

## Unity and Confessional Statements

### Introduction

#### 1. History

The practice of formulating some kind of confessional statements is very old in the Church. Even the Jews got to use the "shema Israel", taken from Deut 6,4-9; 11, 13-21 and Num 15, 37-41 from the beginning of the development of synagogical worship. It retained its unique meaning up to our times, when we did see how many Jews marched into the gas chambers of the Nazi chanting the "shema".

Form Criticism of the New Testament acknowledges some elementary confessional statements of the Apostolic Church as one of the basic "forms" used in the composition of the Gospel tradition and text and of the Epistles. According to most new testamental scholars one can find different motives for the development and the extraordinary spread of symbolic statements in the two first centuries of the history of the Church: the preaching of the "kerygma", the liturgical prayers, the practice of baptism, and very soon the defence against heresies (1).

The "Holy Synod at Nicea" introduced the tradition which lasted up to the Council of Trent, to conclude the works of the oecumenical councils with a solemn proclamation of a symbol of faith (2). The Reformation saw a proliferation of various local confessions of faith, especially in the presbyterian Churches, though retaining at the same time the three great symbols of faith in Christianity, the so-called Symbol of the Apostles, the Symbol of Nicea-Constantinople, and the Athanasian Symbol (3). Even in our times, although our contemporaries seem to look askance at a too confident formulation of the essential dogmas of one's Church, many Churches still feel the necessity for some prudent reformulation of their own confessional statements.

#### 2. Our Method

Our problem in this paper, however, is to show how the confessional statements of the Churches can be related to the urgent problem of unity. There are obviously different ways to tackle this problem. One could compare the many still valid symbols of faith of the different christian Churches and try to find out the points in which they agree amongst themselves and those in which they disagree. This preparatory inventory leads necessarily to a more arduous hermeneutical study in which one proceeds to the deeper question whether those differences in doctrine are differences of terminology, or differences of theological thought, or finally fundamental differences in the orientation of faith itself. Hans Küng undertook this kind of work in his famous doctoral dissertation on Justification (4). Y.-M. Congar attempted the same task, though in a more elementary form with the dogma of Christology and Mariology (5). And so many others.

This work is quite difficult and delicate, because one has to familiarize himself with the deepest orientations of thought and the real meaning of Churches he only knows from the outside (5). The final conclusions of this kind of study seem to lead easily to discussions and differences of opinion. Either one seems to exaggerate the divergences or he gives the impression of overlooking some fundamental differences in his eagerness to iron out the seemingly unnecessary obstacles to unity. One has only to read through the many reviews of Küng's Justification, and even the famous Letter to the Author by Karl Barth, printed as a Foreword to the book, to understand what I mean. Since this kind of endeavour cannot be brought to a good end without a large theological information, for confessional statements are not free from contemporary theological forms of thought, this method is certainly not appropriate to the task which was given to us in this paper.

Personally we are deeply convinced that before everything else there is still a preparatory work to be done, to analyse, that is, first of all our own tradition. Before we look at the others, we have first to look at ourselves, and at the factual tradition of our Church, at the true facts of history avoiding from the very beginning those abstract theoretical and almost mythical positions which have almost no relation with the actual way the Church acted in the course of her history. In

my opinion most theologians are even not aware that there is a real problem in our own Church. We suffer still from the deep impact in our theological tradition of three centuries of rationalism, during which the conceptual formulation of faith was accepted currently as an evident and spontaneous function of the human mind, even in matters of faith. Further our theology suffers still from the hardening of the papal, the episcopal and conciliar teaching authority and function which followed the crisis at Vatican I (6). It is typical of our mentality that we accept and tolerate easily a large amount of very critical hermeneutical studies of the Bible, and even do possess papal and conciliar documents approving this kind of approach, but that it seems not to be allowed in our Church to risk nor to dare establishing the proper hermeneutical rules for the interpretation of the Church's documents. This curious anomaly in our attitude, which necessarily reveals a remarkable vulnerability and one-sidedness in our theology allows for a greater reverence towards the Church's statements than towards the doctrine of the Bible, the Word of God. That is what I mean when I speak of a "mythical abstract theology" of the Church's authority in formulating the Christian faith, which seems to be quite alien to the very facts of history and the basic principles of fundamental theology in relation to the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures and the assistance of the Holy Spirit in the hierarchical formulation of the faith.

What we like to do in this paper is indeed inspired by the methodology of one of the best reviews of the book of Hans Küng on Infallibility written by Y.-M. Congar (7). Acknowledging the continuous narrowing and hardening process of our Roman Catholic theology since the times of Scholasticism, of our reaction against the Reformation, the Enlightenment, modern Liberalism and Modernism, Congar wants to replace the whole discussion about infallibility before a larger horizon of thought, based upon a deeper and more fundamental concern and orientation of thought which may allow the Eastern Churches, the Anglicans and the Christians from the Reformation to enter into the dialogue. Our endeavour is not one of repristination. We do not want to return artificially to a mentality, which existed, let us say, before the first Summa's. Nobody can return to the past and restore its climate of thought. But the historical studies normally broaden and deepen the whole background and climate in which particular questions can be approached and eventually led to some further solution. With Congar we believe that this is the only way in which a dialogue becomes meaningful. Was it not Professor Florovsky who contended in Toronto that there is no possibility of dialogue when we are not prepared to return to the moment when our differences started? Now it is very clear that our differences with the Reformation did not start in 1521 as Karl Meisinger is contending (8), but long before, even before Luther was born.

