cultural understanding figures so critically as a moral dimension of political crises everywhere, and certainly not just in the United States. Bellah locates mythic significance in the Declaration of Independence, which gives the American nation a precise inaugural date, the 4th of July 1776.⁴⁰ This was an act of conscious meaning-creation, a religious myth that received its secular embodiment in the Constitution. More deeply, however, lies the myth of “America,” such as articulated especially by John Locke as representing the original state of nature.⁴¹

Bellah might also have noted with profit how this origin myth which he describes as beginning with Columbus and his wonder at the original inhabitants in their aboriginal simplicity, developed without any reference to the ancient origin myths of the American tribes themselves. But what he did observe with acuity in the early 1970s was that not only the optimistic language of Locke influenced the founders, but also the somber assessment of Thomas Hobbes as well. The European settlers of the 18th century may have brought with them Locke’s quest for the lost paradise but, when they encountered inhabitants whose cultures differed so markedly from their own, they could only interpret those cultures as “nasty and brutish,” an environment in which humans were wolves to one another, and thus requiring moral and religious conversion, not to say control by force. As Ahlstrom notes ominously, “[b]etween the dream and the achievement of a flourishing colonial empire, however, was the Indian.”⁴² The original inhabitants might indeed be saved through Christian preaching, but only as long as the conversion led to domestication according to European standards. The political philosophy to which the aboriginal collective consciousness would have to adapt itself was the one based on a Hobbesian-Lockean contract demanding the pooling of individual interests. This European brand of individualism was already evident in the early Puritan rhetoric. Eliade notes that Puritan leader John Winthrop once denounced the Jesuits for seeking to protect native tribes from European interests (by establishing highly collective “reductions”) for setting up a counter-kingdom of the Antichrist.⁴³ Along the same lines, Ahlstrom notes the

³⁸ Bellah, *Broken Covenant* 2.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 1.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 6.

⁴³ Eliade, *The Quest* 89–90.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 3.

⁴² Ahlstrom, *Religious History* 100.

African context of the same problem: “That western Christendom turned Africa into a hunting ground for slaves rather than a field for philanthropic and missionary endeavor is one of the world’s great tragedies.”⁴⁴ Recognizing the conflict of origin myths, European versus Amerindian, Bellah cites the general attack on aboriginal cultures as being “. . . the primal crime on which American society is based.”⁴⁵ Joining this offense to that of the enslavement of Africans, he goes on: “Thus at the very beginning of American society there was a double crime, the incalculable consequences of which still stalk the land.”⁴⁶ Behind this lay “the ambiguities of chosenness,”⁴⁷ in which covenant, spurred by the consciousness of being a “chosen people,” and in fact a “Christian culture,” falls into conflict with other cultures. Ahlstrom notes a typical example of this kind of chauvinism (awareness of “the white man’s burden”) in the words of the American Evangelical Alliance’s director, Josiah Strong. Strong uttered a classic example of this good-willed sense of Anglo-Saxon stewardship early in the final decade of the 19th century: “My plea is not, save America for America’s sake, but save America for the world’s sake.”⁴⁸ Ahlstrom incisively connects this to the kind of missionary impulse that emphasized “individual conversion.”⁴⁹ It is a textbook example of the ambivalence of the sense of chosenness. Truly, if a people or a community or a person believe themselves to be especially chosen for a great mission, they are derelict if they fail to respond to the call. However, Bellah interprets this problem correctly, I believe, when he comments on remarks similar to Strong’s, as uttered by Senator Albert Beveridge shortly after the Spanish-American War, that God had prepared the English-speaking and Teutonic peoples to “administer government among savage and senile peoples.”⁵⁰

Bellah admits that it was American “civil religion” that finally managed to bring slavery to an end. But the primal motivation being this action failed to transcend ethnocentrism: “The whole epic struggle, as far as most white Americans were concerned, was one of sin, judgment and redemption in the white soul.”⁵¹ Black leaders such as Dubois, Richard Wright, and Malcolm X (and, should we not add, Martin Luther King Jr.?) Who would publicly bear the burden of the struggle, were at least a generation or more away. This terrible ambivalence lies at the very origins of American idealism: all races and cultures are seen as meant to live in peace, even while, as early as 1619, the first African slaves were introduced into the

⁴⁴ Ahlstrom, *Religious History* 635.

