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The Church's Response to the Challenge of Pluralism

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THE CHURCH'S RESPONSE TO
THE CHALLENGE OF PLURALISM

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RÉSUMÉ : En vue d'une réponse pastorale adéquate de l'Église au défi du pluralisme contemporain, cet article distingue quatre genres de pluralisme et recommande pour chacun une attitude pastorale appropriée. 1) Le pluralisme religieux appelle une approche œcuménique. 2) Puisqu'une société où l'on ne s'entend pas sur la valeur du bien (le pluralisme éthique) accorde beaucoup d'importance à une éthique procédurale, l'institution ecclésiale perdra toute crédibilité si elle n'adopte pas elle-même une telle éthique. 3) Même si certains sociologues prétendent que la société contemporaine est marquée par une fragmentation complète, sans aucune communication entre les parties (le pluralisme radical), l'Église doit continuer à croire que le dialogue et la coopération peuvent susciter des valeurs communes. 4) Le pluralisme ethno-culturel exige de l'Église une opposition implacable contre tout préjudice et toute discrimination.

SUMMARY : To examine the pastoral response of the Church to the challenge of contemporary pluralism, this paper distinguishes four different kinds of pluralism and for each kind recommends an appropriate pastoral policy. 1) Religious pluralism calls for an ecumenical approach. 2) Since a society where people disagree about the nature of the good (ethical pluralism) attaches great importance to a procedural ethics, the ecclesiastical institution loses credibility if it does not also adopt a procedural ethics. 3) Even if some social scientists claim that contemporary society is marked by total fragmentation and non-communication among the fragments (radical pluralism), the Church should continue to trust that dialogue and cooperation are able to generate common values. 4) Society's ethno-cultural pluralism demands of the Church an unrelenting commitment against prejudice and discrimination.

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P luralistic society is a challenge to the Christian Church. In this paper I wish to reflect on the pastoral policies of the Church confronted by the contemporary social conditions. To do this I will have to distinguish among different kinds of pluralism. Clarity on this point is all the more necessary since the term "pluralism" is often used in an ideological manner to disguise the class structure of society, the inequality of power and the marginalization of the poor. To refer to these unjust structures as "pluralism" suggests that people should get used to them and fit their lives into the space assigned to them by the social order. The Catholic Church has

responded to present-day capitalism in its recent social teaching found in the ency-clicals of John Paul II and the pastoral letters written by the bishops of Québec and Canada.

In this paper on the Church's pastoral policies, I wish to offer a more careful analysis of the pluralism of society. I shall examine the role of the Church in four different kinds of pluralism, kinds that could exist independently of one another, even if they tend to co-exist in contemporary Western society. They are 1) religious pluralism, 2) ethical pluralism, 3) radical pluralism or the fragmented society, and 4) ethno-cultural pluralism.

I. RESPONDING TO RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

In the Western world the great experiment in religious pluralism is the American Republic. While the peace treaties made in Europe after the religious wars decreed that each society adopt the religion of its prince and thus become religiously uniform, the American separation of Church and State laid the legal foundation for the co-existence of many different religious communities. To reflect on the Church's pastoral policies in religiously pluralistic societies it is useful to examine the American experience.

When Alexis de Tocqueville visited the United States in the 1830s, he was amazed by the intense religious spirit of the Americans and the loyalty they felt for their churches.[1] Tocqueville tried to find a sociological explanation for this phenomenon. He argued that the plurality of Churches in America created a network of small Christian congregations throughout the country that fulfilled important social func-tions. Religion, he argued, served the well-being of America.

According to Tocqueville, the great mobility of the population and the dominant role of the market tended to detach Americans from their communities and transform them into individualist eager to promote their material well-being. Here each one was alone, each responsible for himself, each eager to succeed in his trade or profession. As Americans moved from place to place and from one economic condi-tion to another, they found in the local congregation of their Church a spiritual home, a rooted existence, a community where they belonged. More than that, the congre-gation became a spiritual school for them where they learnt to tame their individua-lism, involve themselves in the lives of others, and develop a sense of social responsibility.