We start first with a kind of phenomenological study of the ambivalent function of the confessional statements. Originally adopted to express our unity they frequently in the course of history enforce and harden the mutual oppositions. In a second part we give such a survey of the historical facts as we have been able to determine from our own personal studies. Since there is a lot of work still to be done this survey has only a provisional value. We need indeed far more historical studies before we shall be able to delineate the history of the origin, the meaning and the role of confessional statements in the Church. This kind of historical investigation we should like to recommend urgently to students in search of a good topic for a doctoral thesis and to professors looking for a useful theme for a seminar.

## I. The Ambivalent Function of Confessional Statements: A Phenomenological Study

### 1. Confessional Statements foster and consolidate Church unity

Sociologists of religion such as Peter, L. Berger, Thomas Luckmann and others, (9) describe empirically how human beings proceed in "constructing" the reality in which they live. Men usually start to do things, of course, not without any meaning or intention. But the important thing is to live. But to ensure his personal security and the cohesion of the group they soon start to justify their activities by the well-known process of legitimation we also know under the name

of rationalisation. To defend now his own legitimations which necessarily are not integrated at the beginning he feels the necessity of organizing those various legitimation processes into a larger interpretative system by which the manifold and varying partial legitimations are integrated into a greater whole, which Berger names "a symbolic universe". According to this process of legitimation society is the result of the many and various legitimation processes of men belonging to the same group. But this integrated and systematized interpretation of the social universe has at the same time a profound influence upon the people who have been constructing it. It becomes in sociological terms an objective reality, independent as such from the individuals who are continuously confronted with it. Through the process of internalisation every member of a given community is forced to accept the offered interpretation of the social universe, to live accordingly, and therefore to be deeply influenced by its more profound orientations and values. In this sense man is the result of society. He becomes such a man with that kind of tradition, that kind of language, that kind of fundamental orientations of life because he was educated and grew up in that kind of society. So there is a continuous flow from the individuals towards further construction of reality, and another from the created society upon the individuals who belong to this community. Ours is not the task to defend or to expose the advantages and disadvantages of such interpretation of our sociological reality. The only point we have to make is that the whole process of interpretation and internalisation leads obviously and primarily to a greater cohesion of the community. The members of this community not only tend to think the same truths, but to act accordingly, and therefore in unity. But even the deeper orientations of thought and the common patterns of behaviour are determined by this social process of unification.

Sociology is a purely empirical science, at least according to a large group of modern sociologists, though we may encounter sociologists who definitely claim to follow the methods of a Philosophical phenomenology, which therefore transcend the purely empirical level of truth.

But even when we accept the more common view on the nature of sociology, it would be a dangerous illusion to imagine that the Church, precisely because she is primarily a God-given, and therefore a so-called "supernatural" reality, would escape the general laws of human social behaviour, as we know them through scientific observation. The Church too started to live according to "the way" Christ showed His disciples. Very slowly she "constructed" different forms of legitimation, taken from the Old Testament, from the teachings of Christ, from the particular traditions of the local churches for the great variety of her kerygmatical, catechetical, liturgical, devotional, missionary and even defensive (against heresies) activities. The doctrinal differences between Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the typical traditions of the Pauline churches, the remarkable spirituality of St. James, the variety in liturgy and worship, in confessional statements, in practices and structures of the communities, for instance in relation to the nature and the function of authority in the various local churches which were rather different and very fluent, at least at the beginning, prove the existence of a kind of legitimation process abundantly. We do not think that any modern sociologist would feel at sea when looking empirically at the few historical data we possess about the Early Church.

There is further no doubt, when looking at the same data, that the primary concern of this Early Church and the scope of those various legitimating processes were directed primarily towards the maintenance and the consolidation of her unity, which they called after Paul and John the "koinonia"(10). The whole effort of doctrinal reflexion upon the nature and the mission of the Church in accordance with the teachings and doings of Christ, the christian "way of life" itself with its manifold practical implications was basically aimed at upholding, strengthening and deepening this necessary "communion" among themselves and with Christ.

Of course, as christians and eventually as theologians we are aware that there was some deeper force driving them towards unity, which remains necessarily impervious to sociology, because it transcends the empirical data as such, or the nature of experience which the empirical sciences are bound to consider and to use. In other terms, sociology as an empirical science, is not able to explain exhaustively what happened concretely with the Church. We know that we can only understand the Church in and through faith, a faith namely which includes a real

spiritual experience, different from though not totally disconnected from the experience known in the positive sciences (11). The religious experience we refer to emerges from the influence of grace.

But grace is nothing else but the creative and loving presence of God in our life through the risen Lord and the gifts of His Spirit (12). In the eyes of faith the legitimation process in doctrine and practice we have met already could never have led the christian communities to what Peter Berger calls a "Precarious Vision" (13). The self-reflection of the Church and her self-consciousness in doctrine and practice was doubtless mixed with more precariousness than we are used to admit in the light of an abstract and a historical theology. But nevertheless this same movement towards self-legitimation in doctrine and practice was supported by a deeper inner attraction and inclination of the heart through the power of God's Spirit, which was keeping the Church as a whole faithful and true to the divine reality from which she was born; and towards which she was being moved, the two dialectical terms, remembrance and expectation which constitute the Church (14). We will have to return to some aspects of this theology later. However in this paper we have not the time to enlarge upon this theme we have treated elsewhere (15).