⁴⁵ Bellah, *Broken Covenant* 37.

⁴⁶ Ibid. ⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ahlstrom, *Religious History* 733–34.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 866.

⁵⁰ Bellah, *Broken Covenant* 38. ⁵¹ Ibid. 55.

colonies.”⁵² In this baffling paradox of inclusion/exclusion and universalism/particularism, Europeans were believed to have the right to enslave or destroy any who differed radically from them in belief, custom, and complexion.”⁵³ In summary, Bellah writes, “The struggle of oppressed racial groups to improve their position in America is a major aspect of our third time of trial. That struggle has called into question all the existing beliefs about America as a successful multicultural nation.”⁵⁴ Bellah does not discuss the “nativism” that Ahlstrom sees emerging out of the constricted idea of chosenness, but he does emphasize the problem that merged in the late 1960s. At this time, hitherto excluded and oppressed cultures such as the African-American, Amerindian, and Hispanic began to question whether they even wanted to be part of the system at all. Rejecting assimilation into the Anglo-Saxon image of the American ideal became the customary stance of racial and cultural minorities.

As I conclude this section, I must ask: Will it ever be possible to create a healthy multicultural society that honors diversity in unity, without breaking under the strain and tension? Canada, my own country of residence for 18 years, has preserved and developed the “mosaic” ideal into a consciousness considerably heightened beyond that of the United States. And yet, Canada too faces crises of tension between exclusivity and assimilation, federalism and “sovereignty,” even secession. With Bellah one must ask, To whom might all contemporary societies look for new and vital myths? Certainly, one must resonate with Bellah when he says: “Where community survives, culture can be revived. Americans may finally be ready to see that multiculturalism is more an advantage than a defect, [and that] . . . true universalism, colloquially called ‘broadmindedness,’ can only come through the multiplication of loyalties, not through the suppression of them.”⁵⁵

Faith and Ideology

The tension that permeates *The Broken Covenant* and a great deal of Ahlstrom’s history is the agony endemic to civil religion, the struggle between religious faith and ideology. Bellah’s desire to birth a new civil religion, or perhaps to retrieve an old one, expresses a deep need for the kind of cultural analysis represented in the well-known work of Clifford Geertz. Having written on this topic in this journal some six years ago,⁵⁶ I

⁵² Ibid. 87.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 108. Bellah is here citing Isaac Berkson.

⁵⁶ See Carl F. Starkloff, “Inculturation and Cultural Systems,” *Theological Studies* 55 (1994) 66–81; 274–94.

do not propose to repeat myself here. However, I find this discussion an occasion to highlight the meaning of what Geertz calls “thick description,”⁵⁷ or the effort to locate the most meaningful symbolism and social codes within a culture. In the case I am now discussing, the ideologies of “interest” (of the socially advantaged groups) and of “strain” (the socially disadvantaged groups) figure in the ambiguities of our situation.⁵⁸ This distinction, for one thing, indicates the specific difference between those types of ideology and thus helps to explain “the preferential option for the poor” espoused by liberation theologians. But the distinction also highlights the generic *sameness* between these types of ideology and places them within the same category in the laboratory of historical pathology. Being ideologies, both finally share in expressing “interest-laden” assumptions, the interest group expressing fear for its security, the strain group social “resentment” against the powerful. The value of this analysis is that it demonstrates the unending social conflict and even the tendency to class warfare that seems to plague all historical eras.

On the other hand, Geertz, though apparently not necessarily sharing any religious faith, offers a deeper penetration into ideology which may enable us to transverse the sea of ideologies without jettisoning valuable cargo. Geertz holds that, by way of description of cultures, we can highlight their symbols and thus reveal their deeper values. In turn, this analysis offers a potential for a less value-laden critique of ideologies as well as an opportunity to salvage the truth in their positions.