Several 20th century American sociologists have further developed Tocqueville's analysis of religious pluralism. Andrew Greeley has argued that people in industrial capitalism tend to lead a restless life, easily move from one place to another, often lose their social roots and become totally absorbed by the pragmatic concern of their business and the head-aches of every-day life. In this situation, the pluralistic structure of religion, that is to say the multiple networks of small communities, offers them a

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1. Alexis DE TOCQUEVILLE, *Democracy in America*, New York, Vintage Books (no date), vol. 2, ch. 5, p. 21-29.

sense of belonging and a source of meaning, that is to say roots in a spiritual tradition and an orientation of life defined by a high purpose.[2]

While European social thinkers like Max Weber[3] and Ernst Troeltsch[4] found the distinction between "church" and "sect" useful for interpreting the religious history of Europe, American sociologists felt that this distinction did not help them to understand religion in America. Richard Niebuhr argued that in America churches tend to become sects, and sects churches.[5] Churches in America must adapt themselves to the conditions of religious pluralism, see themselves as minorities in the country, and recognize that they cannot speak for the whole. Sects, on the other hand, spread rapidly in America and quickly become very large organizations. Since their members tend to be upwardly mobile, the second generation is likely to belong to the middle class, which means that they acquire greater respect for education, demand a more thoughtful approach to religion, and try to overcome the sectarian aloofness from society by assuming greater social responsibility.

To interpret the religion in America, sociologists have introduced the concept of "denomination." Churches in America are denominations, which means that they see themselves as minorities, do not speak in the name of the whole, nor claim to hold the monopoly of truth and grace. At the same time, they have a positive attitude toward society and see themselves as co-responsible for the whole.

The denominational character of Christianity made possible, for the first time in Western history, the structural normalization of Judaism. In sociological terms, Jewish religion exists in America as a set of denominations: Orthodox, Reformed, Conservative and so forth. At the present time, the denominational structure of religion allows other religious communities, Islamic, Buddhist, etc., to become integrated into American society. According to Greeley, the concept of denomination can be usefully applied even to the ethno-cultural communities in the United States. To be a denomination allows a community to remain attached to its own roots and be different from others, and at the same time to cooperate with others and feel co-responsible for the whole of society.

While there do remain in America "sects", in the sense of Weber and Troeltsch, these sects are subject to social forces that tend to make them into denominations. It could be argued that prior to Vatican Council II, the Catholic Church in the USA was sociologically-speaking a sect. Why? Because the Catholic Church was a minority exposed to prejudice and discrimination, which despite its minority status, clung to the age-old claim of being the one, true Church of Christ and for this reason refused to cooperate with other Churches in the pursuit of common aims. The Catholic

2. Andrew GREELEY, *The Denomination Society*, Glenview, IL, Scott & Foresman, 1972. For a longer discussion of Tocqueville and Greeley, see G. BAUM, *Religion and Alienation*, New York, Paulist Press, 1975, p. 145-150.
3. Max WEBER, "The Protestant Sects and the Spirit of Capitalism," in *From Max Weber*, New York, ed. Gerth and Mills, Oxford University Press, 1958, p. 302-322, 305.
4. Ernst TROELTSCH, *The Social Doctrines of the Christian Churches* (1911), London, George Allan & Unwin, 1931, p. 331.
5. Richard NIEBUHR, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*, New York, Henry Holt, 1929, p. 17-20.

Church existed as a subculture in the United States. Catholics remained a group apart not only at worship in their own churches, but also in the other institutions created by them, their schools and colleges, their hospitals and welfare agencies, their publishing houses and recreational clubs, etc. Only after Vatican Council II could the Catholic Church become fully assimilated into American society, that is to say become sociologically-speaking "a denomination," liberated from anti-Catholic prejudice on the one hand and liberated for ecumenical cooperation on the other. The reason why American Catholics accepted Vatican Council II with such enthusiasm, even though they were theologically unprepared for it, was that it enabled them to join the American mainstream and experience their Church as a denomination, treasuring its distinct tradition and yet cooperating with other Churches on equal terms.

The separation of Church and State and the subsequent religious pluralism in the USA have had a favourable impact on all the Churches, including the Catholic Church. In America religion has become voluntaristic. People become religious, rather than inherit it from their ancestors. People are not religious by social conformity, they choose their religion, seek religious experience, become active in their congregation and support their church financially. Voluntarism increases religious vitality. Since voluntarism makes it easier for Christians to move from one Church to another, ecclesiastical leaders, including the Catholic bishops, are more likely to listen to their people and respond to their aspirations. Voluntaristic religion becomes more democratic.