Our topic is immediately concerned with confessional statements. We are therefore not allowed to avoid the implications of the use of human language. We do not think that language, as a form of human expression, must be considered as the highest form of self-expression. Life is more important, and to live we need "patterns of behaviour", which as community-built forms of life follow the same rules as language does (16), and are, as it were, the concrete language of our daily behaviour. We have only to remember that every human activity is a symbolic activity (17), to understand why the same rules apply in relation to them as in relation to the better known phenomenon of human language. Language, however, as one of the many forms of human symbolic activity is better known today, and easier to investigate. Anyway our immediate concern has to be limited to the problem of language.

We consulted first some sociologists, and complemented their empirical observations by some theological arguments. Let us address ourselves to what philosophy may tell us about human language.

There is a large and powerful trend in modern philosophy to be found which contends that we are unable to realise ourselves but in and through the meeting of others (18). We grow into maturity in confronting the others. Now we cannot reach out towards the others and they cannot reach us but through the most elementary form of human communication, that is language. Language is the creature of the human mind, though at the same time this mind is unable to be itself without language. Once created it transcends our own individuality, since it became the common heritage of a nation. Language is the final crystallization of centuries of human experience, almost a solidified experience of many. Reversely no human experience is able to emerge into consciousness without language. Therefore language is not only a typical human instrument we use to establish some interpersonal unity. It is much more the very expression of our deepest interdependence and communion. It is the only way, together with what I called before our common "patterns of behaviour" through which we realize continuously our unity, and not only a kind of extrinsically applied expression of an already existing unity. This is a very important feature of modern thought.

Those considerations have their unique importance in theology. As we said before, it is not because the Church may be called in a certain way a "supernatural" reality that she escapes those deeper laws of human nature. If it is true that the deepest heart of Christianity is God's active and loving presence to everybody of us and to us altogether, then it is also true that on the existential level this deepest unity of the Church has to realize itself in a common language and a common way of life. That is what we see happening in the Early Church, the slow birth of a common christian language, at the same time the result and fruit of her deeper unity and the human source of her real communion in faith. Because we are attracted to God by one faith we look for one language, and this one language directs, defends and maintains our unity in faith.

In this light we understand why confessions of faith originated almost spontaneously in the Church from its very beginning. As a conclusion of this chapter we want to show how and why the "communion of faith", the "koinonia" is indeed the deepest reality of the Church, something we were led to neglect in the last centuries. "Communion" is indeed more than uniformity in doctrine, and quite more efficient than juridical centralisation.

The notion of the Church being one body, obviously took its origin from the fact that the first christians were, when breaking the bread, partaking in the body of Christ (ICor 10, 15-17). The meaning of "koinonia" now with Paul and John embraces a very large spectrum of facets of christian life from the mystical unity with the Risen Lord, and so with His Father, the sharing in the body of Christ in the "agape" to the simple solidarity with the poor of Jerusalem, the Mother-Church. St. John it was who even more than Paul stressed the trinitarian and christological foundation of the "koinonia" (Jo 15, 1-17; 17, 1-26 and I Jo 1, 3, 6-7: the only context where John uses the word "koinonia"). (19).

L. von Hertling has discovered many concrete forms of life which showed how important the "koinonia" was for the relation between the local Churches in the first centuries (20). This is "the constitutional law" of the Church, or better, her deepest pulse of life. There is no doubt that one of the most important institutional forms of ecclesial life, the councils of the local, or the more general councils up to the "Holy Synod at Nicea", later considered as the first Oecumenical Council originated from this same spontaneous need for unity and communion, especially when confronted with differences in forms of christian life and liturgy, most of all in times of doctrinal controversy and crisis (21).

Vatican II has reintroduced the notion of collegiality after an exhausting struggle with the minority, entrenched in the theology of the Church of the last century. But collegiality is nothing else than "the communion of faith" on the level of the Church's teaching authority and guidance (22). Opening the dogmatic constitution of the Church with the chapter of the People of God Vatican II also favoured a restoration of the concern with this inner law of the Church (23).

In this historical light it becomes evident that confessional statements were used and promulgated by the first Councils, the bishops and the Pope to strengthen, to defend and to foster the living communion in faith, practice and charity.

## 2. Confessional Statements maintain Church's divisions

It is indeed a fashion nowadays to insist upon the uniting factor of language in human society; so much as to forget that human life is so often ambiguous in its expressions. It is well known that language, symbolism, and the common "forms of life" have an ambivalent impact upon human society. They bring human beings together as much as they divide them from one another. The "alien" is the man who speaks another language and uses different symbols, and lives in a different way. Hitler wrote in his Mein Kampf that there is no better way to consolidate the unity of a nation than to drive it against one enemy. In this light it is easy to see that in many languages the word "foreigner" means at the same time "enemy".

There is no doubt that the same human ambiguity is playing its tragic role in the whole life of the Church. Only a "supernaturalistic" view of the Church is retaining the illusion that human reality is only nibbling at the very marginal aspects of Church life. Every important council was indeed followed by a schism whenever a smaller or larger part of the Church did not recognize itself and its approach to the faith in the new formulations. It is a little too naive to reduce every schism or heresy to the sin against faith.