What light does this shed on Bellah’s social critique over the last quarter-century? In *The Broken Covenant* he described the deterioration of an authentic religious myth into an interest-laden ideology. Following Geertz’s argument that ideology and religion are both intertwined symbolic cultural systems, my analysis examines these symbols. Thus, “root metaphors” undergo deep ideological alterations as covenant and “chosen people” degenerate into symbols of elite and exclusive mentalities, abetted by a growing individualism. Thus, for example, the “frontier” loses its power as an image of heroic exploration of the unknown, not only through individualism but also through an adversarial attitude toward all persons or groups that stand in the way of progress. “Brotherhood-sisterhood,” because of a failure to appreciate diverse cultural identities, slides into a “melting pot” theory of society. That is, distinct group identities are no longer a value, giving way to their absorption into one system, rather than participating as a unique cultural community within a larger society.

Versions of this semiotic disintegration are dramatically evident in other

⁵⁷ See Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973) 3–30.

⁵⁸ See Geertz, “Ideology as a Cultural System,” *ibid.* 193–229, at 201–6.

recent histories outside North America as in South Africa, Australia, and the vast areas of the Pacific Ocean. According to Bellah in his 1999 *America* article, the Protestant churches, given their positive contributions, their missionary endeavors, and at times their defense of the rights of the oppressed, failed to challenge prophetically the United States for its intensifying individualism, and this because of their theology of the sovereignty of the individual. But a Geertzian analysis, I believe, would expose a much deeper dimension of the problem: since religion and ideology are entwined cultural systems and share many symbols, the churches—all of them—thus find it all too easy to let themselves be relegated to the status of cultural sub-systems. On the level of social analysis, the Protestant churches have recapitulated the problematic alliances of the parent Roman Catholic Church by forming alliances with the state, however much their methods may have differed. When this alliance occurs, letting slide the distinct intentionality as a prophetic community, it is a simple matter to succumb to the comforts of belonging to a cultural system. If Bellah is correct in chiding Protestants, then he is exposing their failure to practice that very “Protestant principle” that should characterize them—a protest *for* the primacy of faith and *against* the burgeoning system of “Christendom.” Protestants and Catholics together share a common tensive paradox: to bring all things under “the lordship of Christ” (a very Protestant theme) and to maintain the Church at the very “heart of the world” (a very Catholic one).⁵⁹

As Bellah advises, the Catholic Church as a world-wide sacrament of the common good may be in a position to offer the antidote to self-centered individualism and its collective cousin, ethnocentrism. But the Church still has a stern task of self-analysis to perform. After all, the context of the origin of the Reformation was a Christendom that constituted a mighty—and in the 16th century, decadent—cultural system. A sampling of historical literature over the last half-century reveals how faith and culture combined into a vast synthesis or “syncretism,” beginning with the Church Fathers as early as Origen, continuing through the Cappadocians, the Latin Fathers, and transmigrating into the complex systems of northern Europe, where Christianity and paganism engaged in a constant mutually assimilative tug-of-war.”⁶⁰

Thus, Bellah’s criticism of his own Protestant community could well be

⁵⁹ This is an allusion to David L. Schindler, *Heart of the World, Center of the Church: Communion Ecclesiology, Liberalism and Liberation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996). While I do not agree with the ecclesiocentrism of this work or its blanket usage of the term “liberalism,” it is an example of the quest for a sacramentality of communion as counterweight to individualistic liberalism.

⁶⁰ See, for example, Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University, 1997); and James C. Russell, *The*

softened by the reminder that their better movements sought to break the hold of Hellenism and Romanism over the witness to the gospel. Returning the favor, Catholics should double their efforts to critique their own community as they strive to develop it as a sacrament of universal salvation. What must the Roman Catholic Church undertake at this turn of the millennium in order to be a prophetic community? How might it challenge secular societies to enter upon a new quest for a common good composed of diverse cultures? How can the Church infuse new life into its own structure by including all the non-European cultures within itself even while granting them distinctive value as dynamic agents of communion? These are the questions that must occupy our attention in the final section.