To this day sociologists are puzzled by the strength of religion in the United States. The theory that industrial modernization and the dominance of technological reason inevitably lead to the decline of religion is not verified in the American Republic. While in recent decades great changes have taken place in the structures of religion in America, religion continues to be an important cultural force in that country.[6]

One may well conclude that religious pluralism is a help rather than a hindrance to a Christian Church if it is willing to see itself sociologically-speaking as a denomination: attached to its own tradition, respectful of the traditions of others, and willing to cooperate with them in the service of the whole. The teaching of Vatican Council II enables the Catholic Church to understand itself in this fashion. While remaining faithful to its own doctrinal self-understanding, the Catholic Church has learnt to relate itself ecumenically to the other Churches, to have respect for and to support dialogue with the great world religions, and to cooperate with other groups and communities for the enhancement of society as a whole.

Since the countries of Europe and the Americas which were religiously uniform in the past have in the 20th century become increasingly secular and witnessed the spread of religious pluralism, the Churches in these countries have had to question

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6. See Robert WUTHNOW, *The Restructuring of American Religion*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1988.

their pastoral policies. I suggest that the American experiment contains an important lesson.

II. RESPONDING TO ETHICAL PLURALISM

Ethical pluralism refers to a society where citizens do not share the same values and hence are unable to agree on the definition of the *bonum*. This tends to be the situation of modern society. Thanks to the cultural influence of the competitive market system, growing numbers of people define "the good" simply in terms of the *utile*, even if this cultural trend is opposed by religion and by classical humanism. Yet even "the useful" does not help society to arrive at an ethical consensus since the question, "Useful for which sector of society ?" is in most cases highly divisive. The ethical pluralism in modern society reveals itself in the insoluble debates regarding unemployment, support for the poor, admission of immigrants, human rights of homosexuals, capital punishment, abortion, sex education and so forth. The liberal political theory upon which the modern State is founded does not empower it to define "the good" for the citizens.

Still, the State does exercise a certain ethical supervision over the pluralistic society. While unable to define a substantive ethics, the State establishes a procedural ethics, which determines how citizens with their different sets of values interact, negotiate and arrive at collective decisions. Procedural ethics demands freedom of opinion, open and uncensored debates, equality of men and women, rules for resolving conflicts, due process, independent courts, procedures for arriving at binding decisions, etc. Without such a procedural ethics, pluralistic society could not exist.

It seems to me that behind a procedural ethics stands a substantive ethical conviction acknowledging the high dignity of the human person. Implicit in the commitment to a procedural ethics is an non-articulated affirmation of an ethical humanism, even if society prefers to remain agnostic in this regard.

All democratic societies recognize a procedural ethics of governance. Citizens rightly complain whenever their government fails to respect the recognized procedural values and violates the rules that protect freedom of expression, the equality of men and women, and the right of individuals to co-responsibility.

Catholics at home in democratic cultures regret that such an ethics of governance does not exist in their own Church. While they agree that the Church is not a democracy, they do demand that the ecclesiastical hierarchy recognize an appropriate procedural ethics such as transparency in the process of decision-making, due process in the resolution of conflicts, the existence of independent courts, etc. It is shocking for Catholics that secular institutions are often fairer, more respectful of persons, and thus more ethical than their own Church. Catholics were consoled by the great American pastoral statement on economic justice (1986) in which the bishops urge American society to adopt new ways of collaboration and participation in decision-making, and then add the solemn promise, "we also commit the Church to become

a model of collaboration and participation."[7] At this time the Vatican under Pope John Paul II opposes this trend.

It follows from these reflections that in a pluralistic society where procedural ethics plays such an important role, pastoral reasons urge the Church to integrate such an ethics in its own organization. In small print, Catholic social teaching actually admits this. The principle of subsidiarity also applies to the Church. John Paul II has even argued that humans, created in God's image, are ethical agents or "subjects", co-responsible for the institutions to which they belong, and that governments on every level are unjust and oppressive whenever they refuse to acknowledge "the subjectivity" of the people.[8]

Even beyond procedural ethics but not unrelated to it, ethically-pluralistic societies affirm a certain set of substantive values. They acknowledge the human rights of persons and their communities, as these rights have been spelled out by the United Nations and accepted into international law. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights promulgated by the United Nations soon after World War II in 1948 did not defend these rights by philosophical arguments. The existing ethical pluralism made this impossible. What prompted the nations of the world to sign the solemn Declaration was their felt revulsion from the massive crimes, the genocides, the carpet bombings, and the brutal oppression committed during World War II. Common outrage laid the ethical foundation for human rights. The nations recognized the high dignity of human persons that demanded respect and legal protection, an ethical concept that transcended the *utile* and introduces metaphysics through the back door into modern, pragmatic culture. I conclude that contemporary society marked by ethical pluralism is not as devoid of common ethical convictions as one might suppose at first glance. People never totally cease to wrestle over the meaning of "the good."