We are now better aware of the organic unity between language or patterns of behaviour and life itself in its deepest orientation. We have therefore a more nuanced view upon the many causes of "heresy". It was a kind of "accepted" interpretation of the origin of "heresy" to posit, partly from an elegant interpretation of the etymology of the greek word "hairesis", that almost every "heresy" started from a particular, individual and very limited "choice" out of the richness of the catholic doctrine. Many historical studies have shown us

that so many "heretics" started with very sincere and authentic catholic concern about the truth and the faith. In a true sense they became only "heretics" after the decision of a council. Differences of language and theology, as those between the schools of Antioch and Alexandria played an important role in the divisions of the early Church. Frequent "heretics" are considered as innovators. A more accurate study of the facts show that their "heresy" rather started with the refusal to follow the Church into her new course in language, theology or life. Pelagius and the semipelagians, for a large part the Arians and even Luther and Calvin wanted to stay with the "old Church". It is quite more important to discover that in the beginning of the many heretical movements inside the Church the basic concern of the two parties was with the same true faith. The whole problem was how to express it. (24)

So the causes of heresy were actually more complex than was commonly thought, the same is to be said for the development of any heresy. Psychologically the formulation of a dogma very often shows a tragic secondary effect, because it puts an end to a further dialogue with people who disagree with the chosen formulation, and this not only out of rebellion, "contumacy" as it is called by the canonists. One might say that in many historical cases the true "heretics" were born the day of their condemnation, which as a matter of fact is also acknowledged by Canon Law. Before the dialogue within the communion of faith was still open; they still belonged to the Church. The effect of a condemnation was often to harden the opposing dissent. Julian of Eclanum was more pelagian than Pelagius himself. So the latter semi-pelagians in Gaul more than the monks of Sicily or Cassian in Marseilles. The same might be said of Luther after the promulgation of the Bull "Exsurge Domine" in 1520.

The closing of the dialogue provokes inevitably a hardening of the respective positions. It is indeed important to note that not only the "heretics" are suffering from it. The end of the dialogue, consisting practically in the refusal of any further communion of faith, weakens and wounds both parties. Fr. J. A. Jungmann showed how the fight against Arianism disrupted the original and biblical economical image of the Trinity in many liturgies of the East (27). The most tragic example, however, is the evolution of the doctrine of grace and the sacraments in the Roman Catholic Church after the Council of Trent (28). Especially when wars of religion or religious persecutions enhance the mass aggressivity of both fronts, there is a strong tendency towards a doctrinal polarisation into two extreme positions, and consequently a tragic loss of balance and nuance, that is, of true catholicity, so often characterized as the "unio oppositorum".

Throughout history the formulation of a dogma was spontaneously linked with the excommunication of the dissenters. The evolution of our understanding of the phenomenon of heresy has finally proved that both are not necessarily connected. But it took us centuries to become aware of this. The Council of Nicea has already some anathemas. Because of the sacralisation of the State in the first centuries this excommunication entailed some civic consequences. Nevertheless in the patristic age bishops like St. Augustine, refused during a long time, to accept any form of coercion against the heretics. The faith is a free act, to be prompted by persuasion, and not by force. The fierceness and the fanaticism of the donatists forced Augustine to appeal for the aid of the Roman governor. He tried afterwards to establish a theological and pastoral motivation for this new attitude (29). Unhappily the Middle Ages only knew of the latter, remaining unaware of his first refusal and prolonged doubts.

The excommunication of the heretics with the full impact of the "secular arm" attained its peak at the Council of Verona in 1184, frequently quoted as the beginning of the Inquisition. There the whole christian commonwealth, the emperor Frederick I Barbarossa, the kings and the princes, the corporations and the free towns, the abbeys and the clergy, every christian man was enlisted for the fight against the heretics, of whom a long list was given (30). This conciliar decree was entered into the Decretum Gratianum (31), and became also a rule of common law. Up to the Council of Constance the same decree was repeatedly quoted or paraphrased (32). At the first Session of the Council of Trent some bishops still wanted to return to the practice of Constance, and wanted a nominal excommunication for the leaders of the Reformation. It shows the first change in the pastoral attitude of the Church that the legates in the name of the Pope and eventually under the

influence of the emperor refused to include any name under the anathemas, which, as we know, were still primarily meant as an excommunication (33).

Since that time many secular and pastoral motives influenced a slow evolution, not without regular returns to clerical or secular persecution, towards a deep change in policy and attitude. But we had to wait for the opening address of the Council of Vatican II by Pope John XXIII to find the first official acknowledgment of this change by a Pope. On 11 October 1962 he said: "At the outset of the Second Vatican Council, it is evident, as always, that the truth of the Lord will remain forever. We see, in fact, as one age succeeds another, that the opinions of men follow one another and exclude each other. And often errors vanish as quickly as they arise, like fog before the sun. The Church has always opposed these errors. Frequently she has condemned them with the greatest severity. Nowadays, however, the spouse of Christ prefers to make use of the medicine of mercy rather than that of severity. She considers that she meets the needs of the present day by demonstrating the validity of her teaching rather than by condemnations. Not, certainly, that there is a lack of fallacious teaching, opinions and dangerous concepts to be guarded against and dissipated. ... Even more important, experience has taught men that violence inflicted on others, the might of arms and political domination, are of no help at all in finding a happy solution to the grave problems which afflict them"(34).

The same evolution seems to have reached the Sacred Congregation of the Faith in her recent rules for the procedures in cases of "error". We were told that even the word "heresy" is being avoided.

But we are still very far from the true spirit of Christ and His Gospel, because the secular temptation of short-circuiting the solution in cases of controversy by an act of pure ecclesiastical authority remains very strong among us. I do not want to defend the naive idea that we have to avoid any reformulation of our faith nor any condemnation. In the first part of this chapter we have indeed insisted upon the unifying function of a common confessional statement. But we want most decidedly to make the following point: that the formulation of any confessional statement involves doubtless a question of truth, but more so a question of pastoral prudence, in measuring how much tension and pluralism any given community can take without endangering and disrupting the necessary communion of faith. To understand this attitude we have indeed to return to that image of the Church where she is being regarded before anything else as a living communion of faith under the guidance of God's Spirit, and not an authoritarian structure of ecclesiastical power, so-called "instituted" by Christ. In this sense we have always regretted the insertion in the liturgy of a saint Pope of the text of Jeremiah: "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant" (Jer. 1. 9-10).

