Rahner’s numerous texts offer a word of an European said to a Corean Christian too. Published 1980 in *Katholic Shinmun* and than in *Samok* there is summed up the experience of K. Rahner with the Second Vatican Council, where he contributed much as expert at first of Cardinal König (Vienna) and then as official theologian of this gathering of the Church. He started with the conviction that a theologian and thinker of faith could make his contribution in searching how to live and to announce the gospel in the reality of our actual world.

But during the four sessions and all what was experienced in order to support the engagement of the bishops questions came up and forced an examination of conscience. We can find a first example in the consideration about the problems of a collective finding of truth,¹) that means:

How is it possible that a community and not one person alone searches truth in the strong sense? We must see how different the members of this community were,

even if in this time the overwhelming majority of bishops were yet Europeans. Faith and Church of all over the world should be represented. It’s true, there was also the presupposition of one and the same Faith, of one and the same Church, but in the reality of the council nobody could oversee or forget the deep differences, distinctions, accents, tensions and so on.

The conscience of unity and the experience of plurality were characteristic of the council and imposed to all members the task to consider anew the idea of Christian unity in a plurality of peoples, languages, traditions, cultures. Until this council a common basis seemed to be given in the European substrate of expression of Gospel and Faith. The Church spoke Latin, but this was not so easy even for bishops with formation, education and studies in this language.

The question of the actual world and the role of Christian community in this world was the great problem. Jesus Christ came for men and he spoke to them in their idiom. The message should be brought to every people, that means in a manner allowing understanding in a real sense. And we must say: the Gospel of Christ is a translated message! Translated into Greek at first. Translated into different traditions and cultures after and announced to others translated anew in the visions, the lives, the considerations of these peoples. Even if the Greek of the Roman Empire was the general expedient of communication as like as later the Latin there were also the Coptic language of Egypt or the chaldeen of the jew-christians in Syria of the first centuries.

There is no holy language for Gospel and Faith, that is a result of the first generations. All human traditions are possibly supporters of the Christian mission. But this means, that the history, the culture and all what influences languages could be acceptable in order to promote the propagation and the announcement of this conviction. On the other side the given human conditions of this sort have influence on the manner to speak and to live Christianity in a concrete way. In other words: Rahner experienced during the Second Vatican Council in Rome this plurality
convinced of the basic identical truth of Gospel and Faith in the testimony of the Church of our times.

This posed the task to reconsider the own Faith. There were elements never discussed but now seen in a way that forced a deeper research mainly of the self-knowledge of Christians and of the Church. Perhaps we are inclined to see and to consider Christian mission as an export as like as for goods and for ideas. But this is not the real Christian understanding. The missionary does not bring the faith, he invites to believe and that means that everyone discovers in himself the vocation and the direct call to convert and to engage himself in the way opened by this experience. The coreen example of becoming Christian is very helpful to understand that. For Karl Rahner the element of freedom and responsibility got a new importance in the reflection of Christian self-knowledge. In consequence he reacted with a new sensibility against all what seemed constraint or arbitrariness. These possibilities were given with the labours of the council. It would be helpful to examine Rahner’s thought about the role of election, of the need to distinguish and to make an own decision. Someone knowing the elements of spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius can perceive where Rahner found the impulse for his reflection.

But it was not only Rahner to think so. He was a member of the church, of the community of Faith, but in the same time also testimony of an own tradition. And there was need to initiate this sort of thinking together, because the possibility of translation surrounds also communication and understanding by communication.

What were they doing other during the Council in Rome? They tried all the time to find expressions of the common conviction as Christians but knowing about what was different between them. The representatives of the older self-knowledge searched the same in formulations, the younger tendency considered the life and all what is given with life, that means identity in correspondent change. If you look on reports of the Second Vatican Council you will find very often the distinction between majority and minority as like as in political parliaments. But in the church such
distinctions don’t have the same sense. Here one must presuppose a basic unity and
the plurality of expressions due to the many traditions, languages and so on.

Rahner spoke of collective finding of truth, what is not only the putting together
of different testimonies of a multitude, but a coherent research of the church as
such. The bishops are qualified speakers of the church and of their concrete church
sharing the same preaching and belief. There is no privilege of this or that tradition,
language, culture, even if there are formulations rendering more and better than others
what is to say. There are also groups to defend this or that formulation convinced
that so the truth finds a better expression and presentation. Here the plurality of
languages can have the result that at first it seems a real opposition or even a
contradiction. In spite of that the experience of the Council shows after all the
possibility to find a common solution.

These experiences moved the reflection of Karl Rahner into the direction of a
deeper conception of church with the task to renew the Christian self-knowledge.
Until this time much seemed self-evident, because so formed by long tradition and
life. Now it was necessary to rethink a lot of this and to see that it was not
self-evident as taken more or less by all members. In order to understand the
evolution of Rahner’s reflection due to the experience of the council we can make
two steps. The first concerns the image of the church and the second the new
perception of the modern world and the consequences.