The pastoral task of the Church in contemporary society is to recognize the biblical and theological foundation of human rights, integrate them into their own ethical tradition, and involve themselves in defending them in the public sphere. While the Catholic Church opposed civil liberties, human rights and popular sovereignty during the 19th and in the first part of the 20th century, subsequent theological reflections (*Pacem in terris* of John XXIII and *Gaudium et spes* of Vatican Council II) have corrected previous ecclesiastical teaching. These new insights taught the Church to defend the full range of human rights, including personal, economic and collective rights. Catholics are grateful that John Paul II has become a champion of human rights in the contemporary world ; they would be more grateful if he humbly admitted that the ecclesiastical magisterium is a recent convert to this ethical perspective.

So far I have spoken of two pastoral tasks of the Church in an ethically pluralistic society, the introduction of a procedural ethic in church organizations, and the theological recognition and public defense of human rights. A third pastoral task of

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7. "Economic Justice for All" (1986), n. 358, *Catholic Social Thought*, Maryknoll, NY, ed. D.J. O'Brien, Orbis Books, 1992, p. 662.
8. JOHN PAUL II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (1987), n. 15, 25, 44. See G. BAUM, "The Originality of Catholic Social Teaching," *Concilium*, vol. 1991, n. 5, p. 55-62, 57.

the Church is to become a participant in the public debate over the political orientation of society and its standards of social and economic justice. Addressing the wider society on the basis of its own religious and ethical tradition, the Church no longer speaks with authority : instead it shows respect for the ethical convictions of other groups and communities. In a pluralistic society, the Church speaks as one among several ethically-concerned institutions that wish to influence public opinion and help to shape the end and ways of their society.

A concrete example of the change in the Church's public discourse is the admirable reaction of the Québec bishops after the Quiet Revolution of the early sixties that transformed a Catholic society in which bishops spoke with authority into a pluralistic society increasingly secular in outlook. The bishops realized that they had to find a new voice. They recognized that practicing Catholics were now a minority in Québec, yet they did not lament the passing of the age nor complain of their loss of power. They explained to their society that even though they now represent only a minority, their remain in solidarity with the new Québec and will continue to address the ethical issues of society from the Catholic perspective as part of the public debate through which a democratic society defines its political and social life.

III. RESPONDING TO RADICAL PLURALISM

There are social scientists[9] and more especially postmodern philosophers who claim that in a concrete and historical sense society no longer exists. Here pluralism refers not simply to the religious and ethical realm but to the ongoing fragmentation of society, *i.e.* the break-up of a human collectivity united by a network of interrelated institutions and a set of common purposes. Today, it is argued, society exists only in name : it has an abstract meaning in people's minds but it no longer exists in reality. People now belong to a multitude of partial worlds, that is to say to social patterns with specialized ends, patterns again subdivided into more specialised patterns, with the result that people have become prisoners of their own institutional network, remain ignorant of people belonging to other such networks, and relate themselves to society only in totally abstract fashion.

This pluralism is so radical, it is being claimed, that people in each network develop their own language, a language incomprehensible to people in other networks, a circumstance that makes impossible any meaningful public debate over the ends and means of society. People are no longer able to define their identity through the society in which they live ; they now define themselves through the social fragments to which they belong by reason of their profession or employment, their place of residence and their personal interests shared with others.

In the fragmented society, according to this analysis, politics has become a specialized subworld that has no link with the people as a whole. Nor do people caught as they are in their own social fragments understand the language used by

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9. See Anton Zijdervelt, *The Abstract Society*, Garden City, NY, Doubleday, 1970 ; Arthur Brittan, *The Privatized World*, London, Rootledge & Kegan Paul, 1977.

politicians. They do not respond to political discourse, they shrug their shoulders, and they wonder if they should continue taking part in elections. The economy, according to this analysis, has also become an independent specialized subworld divided into a multitude of fragments unable to dialogue with one another. Communication has become impossible within the realm of the economy nor between that realm and the realm of politics.