Personally we are convinced that the courageous attitude of Card. Alfrink sets an important example for the future bishops of our Church. He has made his life almost intolerable, because he believes that the last thing to do is to give up the communion with dissenting groups in his own country and with the Roman Church as well. The significance of his episcopal attitude is that he shows his firm conviction that the first task and mission of a bishop is to keep the communion alive. It is the only way to keep the Church alive, even in times of crisis. The life of the Church depends upon its unity in the communion of faith and from a healthy tension in diversity and pluralism.

## II The Changing Meaning and Import of the Confessional Statements

This chapter is fundamentally based upon historical research of my own and of a few others, whom we shall quote in the course of this chapter, too few for that matter, since the critical study of the authority of the statements of the ecclesiastical Hierarchy, especially of the Pontifical authority remains largely taboo, even in our days. As a whole this chapter has no more value than to give a broad outline for further research, a kind of working-hypothesis. There is still too much to be done before we could have a definite judgment. As it happens with working-hypotheses some parts of it are already founded in sound research, and slowly a

growing agreement and consensus is being reached, at least among those very few scholars who care to keep abreast with the research. Many specialists of the theology of the Church, such as H. Kung, K. Rahner, J. Ratzinger, W. Kasper, P. Le Vooght, and others, seem to remain unaware of what was done since World War II.

We divide the history of the theological thought in the Western Church in to three great periods, first the centuries of the patristic and medieval age up to the XVIth century, secondly the centuries between Trent and Vatican II, and thirdly the post-Vatican era, in which we have the impression that a new orientation is emerging. The breach between each period is marked by a deep crisis in faith and theology.

The motives for this division are first to be found in the actual facts. During those three periods the confessional statements are formulated and read in a different way. Words which because of their identical formulation in latin, as "fides" and "Haeresis" for instance, seem to keep the same meaning, do possess a different meaning, though not disconnected with the former period.

There is another reason linked with the more factual data, and explaining their evolution in meaning and import. This reason is the fundamentally different basic and mostly unconscious orientation of the european and occidental mind, as the kulturo-philosophical background of the theological and philosophical language and thought. Unhappily we can only refer to a remarkably study in Flemish of the european mind since the XVIth century from J. H. Walgrave, a dominican professor at the University of Louvain, an outstanding fundamental theologian, a specialist of J. H. Newman and Ortega y Gasset. An american translation is ready, but cannot be published because of financial problems of the publishers who undertook it first (35).

J. H. Walgrave took from J. H. Newman his idea of the "first principles", from Ortega y Gasset his key-concept of "creencia", and from Heidegger and Gadamer the idea of a "Vorneinung", or the "undurchschaute Vorurteilungen deren Herrschaft uns gegen die in der Ueberlieferung sprechende Sache taub macht" (36), the so-called "wesenhafte Vorurteilshaftigkeit alles Verstehens" as the basic problem of Hermeneutics (37).

We think of the commonly and spontaneously, and mostly unconsciously accepted orientation of the mind inside a given culture, incarnated in the complex concrete reality of language and patterns of behaviour. We are only able to detect their general outline by a patient, open-minded and precise study of a general mentality and intellectual climate.

We have to distinguish this view upon human thought and activity from the well-known notion of "conventional wisdom", remarkably and almost cynically described by J. K. Galbraith in his The Affluent Society (38). Both show certain, more superficial similarities, in so far as both are universally accepted, unconsciously held, and in so far both do have a great influence upon our way of life and thought. They differ in as much as the latter is the result of an intellectual easy-going laziness and basic egoism. This "conventional wisdom" is the result of a sum of prejudices and easy solutions and conventions behind which men like to entrench themselves against the duress of the reality as a spontaneous reaction of self-defence. The former could be described as the concrete and historically determined orientation of our "ultimate concern" with reality as such, and has therefore a much deeper significance for the evolution of thought and life.

### 1. The Medieval climate of thought

Let us start with the facts of theological language, so as to keep in contact with historical reality. We will not say much about the patristic era, since we are not so well acquainted with it. We have the impression, however, that they did not differ so thoroughly from the medieval mind, at least in so far as the "first principles" of thought and life are considered. But this is no more than an impression (34).



We start with our own studies. A lifelong work on the Council of Trent has given us some basic insight in the whole approach of the XVIth century to the reality of "faith". It is very clear from the way they argue and think at the Council that they have a very corporate and almost horizontal - to use a mode way of talking - view of the reality of faith, as a "fides quae creditur", "the deposit of faith". This is being more and more acknowledged (40).

"Fides" embraces the complex reality of the living Church in her doctrine, her liturgical-sacramental practice, her canonic tradition, based upon the ecclesiasticae consuetudines (41). This "fides" has various qualifications, it belongs to whatever is universally accepted by the Church, it embraces "ea quae necessaria sunt ad salutem". It finds its original expression in the Bible, but sometimes more so in the councils of the Church and the teachings of the Popes, especially those which are preserved in the Decretum Gratianum, the Denzinger of that time without which no study of the conciliar discussions remains inadequate (42). One may recognize, at least at the time of Trent, some typical nominalistic trends, which H. A. Oberman calls the "ecclesial positivism" of the nominalistic theology, the primary importance that is, of Church statements and definitions.