THE COMPLEX SACRAMENTALITY OF CATHOLICISM

Ideology and Christianity

Before discussing the vocation of the Church to the sacramentality about which Bellah writes, some apologetic groundwork is necessary. Granting that Christianity itself is incarnated within cultural systems, I argue that the Church will unavoidably be involved with religio-cultural and ideological symbols; it is in fact a historical necessity. But how is the Church to “transcend” (not eliminate) its connections to cultural forms, and especially take a prophetic stance toward ideologies? Some two decades ago, Karl Rahner published an essay—originally a lecture—which on the surface seems to be an apologia arguing that Christianity is not an ideology. But at a deeper level it is also an examination of the collective Christian consciousness.⁶¹ My theme demands briefly revisiting that essay.

While understanding the complex history of the term “ideology,” Rahner chooses to adopt its negative meaning calling it “an erroneous or false system which must be rejected in view of a right interpretation of reality.”⁶² However, the value of Rahner’s article is much greater than his pejorative use of terminology, since he also describes ideology in such a way that Christians must always critique it even in its positive manifestations. That is, an ideology is characterized further by “. . . the voluntary element of closure by which the ideology understands itself as a total system. To this extent, then, ideology is thus a fundamental closure in the face of the ‘wholeness’ of reality, one which turns a partial aspect into an absolute,”⁶³

Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity: A Socio-Historical Approach to Religious Transformation (New York: Oxford University, 1994).

⁶¹ Karl Rahner, “Ideology and Christianity,” *Theological Investigations*, trans. Karl H.- and Boniface Krueger (Baltimore: Helicon, 1969) 6.43–58.

⁶² *Ibid.* 43.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 44.

and calls for some plan of action. We can agree that any and every ideology, no matter by whose definition, operates under this bias.

Here I bypass Rahner's review of differing philosophical types of ideology in order to focus on the basics of his argument, namely that Christianity itself is not an ideology. However, this assertion demands that one indicate what Christianity must *do* to avoid becoming a mere ideology. First, if Christianity lays claim to a self-confident assertion that faith is as demonstrable as a principle of natural science, it falls into ideological argumentation, giving rise to "an unquenchable desire for a comprehensive interpretation of the meaning of existence,"⁶⁴ that is the appearance of having all the answers. Secondly, Christianity has been used throughout history to support various socio-political and cultural conditions as if they had permanent and absolute validity, "mostly in a conservative and reactionary way."⁶⁵ Thirdly, and this is the statement with which I am most concerned here, if Christianity tries to objectify the mystery of grace, God's forgiving self-communication, "through categories and historical, institutional, sacramental and juridical forms in the human word of revelation," then it risks obscuring the real message it is commissioned to proclaim.⁶⁶ Finally, Rahner notes a temptation on the left of the spectrum (a common one today in interreligious dialogue), to give up on *any* search for absolute truth and to relativize all of the gospel to the status of "world-view functions and ideologies and to grant it at most in our lives a greater degree of subjective affinity."⁶⁷

Rahner's argument as to why Christianity is not an ideology may serve as an intellectual agenda for preventing its reduction to an ideology. In summary, he makes four points. The first is that metaphysics, as a rational interpretation of Christianity, should not per se be relegated to ideological status, since it is "inescapably given together with human existence."⁶⁸ In the light of Rahner's argument, metaphysical reasoning, though arriving at fewer "universals" than it could claim in the Middle Ages, can still contribute to defining the common good. This position becomes ideological only if it claims a monopoly on all socio-ethical truth and leads Christians to abandon dialogue with other world views. While carrying on this dialogue, Christian theology can never abandon its efforts to interpret the meaning of the common good that Bellah seeks to retrieve, however difficult it may be to achieve that interpretation.