The social scientists who propose this analysis argue that radical pluralism is related to the ever-increasing specialization demanded by science and technology. The model is here the modern university divided into many departments where each department is subdivided into smaller sections, each developing its own discourse, with the result that communication within a department has become extremely difficult and communication among the departments almost impossible. Here each group is engaged in its own research, unrelated to the work done by other sectors and unaware that at one time the university saw itself as cooperative project.

The postmodern philosopher, Jean-François Lyotard, has argued that "society" is a mental construction made by the philosophers of the Enlightenment who believed that human conviviality could be rationally conceived, guided and controlled.[10] This rationalistic belief, Lyotard continued, has produced totalitarianism in fascist and communist countries as well as the orientation towards the totally programmed society in the liberal-democratic world. What has been revealed in our time, Lyotard concluded, is that society does not exist at all: there are only people living together, interacting and creating their own networks of meaning.

Social critics are quite wrong, according to Lyotard, when they think that people in today's world have become individualists, each one concerned with promoting his or her own material advantage. On the contrary, people want to belong to networks, associations, tribal communities and other socially constructed groups. People love conviviality. Each of these groups, the analysis continues, develops its own discourse which allows its members to communicate with one another but which is incomprehensible to members of other groups. The great rationalist illusion of the Enlightenment, the argument continues, was that all humans shared in a common "ratio" and that they could therefore arrive at common social ideals and eventually come to constitute a united human family. The same illusion is operative in the more recent hope that dialogue among people of different cultures can arrive at mutual understanding and cooperate in the quest for justice and peace. This modern illusion, we are told, must be abandoned. Postmodern thinkers recognize only the radical pluralism of non-communicating groups and networks, a condition – they say – which calls for rejoicing. The fragmentation of society, which social scientists lament, is welcomed by postmodern thinkers as the entry into freedom.

How does Catholic theology react to this proposal ? The social analysis undoubtedly contains much that is true. We are greatly saddened by the absence of a common "ratio" in the growing hostilities between religious groupings and ethnic communities in today's world. Our Enlightenment optimism, already debilitated by World War II,

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10. Jean-François LYOTARD, *La condition postmoderne*, Paris, Minuit, 1979.

is further undermined by the senseless armed conflicts in the former Yugoslavia and in several other crisis situations of today's world. We are also disturbed by the wide-spread malaise in the Western democracies, the decline of social solidarity, the growing indifference to the political debate, and the general turn to consumerism, even if people can only dream of what they would buy if they were rich. Moreover the globalized economy has become independent of society and owes it no loyalty. There can be no doubt that we observe a growing fragmentation of society.

Perhaps one should understand the postmodern delight in radical pluralism as brilliant irony, making fun of and simultaneously weeping over the emerging world society.

Yet as a social-scientific theory, radical pluralism or the fragmentation of society does not offer an adequate understanding of the contemporary world. It exaggerates existing trends but does not, in my opinion, present a total picture. It would be possible and in fact useful to regard the fragmentation of society as an "ideal type" or a scientific grid that would guide the observation of a concrete, historical society and thus enable the researcher to discover to what extent social fragmentation has progressed in it and, by way of contrast, to what extent social solidarity and collective consciousness are still effective. If we look upon radical pluralism, not as a theory of contemporary society but as an ideal type that fosters sociological research, we would arrive at a more nuanced understanding of the postmodern world, without overlooking the significant counter-trends that still foster dialogue, mutual understanding and universal solidarity, including, for instance, various forms of nationalism.

Let me add that I strongly believe in these counter-movements. As a Christian who since the fifties has participated in the ecumenical movement, I have been greatly impressed by the power of dialogue and cooperation to initiate people to a new self-perception, a profound understanding of their partners, and an expanded sense of social solidarity. I wish to argue that it is a pastoral task of the Church, especially in dark times, to insist that human beings created and redeemed by the triune God are destined, despite their cultural diversity, to arrive at mutual understanding and social cooperation. The Church must proclaim even in dark times that people are called by God to gather in social institutions constructed by them, with the purpose of promoting their personal and social well-being. Because God has not deserted the world, the Church must proclaim the hope that justice, peace and undistorted communication among nations and cultures are historical possibilities.