My experience in reading the Acts of the Council of Trent had, as a matter of fact, already been developed by an historian of medieval theology, unknown to me at that time, Dr. A. Lang from the university of Bonn whose research embraced the whole theology from Thomas to Melchior Cano (43). In 1953 he published a very clear conclusion of his twenty years of research, partially in connection with my first studies of Trent. He wanted to draw my attention to his work, at the precise time when I had discovered by myself that the classic way of interpreting Trent was wrong (44).

The notion of "fides", he says, was deeply influenced by the medieval philosophy of knowledge. It stands in between the "opinio", of which it shares its obscurity and the "scientia" of which it shares the absolute certitude. "Fides est certissima" is a well known principle of medieval theology.

"Fides" has at the same time an ecclesial dimension, embracing everything what the Church universally imposes in order of salvation: doctrine, liturgical and sacramental practice and canon law. In this context the same "Fides" possesses a moral aspect, since every christian is morally obliged to follow the guidance of the Church in order to be saved (45).

"Heresy" being largely the opposite notion to "faith" characterizes the christian who out of "contumacia" refuses to submit to this guidance of the Church universal. Recently we showed how heresy at the Council of Trent was not necessarily reduced to matters of doctrine, and less so to matters of revealed doctrine, but also with the universal traditions and customs (consuetudines ecclesiasticae), especially in relation to sacramental life. (46). We find the same mentality in the decree of the Council of Verona, where a full list of "heresies" are enumerated. At the end of the list the decree says: "... and all of them who don't fear to think or to teach differently about the sacrament of the body and the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, or about baptism, or penance, marriage or the other ecclesiastic sacraments, differently from what the holy Roman Church preaches and does, ..." (47). In our article about Trent we showed how the Fathers of Trent understood formally this decree as embracing doctrine and practice of the Church (48).

Connected with the notion of "fides" was the other terminological expression: "faith and morals". The english translation is wrong for that time. "Fides et mores" means "faith and customs". This terminological formula was probably inaugurated by St. Augustine, especially in his two letters to the priest Januarius, who was asking him various questions about the current sacramental practices of the different churches in the course of the liturgical year, as fasts, holidays, etc. Nothing about "morals", though of course the latin word "mores" could have this meaning in Augustine's time too. The important point is that St. Augustine is already connecting the universal teaching and practice of the Church with the idea of infallibility or indefectibility (49). That is the reason why the two words remained together when used in relation to the Church's universal indefectible guidance. During the Middle Ages we are able to find a few references to the central

place of the "faith and customs" in relation to the infallible authority of the Church or the Pope (50), but we have not the impression that it was a frequently used notion. But in the XVIth century when the works of St. Augustine were in the process of being published for the first time, and when the catholic theologians had to defend the "ecclesiasticae consuetudines" against the attacks of the Protestants we see that not a few writers reintroduced the combination "fides et mores" taken from St. Augustine, and largely with the same meaning as for Augustine. The term "ecclesiasticae consuetudines" had at that time not yet the meaning of "mere ecclesiastical customs", as we think about them now. They were only aware that some "ecclesiasticae consuetudines" were binding and others were not. The same can be found in relation to the term "apostolic traditions". The current example of "apostolic traditions" which were not binding are the decisions of the first Council of Jerusalem. In some cases they were named therefore "ceremonialia", but as a whole there was no proper terminology to distinguish between the universal traditions or customs, binding for all times and the other ecclesiastic traditions which could be changed (51). In the first decree of the Council of Trent about the Bible and the Church's traditions (52) the same ambiguity remains. "Mores" still means the "disciplina ecclesiastica", especially the traditions outside the New Testament. Now it is striking that a few centuries later Vatican I shall distinguish "faith and morals" in the new sense now from the "disciplina ecclesiastica" (53).

The decisive point for us is that "fides" is not formally connected with Revelation as such, as it will be later at Vatican I (54). When a medieval theologian was confronted with the problem of "revelation" his spontaneous reaction inherited from the tradition of the "quaestiones" was to ask whether there were "private revelations" after the death of Christ.

They had, however, a different approach to the same problem about Revelation, but in a very concrete way. They used the formula "fides et Ecclesiae sacramenta". The "articuli fidei" were originally of course the twelve articles of the Apostle's Creed. Sometimes they refer to the basic truths of the Bible, and later to the basic truths of the Church. "Sacramenta" referred to the actual sacramental traditions, which because of their relation to the institution by Christ, because of their universality and intimate relation with salvation constituted the very core of the ecclesiastic discipline or customs. The formula "fides et Ecclesiae sacramenta" is in a certain sense expressing the very core of the larger reality, sometimes called "fides et mores" (55).

We could give many examples for this. So the famous Caput "Firmiter" of Lateran IV under Innocent III, who was considered afterwards as something like the fourth great symbol or creed of the Western Church (56), is structured according to the principle of "fides et ecclesiae sacramenta" (57). Everybody knows that the Decree for the Armenians was a readaptation of the small book of St. Thomas, "De fide et Ecclesiae sacramentis" (58).

At first sight one might wonder why the medieval and early Renaissance Church possessed such an institutional and almost earthly notion of "fides", based upon the concrete life of the Church. One of the cultural reasons for this was that the Church's structures and life were founded and rooted in a complex but very flexible system of common law, which we loosed in 1918 by the codification of Church Law, and which is still more threatened by the scheme for a "Lex ecclesiae fundamentalis" prepared in Rome (59).

