

modern period.

To do this, the student is forced to be more critical of the faith communities than in the past. He has to recognize that not everything within the scriptures is constructive of community and that some institutions were even destructive. Strangely, the prophets and Jesus of Nazareth seemed more willing to admit this than some modern believers. It calls for an evaluation of the various models which the ancient societies used as patterns for their own structure and the frank admission that some of them should be rejected as models for today as well. There is a danger here, it is true, that of creating a canon within the canon, but the record shows that biblical scholars are not afraid of a few risks, and they usually are capable of meeting the challenge.

The consequences of this trend—asking questions of the early communities that are being asked about modern society—can only be constructive for all fields of study. It will provide us with models and an evaluation of them that comes from the scriptures themselves. Perhaps they will not replace the ones taken from the social sciences and readily offered by theologians as Christian ideals for the modern world, but at least they should provide a healthy standard of comparison. As a result, teachers may pause to reflect and to ask if the Bible is relevant to their courses. I believe that it is and hope that *Horizons* can help demonstrate it. If it does, we will have a stronger discipline than before.

— JAMES W. FLANAGAN

### THEOLOGICAL PLURALISM AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

The launching of a scholarly journal, like the appearance of all forms of new life, is auspicious for many reasons. It gives us occasion to reflect on all that has happened to make this possible, and all that might come of it which would make it worthwhile. As one of *Horizons'* associate editors with responsibilities in the area of religion and culture, I am hopeful that many people will use these pages to engage in a provocative discussion of the many topics which might be included under this rather elastic but important rubric.

It has occurred to this writer that the area of religion and culture has a singular importance for the times in which we live, precisely because of the rapid cultural changes that we are currently experiencing with their theological repercussions. McLuhan's "global village" has made us both neighbors and strangers at the same time.

Ever since theologians began to think and write with an

ecumenical sensitivity there has been a keener awareness of the rich diversity in religious traditions and expressions of faith. In a sense, theological pluralism has become a fact of life. Less clear, however, has been whether this pluralism is a good to be preserved or an obstacle to be overcome.

It has sometimes been suggested that the more deeply one explores one's own tradition, the more one becomes aware of an ultimate oneness in faith with those in other traditions. While marveling at such a goal, one nevertheless wonders what such a statement does or could mean. Modern studies, for instance, relating Aquinas and Luther on human freedom, or the Council of Trent and Karl Barth on justification, appeal to a unity in basic affirmation but a difference in conceptual articulation. As legitimate as such a distinction might be, it is admittedly easier to claim than to explain. And as congenial as such distinctions are when agreed upon by Christians, the problems are magnified when one or more parties to the discussion is neither Western nor Christian.

Peter Berger has noted that our secular culture has witnessed a widespread collapse of the plausibility of religious definitions of reality. One could further suggest that while no one definition has yet been able to claim universal allegiance, many are competing for wider recognition and a larger following. The contributions to contemporary thinking which have come from the feminist movement, the youth culture(s), the so-called Third World, and myriad other sources representing all shades of opinion, dramatize the theological pluralism which has arisen out of truly diverse cultural situations.

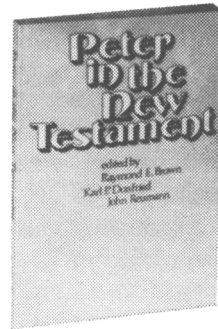
At some point the question does seem to arise as to the meaning and possibility of unity (and also orthodoxy). Here we might profitably listen to the experience of present-day peoples. In the ongoing struggle for racial justice, the black community has reminded the white majority that becoming a part of the white man's society on the white man's terms is a form of self-destruction. If integration is to be effective and successful, it must involve greater diversity within unity. Such a formula, albeit vague, might be in order for other communities as well.

It seems fair to suggest that we have passed beyond the point where it makes much sense to insist on a wooden implementation of *e pluribus unum*. What seems more likely is that our current experience of theological pluralism and cultural diversity will force us to reexamine our own presuppositions out of which basic ideas are built. Walter Burghardt urged this upon the participants in the recent Scottsdale Conference on American liturgy. Such a task is also incumbent upon each of us.

— JOSEPH A. LA BARGE

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