Rahner's second point is that even an ideology is in some sense a quest for transcendence, because it seeks that transcendence as a triumph over mundane realities. Christianity, being the testimony to God's self-

⁶⁴ Ibid. 46.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 49.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 47.

communicating grace that saves from *all* enslavements, cannot itself be an ideology, but surpasses all ideology in calling us to the worship of holy mystery. And yet, Christian theology recognizes the values that undergird many ideologies, and seeks to save the truth in them. Rahner obliquely admits that this means that Christianity is certainly neither an “ideology of immanence” (absorbed in worldly goals) nor an “ideology of transcendence” (shunning all striving for such goals).⁶⁹ Rather, it is the living-out of transcendental faith immanently in the secular realm, so that its participation in the divine *koinonia* becomes a sacramental witness to the common good.

The third argument partakes of a certain irony: if Christianity is truly devoted to transcendent reality, that reality is by God’s governance enfolded in human history. Grace is historically mediated, and thus Christians must take their “profane” history very seriously, by recognizing it as “the concrete expression of the will of God who posits it in freedom.”⁷⁰ Unlike the ideologue, the Christian essentially refuses to live her faith as if it were mere theoretical historical knowledge, choosing rather to celebrate it though sacrament and worship. Here Rahner seems to buttress Bellah’s claims for the importance of sacramentality against a radically individualistic intellectual position toward one’s faith.

Fourthly, typifying his theological method, Rahner argues that Christianity differs from ideology, which is by definition closed and inclined to reject all other positions, by actually including honest and truth-seeking ideologies within the pale of salvation. Whatever view one may take toward anonymous Christianity, to which Rahner appeals here, he makes a cogent point in maintaining that unlike ideology, Christianity grants that the truth is greater than itself and is thus willing to join with others in seeking for it. This point attacks not only individualism and cultural exclusivism at the roots, but it sets an agenda for a movement toward the common good and for stronger communion, which I shall discuss momentarily.

Rahner concludes his essay with three suggestions for the Church. First, the Church, while officially distancing itself from ideologies, should support its members in their earthly vocations by which they take concrete decisions, and this must inevitably involve them in ideological activity. Secondly, there will have to be some tolerance in the Church for different responsible decisions and imperatives, which will not always (if ever) be able to claim to be derived from universal principles. For example, to believe that one or one’s particular group knows all the details of what the common good essentially is, would be ideological in the pejorative sense. This point applies dramatically to intercultural dialogue within the Church,

⁶⁹ Ibid. 52.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 54.

and more specifically, to the Catholic witness in the United States. The many pleas by Hispanics, African-Americans, and Native Americans for the Church to nurture cultural diversity in the one faith are finding echoes in an increasing number of cultural groups. Thus, the Church should be on watch against the fatal mistake of falling into a doctrinaire and institutional fossilization that mimics ideology. Rather, the Church lives by grace, and grace is what finally prevents humans from turning themselves into absolutes.⁷¹

Communion: God's Common Good

If there is any ecclesiological teaching that might serve sacramentally as a program for the praxis of the common good, the transcendence of particular ideologies, and the fusion of community with cultural diversity, it would seem to be found in the concept of *koinonia* or *communio*. The etymology of the Greek word is more vividly symbolic than its Latin translation, having its roots in Greek philosophy, especially in Plato, who understood it as a life-giving participation in the eternal realities. The New Testament understood the term in this way, especially in the letters of Paul and in the second letter of Peter (2 Peter 1:4) which reflects the Greek meaning in the phrase “sharers in the divine nature.” Paul’s use of *koinonia* ranges from the idea of shared holiness (2 Corinthians 6:14) to a participating in Christ’s sufferings, to the unity of equity and justice demanded by participation in the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 10–11). He also brings under its umbrella the social duty to “share in the needs of the saints” (Romans 12–13), culminating in the practical injunction to the Corinthians to contribute money for the impoverished community in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 9:13).⁷² The entry for *koinonia* in Kittel’s theological dictionary of the New Testament notes that *koinonia* is never an absorption but rather a sharing by distinct persons.⁷³

Before proceeding to my own argument for communion ecclesiology, I wish to cite an illuminating article recently published in this journal on *communio*.⁷⁴ Dennis Doyle, reflecting on the work of de Lubac, empha-

⁷¹ Ibid. 55–57.

⁷² See Friederich Hauck, “Koinonia,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965) 3.797–809.

