

Diversity In The Church

In his masterful exhortation, "On Evangelization in the Modern World," Pope Paul VI gives a beautiful biblical as well as historical description of the Church:

"This is how the Lord wanted his Church to be: universal, a great tree whose branches shelter the birds of the air, a net which catches fish of every kind or which Peter drew in filled with one hundred and fifty-three big fish, a flock which a single shepherd pastures. A universal Church without boundaries or frontiers except, alas, those of the heart and mind of sinful man.

"Nevertheless this universal Church is in practice incarnate in individual Churches made up of such or such a part of mankind, speaking such and such a language, heirs of a cultural patrimony, of a vision of the world, of a historical past, of a particular human substratum. Receptivity to the wealth of the individual Church corresponds to a special sensitivity of modern man.

"Let us be very careful not to conceive of the universal Church as the sum, or, if one can say so, the more or less anomalous federation of essentially different individual Churches. In the mind of the Lord the Church is universal by vocation and mission, but when she puts down her roots in a variety of cultural, social and human terrains, she takes on different external expressions and appearances in each part of the world." (#61-62)

The variety of rites within the Church is a perfectly natural phenomenon. It is as natural as the variety of languages that the human race has developed and uses. A rite, like a language, is a mode of expression. It is the fruit of the interplay of many factors, such as geography, climate, temperament, culture, mentality. . .

When Christianity appeared on the scene of the human arena, Mediterranean countries had already reached a state of high cultural development. The Gospel was incorporated into these cultures. There was an inter-penetration of the two. Christianity influenced the further development of these cultures, but at the same time, the Christian religion took on the modes of expression of these people. We call those modes of expression rites.

During the first three centuries of the Christian era the Greek language and culture reigned even in Rome. It was only after 250 A.D. that the Latin language regained its rightful position in Rome. From