Returning to what we said about the importance of the cultural "Vorurteilen" for the understanding of a mentality of the past, we think with J. H. Walgrave that this was made possible because actually the general anthropological orientation of the medieval mind accepted the relation to God as the deepest and primary dimension of human existence (60). In this sense Walgrave defends rightly that Luther, Baius and Jansenius were basically standing in the climate of the older Church, even when some other trends in Reformation and Jansenism already prepared the modern mentality (61). Rooted in a culture which was fundamentally God-orientated they were more at ease in accepting the realistic fact, that God's salvation was indeed mediated by a very concrete and historical Church. They had not our sense of history indeed, but a very deep feeling of dependence from a

significant past. As a matter of fact most cultures at that time were orientated towards the past. The actual living Church was almost the cumulative result of a long history of men for whom God was indeed the last meaning of whatever happened on earth.

## 2. The climate of thought and life from the Renaissance to Vatican I

Our last interpretation of the medieval history and theology becomes more convincing when we compare the latter with the philosophical and theological trends after the Council of Trent at the threshold of the modern era. We can now be much shorter, since most of us still, more or less, belong to this cultural world, at least in so far as they were educated and trained in it. We are, as a matter of fact, so familiar with those "Vorurteilen", that many of our contemporaries would be unable to imagine a different world of thought, either in the past, or now on the doorstep to a new world. According to Walgrave the radical intellectual explanation of the crisis at the time of the Reformation and the Renaissance, and in our times is to be found in the deep change of the fundamental orientation in thought and life (62).

During the Renaissance the European man discovered himself, with his own finality, and the knowledge, the ethics and the ways of life resulting from this discovery. The word "natura" receives a new meaning, no more than what we are by birth (nasci) - our concrete existence that is -, but this realm of activity which is conditioned by our created existence as such, and its own natural finality. For the Church and the faithful within this Church there was, of course, still another reality, the reality of a fully gratuitous grace as the expression of our Salvation in Christ. So the word "supernaturalis" was created, or better, received a new and more precise sense. For the first time the Church adopted it in expression of her faith in the condemnations of Baius (63), and from now remained faithful to it up to "Humani generis" of Pius XII (64). In opposition to this "super-natural" dimension of life with its own finality, the term "natura pura" was coined, and played such an important role in theology that Pius XII still thought that every R.C. theologian should accept that God could have created man "in puris naturalibus".

We may expect that this profound change in mentality affected the words we have analysed before, and many others for that matter. The "articuli fidei" disappeared from theological language. Others were profoundly changed. Under the influence of the Enlightenment which exalted the whole realm of human knowledge and earthly activities, the term "fides" got a more precise meaning, though more limited than before, and also, at least after a time, more conceptual. "Faith" embraces all truths which were revealed by God Himself, and are as such presented by the Church (65). This description of Vatican I we can now find in all the catechisms of the beginning of this century. Now "faith" is formally connected with truths, and after the rationalistic period this connection becomes almost exclusive of any others. More important is that for the first time in history (66) "fides" is formally embracing revealed truths as such, at least in so far as this meaning becomes now the first and the most obvious. Vatican I, however, keeps something of the old tradition, what we called the horizontal dimension of faith; it has to be presented as such by the Church, which in the course of time is being more and more identified with the Teaching Authority of the Church. In accordance to what we have seen "faith" is finally a supernatural activity of man (67).

The same happens with "mores". In the controversies against the Reformation they had been partly absorbed by the new notion "traditiones", a normal evolution when we remind ourselves how Augustine, and with him Gratian had used the term "mores" (68). The word "mores", however, still remains, but is now more and more applied to "ethics" or "morals", implying the newly discovered notion of "natural law". This too was a normal evolution, since Augustine himself was familiar with this philosophical and Roman use of the word, and Thomas inevitably was introduced to it by Aristotle. We have already said that "mores" was not so much in use during the Middle Ages, but in a very fluent and large sense (69). They preferred the term "consuetudines", also the source of law, the "lex non scripta" (70). For us "mores" has only a limited importance, only in its relation to the more and more established term of "res fidei et morum" (71).

This is indeed a very succinct view of a semantic evolution which took many centuries to establish itself. I do not think that we need to prove that this was our way of thinking up to Vatican I. From our own training we know that it happened, even so much that we are used to projecting this semantic use into the Middle Ages, and even into the Patristic era. The only historically interesting question is to show how it happened.

As an illustration of the new mentality we want to conclude this chapter with a few words about theological qualifications. They have largely influenced the use we make of the confessional statements in our Church. My intention is to show how recent this use is, and therefore to question its use in connection with the third chapter of this second part.

Before we start with the history of the theological qualifications and censures (72), we would like to start with the most important of all, the "definition of faith", as describe in Vatican I (73). It took such an importance in modern theology that after Vatican I J. M. A. Vacant initiated a trend in Roman Catholic theology according to which the highest dignity a "revealed truth" could attain was to be "defined" by the Pope or an Oecumenical Council (74). Happily this trend which festered in Mariology, was never universally accepted in the Church, though it did a lot of harm (75).

In the Decretum Gratianum "diffinire" (sic) meant only to put authoritatively an end to a controversy inside the Church. It was linked with the "clavis potestatis" of the bishops, in opposition to the "clavis scientiae" of the exegetes (76). We think that Trent, where the bishops and theologians still prefer the spelling "diffinire" (again the inevitable influence of Gratian) instead of "definire", still more or less accepted this word in its older meaning (77).

To go back a huge stretch of Church history, H. J. Sieben has quite recently taken up an accurate study about what the Fathers of Nicea and their contemporaries were thinking of their own work at the first Oecumenical Council of the Church, at least so called since Chalcedon (78). They were clearly not aware that they were "defining a point of faith", since this terminology was not used yet, but even that they were infallible. They acknowledged first the relativity of their work (79), confiding in the fact that they had tried to express in new terms the central message of the Gospel. The authority of Nicea was, at least according to their own view, based upon their faithfulness to the Gospel.