IV. RESPONDING TO ETHNIC-CULTURAL PLURALISM

For many people the word "pluralism" refers to the pluri-ethnic and pluri-cultural character of contemporary society. For a number of reasons, including the negative impact of globalized capitalism on the third world, over the last decade millions of people have been forced to leave the land of their origin and become refugees and immigrants in other parts, including the industrial societies of the West. In my opinion we here witness the beginning of a regular migration of nations that will almost inevitably lead to the end of ethnically and culturally homogeneous societies.

It is my impression that the response to this situation is more difficult in Europe than in North America and other settler countries, where people have been acquainted with immigrant cultures almost from the beginning. Of course, all these countries whether they be European, North American or Australian, have a tradition of racism that has assigned a subordinate place to people of foreign origins, especially people of colour. The migratory movements of the present often give new stimulus to racist prejudice and discriminatory practices.

The urgent task of citizens in these societies is to affirm the new cultural pluralism, to set up legal structures that protect ethnic minorities from discrimination, and to create a culture of openness that facilitates the social participation of people, whatever their origin.

Here the Church has an urgent role to play. The Christian message is so over-whelmingly clear that love and justice are universally relevant that the Church must take a vigourous stand against prejudice and all forms of social discrimination. God's preferential solidarity with the poor and excluded summons the Christian community to act on their behalf. Over the last decades, the Churches have responded to this message. In the documents of Vatican Council II we find strong texts condemning discrimination on religious, ethnic, cultural or economic grounds, a message that has been reaffirmed and applied to local conditions in pastoral letters written by bishops in various parts of the world. We find the same emphasis in the documents of the World Council of Churches and its member Churches. However reluctant Christians may be to accept this message, they will have to admit that the oft-repeated teaching of their own Churches is strong and clear and leaves no room for a shadow of doubt.

In the following I wish to discuss two pastoral approaches that in my opinion would enhance the Church's response to the challenge of contemporary pluralism. The first one deals with the conversion necessary for overcoming ethnic and cultural prejudice, and the second one touches upon the Church's ministry of reconciliation.

1. It seems to me erroneous at the outset to accuse of racism all men and women who find it difficult to accept the new pluralism and overcome their antipathy to foreign-looking people. To live in a culturally homogeneous society is a good to be cherished. People feel rooted and at peace in a society where language and customs used at home facilitate communication in the streets, the public square and the entire community. To lose this cultural homogeneity is a painful experience; and people have the right to grieve over this loss without being accused of racism. Immigrants know how painful has been their own departure from the homogeneous community in which they were born. It seems to me, therefore, that in her preaching the Church should honour the sorrow of people over their loss and give them time to come to grips with the new situation. The liturgy provides periods of mourning, but after the time is over people must close a chapter of their lives, confront their new situation and respond courageously to the present challenge.

It seems to me that if the Church – and possibly society as a whole – respected such a period of grieving, then people would find it easier to recognize the end of an age, find the courage to move beyond it and welcome the new pluralism.

Most people derive their identity from the cultural community to which they belong. We recognize how deeply attached people are to their identities when we look at the many movements in the present world where people struggle for cultural self-determination, often with aggressive side effects. Liberals and Marxists find it impossible to understand these struggles. Liberals think of humans as oriented by nature toward personal survival and the advancement of their material good ; and Marxists hold that people are moved to action, whether they realize it or not, by the material advantage of their economic class. Since Liberals and Marxists share an economistic perspective, they are puzzled by people's attachment to their cultural identity. Liberals regard it as irrational, and Marxists as false consciousness. Yet what we learn today, often in frightening ways, is that people are so deeply attached to their collective identity that to protect and enhance it, they are willing to make material sacrifices, create political movements and sometimes even engage in armed conflict.

This point I wish to make is that people whose cultural identity is being threatened – for instance, by ethno-cultural pluralism – experience profound personal anxiety. They are confused and frightened. Emile Durkheim called this experience "anomie." In his extensive studies he has shown that when a culture for whatever reason becomes unstable, uncertain or fragmented, people who had their identity defined by it, experience profound anxiety and often engage in irrational actions.[11] Following the cultural mood of the 20th century, few sociologists have followed Emile Durkheim's lead. Social scientists who see nothing but fragmentation in society do not observe the anxiety produced by this among the people and hence overlook the counter-movements in society promoting social solidarity.