⁷³ Ibid. 804. Unquestionably, this assertion points dramatically to trinitarian theology, although there is no space to enter into the subject here. For a widely recognized treatment of Trinity as theological archetype of *koinonia* and for the inseparability theology and “economy,” see Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991).

⁷⁴ See Dennis M. Doyle, “Henri de Lubac and the Roots of Communion Ecclesiology,” *Theological Studies* 60 (1999) 209–27.

sizes that the Church, whatever juridical structures it may maintain, “finds its ultimate basis in relationships among human beings with God through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.”⁷⁵ Doyle develops de Lubac’s argument that to call the Church a communion is “to recognize both its historical and spiritual dimensions in the face of the challenges of the modern world.”⁷⁶ This gift enables the Church better to understand the human heart: “Catholicity, then, for de Lubac, implies not only an encompassing of various dimensions of truth held in tension, and not only a socially conscious embrace of all that is good and worthy, but also a radical inclusion of all human beings in all of their depth and mystery.”⁷⁷ Doyle sees de Lubac combining in his thought the divine, mystical, sacramental, historical, and social dimensions of the Church. The latter quality, especially, renders the Church ever an enemy of both individualism and exclusivism; it is a community that “affirms and elevates whatever is good in human culture.”⁷⁸

Here I can not give detailed attention to the historical development of communion ecclesiology. It figures strongly in early patristic thought, from the organic unity envisioned by Clement and then by Irenaeus to the Western theology of Augustine in connection with the Body of Christ. Likewise, in Cyprian, the idea of communion represents a sharing in Christ’s life through the union of believers with the bishops and the Church of Rome. The Reformation theologians such as Luther and Calvin did not neglect the importance of communion; Luther emphasized a Spirit-created fellowship among the saints, and Calvin stressed the image of the commonwealth which strongly shaped the origins of the early American colonials.

Within official Roman Catholic circles, one event that articulated the concern for communion across cultures was the International Synod of Bishops on the Family in 1980. In the search for a more culturally aware approach to marriage legislation, the Bishops’ Synod produced a statement entitled, “Inculturation: the Communion of Particular Churches.”⁷⁹ This relatively early foray into the praxis of inculturation dramatically expressed concerns that I have been addressing. The document states: “One of the consequences of the deliberations of the Vatican Council intimately connected with the recognition of pluriformity is the understanding of the Church as a communion of particular churches. This is also linked with the idea of collegiality and the application of the principle of subsidiarity in the

⁷⁵ Ibid. 211.

⁷⁶ Ibid. 214.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 217.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 225.

⁷⁹ See the full documentation of the synod in *Origins* 10, nos. 17–20 (1980). Quote from *Origins* 10 (October 23, 1980) 310–11.

Church.”⁸⁰ Hence, the appearance of particular churches belonging to a particular cultural area led the synod participants to add: “Unless the faith is incarnated in our culture, our children will never come to see it as truly their own, not a foreign importation, and the church will remain marginal to their lives.”⁸¹

One theologian who has addressed the theme of communion in a manner touching on my argument is J. Robert Dionne, writing in 1987. In a brief section of his *The Papacy and the Church*, he elaborated on “The Church as *Koinonia* on the Level of the Word.”⁸² Dionne was most concerned there with the development of doctrine, and ways in which it might take place “eiscyclically” (from the Church into center) and “eccyclically” (from the papacy outward). He employed the text of 1 John 1:1–3 to illustrate how the Word of Life, when authentically proclaimed and received, creates life-giving *koinonia*.⁸³ Among Catholic ecclesialogists, however, the emphasis is on *koinonia*, not only in the word but in the sacrament. He is also concerned with the response of the non-Catholic Christian, who will inquire just how deeply this sharing principle will be allowed to penetrate, not only into the ordinary magisterium but into infallibility and dogma. This section from Dionne touches on my theme insofar as it emphasizes the unified word/sacrament character of the Church as sacrament. It does not venture, however, into the issue of how the Church might manifest its sacramentality across cultures.