Church in council

The gathering of 2500 bishops of all over the world brought together the reality
of Catholicism of the actual time. In the beginning of the 60th the movement of
decolonization mainly in Africa had awakened the sense of the own history of
peoples and tribes with the wish to develop the Faith more according to the
familiar and original framework of life, even if the Christian announcement in
missions had brought many elements of the foreign background of missionaries.
The church was considered more or less according to “Mystici corporis” as one body with many members stressing the unity more than the plurality. But the many expressions of church didn’t confirm simply this idea. The working together of the congregation showed abundance of differences in every day discussions, misunderstandings, difficulties. The conditions were distant and often unknown so that it seemed nearly impossible to discover a common result. But the greater part of bishops didn’t forget that unity and plurality in the community of faithful is not an “either … or”, but the invitation to find a common expression. The corresponding research was the duty of the council.

With this principle Vatican II experienced a movement often criticized as compromise putting in danger the truth itself. But there was to learn that the idea of clearness presupposed in such critic includes a disposition of the side of man what can’t be just in regard to revelation and to truth given by God. The problem of unity and plurality lived in the council is given by the mystery in Gospel and Faith. That says that there is something to accept by man about what he can’t dispose; he is able to search, to look out, to prepare himself in order to open his hands for this gift, but he can’t produce or make it. According to this condition he can only await what is coming and donated and what we call mystery. The church represented in the council must have the same attitude and understand itself as a gathering awaiting a gift of God. A church waiting in this sense was also a fruit of the experience of the council. This includes a real search, not simply passivity and an art how to deal with time and to have patience. No one could say at the beginning how much time was needed for a council and in what moment the decisive points could be fruitful. There was need for a program, but there was need for sensible attention in order not to miss the right moment. The danger was also real to go in a false direction.

Karl Rahner had learned in the spiritual Exercices of st. Ignatius the logic of existential discovery and knowledge. What was new to him here was the experience
that all this could be the task of a community, of a gathered group of bishops in the name of the whole church. Even if according to the Christian conviction the mystical body of Christ in all its members lives by the same spirit, we cannot forget that also the concrete mankind is operating in all these members. That means: it is not only the ideal to taken in account here. In Jesus Christ the word became flesh, and the flesh has its own rules. To put together these sides in the right way and order was also the theme of the Second Vatican Council. A common manner in doing this was not known. Everyone tried it following his own understanding and possibility, sometimes with good, sometimes with bad results. But where the members of the gathering respected the others as faithful and sincere Christians and bishops there could be not only fruitful issues but true Christian solutions.

This experience of Church promoted the dialogue as mean of the proceedings of the council. The hope to come in this way to a responsible method of working together was not disappointed. In the same time of this experience there raised the question how the Christian in the world of our time had to see and to consider himself in regard to his task as faithful and as testimony of Gospel and Faith in our given situation.

Two code words remain: world and self-understanding of Christians, The experience of church was a first element to start a new reflection, but after the consideration of the given world as address for Christian announcement and mission gave a further motive of a deeper and more theological insight. Until the council the world was mainly seen as something self-evident. But then the bishops realized that their distinctions depended of differences in Christian life due to different developments of the concrete world here and there. They came from more traditional worlds or from more developed, that means: they had to live Christian Faith and existence under different conditions and presuppositions. The Council tried to answer the raised question in the pastoral constitution “Gaudium et spes”, an almost new text in Christian tradition. The experience of church in the council was
linked with the experience of the changes of the world in the different regions of our globe.

World in council

Here is not the place to describe in all details the given world in the 60th. Everyone can imagine without difficulty what happened in Rome when the reality of the world became the theme of the church gathering in this time. You can take the text in order to discover what sort of problems were the content of the raised debates mainly dealing with man and his fundamental conditions of life. The pastoral constitution initiates a history and gives not a final decision, opens a discussion not yet closed, but encourages further steps in discovering the reality of the given and changing world. It’s true, the world does not permit that the truth of the Gospel and the Faith is altered in dependence of transitory elements. In spite of that there is a real influence not just including dependence but certain conditions.

The world is created by God and man cannot change simply this given reality. Here we touch what is new in dealing with the world in our times. The possibilities of changes are much more than further and so mankind has altered the creation and is in doing that more and more.

In other words: the sense of world develops when man is dealing with world in the actual manner. Sure, we cannot await that the world becomes the simple contrary of that what was, but step by step there can be a very great difference.

In the time of the council the keeping of creation was not yet a known and recognized task. The first steps on this way were taken nevertheless. Therefore we understand now better what started with the council. And Karl Rahner was very attentive to this movement. On one hand he stressed the changes, on the other he defended the substance of Faith and Life of Christian existence. Put together both, that was the great task of the bishops in the council. The way to realize this was a deeper theological reflection, but not all were able to follow this direction without
difficulty. And so we can explain many discussions and misunderstandings to observe during the council-sessions in spite of all good will and the general decision to come to a just solution.