The conclusion I draw from the Durkheimian insight is that among a great many people, especially decent people, uncompromised by ideology, hostility to immigrants and opposition to pluralism is inspired by a profound anxiety, which they themselves do not understand. What follows from this is that in its preaching the Church should not rashly accuse of racism people who are deeply troubled by the contemporary ethno-cultural pluralism. Making people feel guilty does not help them to overcome their fear. What is required of people after a period of mourning is not just virtue in the inherited sense but a conversion of the mind that takes away the fear and engenders trust. The Gospel message, Christians believe, has a transforming impact. Since openness to cultural and ethnic pluralism is facilitated by personal encounters with members of the immigrant communities, parishes and other church groups should be encouraged to organize occasions where people of various backgrounds meet and talk to one another. Since the willing acceptance of the new pluralism is a matter of great urgency for society, the Church must invent new, original ways of communicating the universalist message of the Gospel.

2. Another pastoral task of the Church is to exercise a ministry of reconciliation among peoples and communities that have been enemies in the past. While all

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11. For an analysis of Emile Durkheim's concept of "anomie" and the malaise of modernity, see Robert NISBET, *The Sociological Tradition*, New York, Basic Books, 1966, p. 300-304.

Christians recognize in an abstract way that the Gospel assigns the Church a ministry of reconciliation, the Church has rarely involved itself in its exercise.[12] Churches tend to be so deeply identified with the people to which they belong that in situations of conflict they side with their own, instead of fostering reconciliation.

The ecumenical movement has been a place where Churches have been initiated to the redemptive drama of reconciliation. They have learnt that reconciliation is a gradual process in which communities with a history of conflict learn to speak to one another, rethink and re-evaluate their past, acknowledge to one another the wounds they have inflicted and the wounds they have received, and then, through repentance and forgiveness, acquire a new self-understanding, become willing to make amends and enter into the joy of reconciliation. In the ecumenical movement, Churches for a long time aloof from one another and competitors have become sisters, friends and cooperators. Yet the Churches have also learnt that reconciliation in demanding a critical re-reading of one's history is a painful process which some members, including ecclesiastical leaders, have been unwilling to join.

If reconciliation is so difficult for Churches which have received the Christian message, reconciliation is even more difficult for cultural and political communities with a heritage of prejudice and conflict. In recent history we have witnessed a number of ecclesiastical gestures of reconciliation that have had beneficial effects on society and stirred up wide-spread secular concern for reconciliation. Most remarkable is the controversial document on German-Polish reconciliation after World War II, published in 1966 by the German Protestant Church, which gave an impetus to the quest of reconciliation between the German and Polish Catholic bishops and which, more surprisingly, prompted the German government to initiate a process of reconciliation with the government of Poland.

In Québec and Canada the important issue is the reconciliation between the greater part of the population and the native peoples striving as they are to obtain self-government. The cultural awakening of the native peoples, oppressed and despised over the centuries, is a major spiritual and political movement taking place in the Americas, North, Central and South. This movement challenges the presuppositions of Western society, questions the ethical foundation of its institutions and threatens the good conscience of the great majority, which inevitably generates resentment and hostility. This paper is not the place for reporting the involvement of the Canadian Churches in words and gestures of reconciliation, repenting of their past identification with empire and promising solidarity and support for the project of the native peoples. Through these ceremonies of repentance the Churches also hope to influence public opinion in Québec and Canada and open people's eyes to the tragedy of the past and the present drama of recovery experienced by the native people in the Americas.

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12. See Ralph PREMDAS, "The Church and Ethnic Conflicts in the Third World," *The Ecumenist*, vol. 1 (1994), p. 53-56.

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Taking a cursory look at various forms of pluralism in contemporary society and the questions they raise for the Christian Church, I have mentioned several pastoral policies that seem appropriate responses to this challenge: 1) the cultivation of personal, voluntaristic religion, 2) ecumenical openness to other Churches and the world religions, 3) a procedural ethics in the ecclesiastical organisation, including the equality of men and women, 4) the theological recognition and public defense of human rights, 5) the participation of the Church in the public debate on the issues of justice in society, 6) proclaiming the hope that a sustained dialogue will uncover universal values and lead to the pacification of humankind, 7) a strong public voice against all forms of prejudice and discrimination, 8) the pastoral recognition of a time of grieving over the loss of cultural homogeneity, accompanied by the call for a spiritual conversion to welcome ethno-cultural pluralism, and 9) a ministry of reconciliation exercised among communities burdened by a history of conflict. Many of these policies have already been endorsed by the Church.