However, intercultural aspects of the theme have found strong expression in the work of at least one contemporary theologian, Jean-Marie Tillard. In his *Église d'églises*, which in so many ways reflects the thought of the great Johann Adam Möhler, Tillard elaborates on the conception of communion, and calls upon the Church to become what Jesus meant it to be, namely a life-giving communion composed of distinct members and of the divided nations of the world, in order to seek a shared life amid all their diversity. For Tillard, “humanity is truly itself only in communion.”⁸⁴ This communion is symbolized by the Church of Pentecost as it responds to the call of the Prophet Isaiah to unite all peoples. But the Church has symbol-

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid. 311. One significant example of a collective effort to address these issues of communion and culture, centrality and particularity, is the Decree of the 34th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus. See *Documents of the Thirty-Fourth General Congregation of the Society of Jesus* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1995) Decree Four.

⁸² J. Robert Dionne, *The Papacy and the Church: A Study of Praxis and Reception in Ecumenical Perspective* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1987) 285–97.

⁸³ Ibid. 295.

⁸⁴ J.-M. R. Tillard, *Église d'églises: l'ecclésiologie de communion* (Paris: Cerf, 1987) 27.

ized communion as much by its failures as by its achievements of communion. To the question, Why do Christians lack the solidarity of the Body of Christ? Tillard responds that they have failed to “discern about the Body (1 Corinthians 11:17–34).”⁸⁵ Christians forget the inseparable connection between the eucharistic body and the ecclesial body with its unity and diversity. Bellah’s plea to the Church to be an authentic sacrament of the common good finds its support in Tillard’s comment: “It is the question of the Lord of Glory making his power present through his body. Thus the mission of the Church transcends any collapse into individualism.”⁸⁶

Most significant here is the argument that the Church, as Tillard details in a long second chapter, is the communion of local churches, each one contributing to the catholicity of the whole Body. The fact that these local churches are set within different cultural contexts gives the universal Church its richness and variety. “Theology today speaks here of acculturation, of the translation of the one faith into the compost of peoples, of human traditions, of the old religious sources.”⁸⁷ In this context, Tillard is especially concerned with the significance of “reception,” which is accomplished, not primarily by canons or liturgical forms, but by finding an accord with the soul of a people.⁸⁸ This is how the Church carried out its mission of growth in the early centuries, developing a catholicity that was a symbiosis of diversity and unity, a communion of the infinite multitude of human forms in the unity of faith.⁸⁹ Adaptation to language or to different cultures is not something which came unexpectedly to it as an afterthought. It is a “connatural” situation to it. Adaptation takes place “naturally” in the spread of the supernaturally bestowed faith.⁹⁰

The church, the sacrament of faith-witness, through the action of *martyria*, arises from the Spirit of Pentecost, when it confesses its faith at the eucharistic celebration. “Such a confession has very profound implications: that is, the simple fact that Christian communities rooted in different cultures, representing different social contexts, linked to different expressions of faith, adopting different liturgies, mutually *recognize* their respective

⁸⁵ Ibid. 40–41.

⁸⁶ Ibid. 46.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 169. It is worth noting that at the time of writing, insufficient distinction had been made among theologians between the related words “acculturation,” “enculturation” and “inculturation.” Tillard later in the same book employed the word “inculturation” in a more accurate expression of his meaning. For a brief summary of current usage of terminology on inculturation, see J. Peter Schineller, S.J., *A Handbook on Inculturation* (New York: Paulist, 1990). The difference between cultural anthropology’s usage of the word “acculturation” (adapting to a foreign culture) and the theological usage of “inculturation” (the incarnation of the gospel in a culture) is of vital importance.

⁸⁸ Ibid. 169.

⁸⁹ Ibid. 181–2.