The idea of the world was a theme very hard discussed. There is a concern for the world in Gospel and Faith, but there is also a more or less free side of this reality, that means an own development of a proper right, or in other words: not all of the world is given by creation, by salvation and by the last vocation of this world. If one would see it this way he would shorten the conception of world and mainly all what became the world under the different influences of spirit and matter. In the modern times interest of man was directed in a special way on the right of nature in order to use the intern norms of matter for technical goals. And in a mutual take and give the world has shown a certain substance in view of man demanding an intercourse with the result of new faces of the world. We could even speak of a form of dialogue between man and nature initiated with modern times in sciences.

But these indications must be enough to understand in what sense we can say that modern world became for man another reality than before.

Karl Rahner spoke all the time of his life as professor with specialists of sciences because he wanted to see also the natural world of our times in the framework of a realistic philosophical and theological reflection. One of his courses in Innsbruck was the creation in theological regards, but this cannot dealed with outside of all information about what is the conception of world for scientists. For many bishops in the council this was a new sight with a lot of consequences. And therefore a certain rejection could be experienced in the council against such a proposition.

Christian tradition sees the world not only as place of evil and transitoriness, but also as place of Christian life and verification; not only as occasion of fear and anger, but also of joy and hope as it is said in the beginning of the pastoral
constitution. In order to regain the balance of this image of the world it was necessary to put an accent on the positive meaning of world according to Christian message: world is creation of God, world is loved so much by God that his own son came to redeem this world and the Spirit is given to sanctify it. Above all this world is the place where we must live as Christians. The value is emphasized after a long time of emphasis of the dark side of the world.

Since Vatican Two Christians are searching what the world means to them in order to realize fuller and better the Christian existence in this moment. World in all the changes, world as the one place where we are one mankind beside all the differences. The world is forcing more and more the living generations to consider the growing unity of all, because we share what happens and what is going on all over the globe.

**Christians in council**

There is no special anthropology between the results of the church gathering in the first half of the 60th. Implicit in the constitutions, declarations and other texts of the council we discover after all a basic image of Christian man in our times, of someone seeing himself with a vocation to deepen his religious existence and to contribute in a real renewal.

Karl Rahner spoke in his last years often about future, about a responsible expectation and what could be necessary to correspond with the future. We cannot foresee what will come, but our action has influence on that what will be. And there can and will be a result engaging our responsibility. We must ask therefore if our life supports the development of Gospel and Faith, that means if we are living in the sense of the future, if we engage our forces so that they contribute to that what will be or not.

I would say, that there are conditions well known already, even if we don’t have the full and concrete knowledge about the future of Christianity and church. One of
these conditions is for a faithful that he is catholic. But what is catholic today? In the first result it means that faith, hope and charity are really alive and that they characterize the Christian conviction and life. We trust in God and believe that he gave us our place in this world, that he committed to us the concrete task of this place and moment and that he awaits something of us giving us all what is needed to fulfil this vocation. We don't have another vocation and we should take the given time in this sense.

The courage to live in such a way will also be donated when we are ready to engage ourselves practically according the best knowledge and conscience. And then we see that the inner reality of faith offers the necessity for a distinction of spirits. Perhaps this is the great problem of many Christians to find the courage for the part of their own decision, what is every time a duty in Christian life. Karl Rahner found a solution to this problem in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola in the rules of election or in a logic of existential perception. This includes a self-knowledge and the necessary conditions for that in our times. Rahner searched in this direction from the beginning of his systematic reflection, but the Second Vatican Council gave him a special impulse by the experience of the work to realize in this gathering of bishops and with them. Theologians had to prepare the contributions of bishops, when these wanted it. In the same time they had to see how the contributions would be inserted in the whole of truth of Gospel and Faith. There were many discussions about between these experts and specialists.

It was the understanding of Christian, his self-knowledge, what was the topic of this discussion, because in last result man is addressed by the Gospel so as he is, that means in his concrete situation, in his history and culture and so on. Or in other words: a pastoral council cannot miss to consider what is concretely given. In order to announce the message so that it is intelligible the testimony must accept the conditions on the other side. And that says, that he is ready to take into account the given position of the other. So he sees that man's differences have their
right beginning with creation and vocation. These differences are the foundation of life and evolution.

Shortly before his death Karl Rahner tried to answer "The question of the future of Europe". Here he reflected seriously about the transmission of Christianity by European missionaries and about the consequences for the European self-knowledge resulting from this experience. It could be helpful for others to study the pages; here we cannot enter in a new discussion of the same problem seen from another point of view. I hope to have indicated what is the topic of this reflection and the elements of a solution even for our times thirty years after Karl Rahner’s death. There is ground enough for hope. I thank you for your patience.

2) Sth XVI, (Zürich, 1984), 63-90; jetzt: Sämtliche Werke, 28, (Freiburg, 2010), 755-774.