⁹⁰ Ibid. 183.

eucharists constitutes a confession of the universality of salvation.”⁹¹ Later, discussing the role of the episcopacy, Tillard notes, “Episcopal solidarity does not lead, even within a patriarchate, to a uniformity which erases local particularities.”⁹² He further emphasizes how the Word of God, from the very beginning of revelation, expresses itself in so many traditions, from the Old Testament even into the period of Hellenistic Christianity, and that this manifests how “catholic” the Word is from its first action in history.⁹³

Writing about the universal communion of the churches, Tillard argues that, while the universal communion of bishops is of absolute importance for effecting the union of the churches, these churches have different customs, traditions, and problems, different organizations, even different “souls.”⁹⁴ At this point, Tillard adopts the use of the distinctly theological word “inculturation” in order to point out how recent a concept it is, growing out of the “new churches” of recent missionary activity, where “incarnation into the proper cultural values is still in its very beginning. Yet since the beginning the Church has spread by taking on characteristics which have come from the territories where they were born.”⁹⁵

In his conclusion Tillard effectively describes the integration of ecclesial unity and local cultural diversity. For him, in the Church of churches, there is no question of a fragmentation, but rather of the union of all in one communion and indivisible community of salvation. Writing specifically about the local churches, Tillard applies his final remarks to the diversity of cultures: “Uniformity suffocates *communion*, while certain divergencies on fundamental points render it non-viable. Unity without diversity makes the Church a dead body; pluralism without unity makes of it a dismembered body. Shall we not grasp how, with the Spirit of God, they are to get along with each other in the healthy equilibrium that “communion of communions” implies?”⁹⁶

CONCLUSION

I have tried to emphasize the cultural and intercultural elements that characterize the perennial tension of individualism and collectivism, with

⁹¹ Ibid. 165.

⁹² Ibid. 261. Tillard cites two cases here: the famous instructions of Gregory I to the missionaries in England, that they not destroy pagan shrines but rather consecrate them to God’s service, and the letter to the Church of Seville permitting it to make use of a different baptismal rite.

⁹³ Ibid. 182–83.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 325.

⁹⁵ Ibid. 326. Tillard cites here the other famous 1659 instruction of the Propagation of the Faith that strongly condemned the imposition of European customs on the churches of Asia.

⁹⁶ Ibid. 401.

which Robert Bellah and others have gamely struggled for the last quarter of a century. I have also tried to make the point that no treatment of the common good can ignore the issues of ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity. Bellah's critique of the history of the United States, and especially of its Protestant founders and developers, manifests the insight of a strongly sacramental Protestant who believes that the churches must strive to serve as symbols of the common good. His lament over the loss of the original sense of commitment and the capitulation to European-American exclusivism is still, at the start of a new millennium (which will almost certainly not feature a Western hegemony), an urgent testimony to heed.

I have sought to embrace Bellah's argument, but have also added other considerations. First, North Americans ("Unitedstatesians"—to anglicize a term better expressed in the Spanish of Latin America—and Canadians) should not fall into paroxysms of guilt and self-condemnation over past failures in the quest for the common good. We are, in fact, simply echoing the terrible cultural and tribal hostilities that lie at the roots of many of us and are still so tragically evident today in the European continent. More, we also mirror in this the mentalities of societies in the other continents of the world. I support Bellah's polemics against our failings especially since we have for so long presented ourselves to the rest of the world as beacons of justice and tolerance.

Second, as a Roman Catholic, I see it as a call to note that the Catholic Church too has had its failures in trying to live the very virtues with which Bellah credits it—the sacramentality of the common good. We should not be scandalized at the Church's frequent failures to appreciate the extent to which it has been a European cultural subsystem, and thus often behaved in a churlish way toward the cultures of the young churches. For this reason, I have proposed that the Church Catholic, especially by retrieving the theology of ecclesial *koinonia*, can be in a position to be a "sign raised up among the nations" of true communion. This communion can find its greatest strength, other than through divine grace, in its rich cultural diversity. But it must open itself further to facilitate this diversity in its theology, its structures, its laws, and its liturgy.

Covenant, culture, communion. Is it too much to hope that Catholics and Protestants can unite to witness to the healthy symbiosis of the elements that have been discussed by means of a retrieval of their best traditions, those that reach behind the various schisms to the Spirit who first united the diverse cultures into a communion and a covenant on the day of Pentecost?