Here again we have projected our juridical approach to the truths of faith, which is the necessary evil consequence of rationalism, into former ages who never thought of that. Our view, at least our unqualified and vulgarised view is that whenever an Oecumenical Council fulfills the conditions of Canon Law (80) and promulgates a technical "definition" we do have, almost automatically an infallible statement of the Magisterium. Happily our Canon Law is not so bad after all, since it forbids to consider as a "definition of faith" whatever promulgation of the Magisterium which is not clearly proved to be such a definition (81), a measure of prudence which was not always observed by the manuals of theology.

The recent controversies about the book of Hans Kung has made us, at least more sensitive about those juridical simplifications of the latter centuries which seems to me rather nearing a magical conception of the role of the Magisterium. As everybody knows the juridical conditions for a definition of faith formulated in the Codex Iuris Canonici were totally unknown in former times. **Indeed, not only** can we find different descriptions of what an Oecumenical Council is (82), but even the commonly accepted list of the Oecumenical Councils was introduced in the theology by Card. Bellarmine, under the influence for that matter of the school-opinion we now find in the Codex (83). There is a lot to be done regarding the theology of the Oecumenical Councils, from which most of our confessional statements took their origin (84). We are not giving any solution now, since in questioning this tradition we are already anticipating what we shall have to say in the third chapter.

But what to say about the other "theological qualifications"? Their history has a definite importance, especially on the cultural background of which we spoke. The Middle Ages did not know but some more general negative censures, as "error" and

"haeresis". Very often they seem to me rather synonymous, even at the time of Trent, though the introduction in the course of the XIVth century of the nefast "Konklusions theologie" might have introduced some slight nuances. Slowly the custom developed to establish lists of errors, which in the XVIth century was usually the responsibility of a University, later was attributed by the popes to a special curial commission. Typically it is only during the Aufklarung and the time of rationalism that a whole spectrum of positive qualifications and negative censures became in full use, though we might find some of them before this age. The peak was reached in the condemnation of the Council of Pistoia (85). At the end of the former century the use was introduced to "qualify" the various parts of a thesis in the handbooks of theology (86). Since Vatican II this practice is more and more abandoned. Is this discretion not the result of a new age and a new approach to truth and reality?

At Vatican II there was still a strong minority to defend that God revealed Himself only through the truths which Christ communicated to His Apostles. I know of a few of my colleagues who were defended to publish their doctoral thesis at the Gregorianum because they thought differently. This, of course, before Vatican I. Vatican II put an end to this view (87). Since then, however, a new conception of Revelation is emerging which links it much more with the life of the Church, though respecting the central unicity of the message of Christ (88).

The history of the four last centuries is unintelligible without the basic distinction between "natura pura" and the "supernatural" reality, and without the disastrous impact rationalism had upon the Protestant and Catholic Churches alike. That the Church expressed spontaneously her faith in "eternal truth" or "dogmas" was no problem, since this was the function of the human mind. They neither questioned that the Church was fully able to identify the respective degree of "supernatural" truth in every sentence the theology used. The worst relic of that age is what is now commonly called the "doctrinal monophysism" of the confessional statements, namely the impossibility to feel the distance between the divine reality and the human expression of it, how much authorized this expression is. According to the rationalistic philosophy a "definition of faith" was more or less considered as a kind of photograph of the divine reality, which could be improved using a better camera, but was fundamentally "irrevocable" (89). This "doctrinal monophysism" of the Magisterium was also fostered by the pyramidal view of the Church. Since Christ himself had left the fulness of His authority to His Vicar on earth, the definitions of the Pope and of the Oecumenical Councils were largely equalled with the Word of God Himself. This was disastrous for the mentality of the Church, not only of the Magisterium, but also of the faithful who got used to expecting from the Pope and their bishops the final answers about almost everything. (90).

### 3. The modern crisis, as the expression of an emerging new orientation

Our already too long paper is far from exhaustive on the matter. This second part of the paper was leaning heavily upon Walgrave's analysis of the intellectual "Vorurteilen" of the Western european world since the XVIth century. Theological thought, however, has now acquired a planetarian dimension, and does not belong anymore to an european monopoly. Modern sociology and psychology have unearthed other important dimensions and forces in the expanse of human history, which doubtless do influence too, our theological thought (91). We theologians have the nasty tendency to remain in the ivory tower of an abstract intellectualism. But we have no time to enlarge upon this theme!

We stay in the middle of a deep and tragic crisis of the Church. Submerged by this situation it is humanly impossible to have a lucid overall view of the deeper trends which are driving us forwards. At the same time there is always a decisive element of corporate choice or option. Even on the deepest level of the fundamental orientation which underlies our theological reflections and decisions, we cannot accept a form of historical determinism. We do not know yet whereto we are moving, though we have already set the first steps. It will therefore suffice if we indicate six important aspects of our actual orientation of thought. We do not think that this shall be an exhaustive exposition of our time. In choosing these characteristics we were first of all thinking of their possible application to our problem of the confessional statements.

a. The refusal of the "supernatural" as such.

There is first the refusal to maintain the division between the "natural" and the "supernatural". If this distinction imposed itself at the beginning of the XVIIth century, the later conceptual hardening of this basic theological distinction caused too much spiritual harm to the Church by its inhuman "supernaturalism" in dogma, in morals, in spirituality, in the conception of the Church, her Magisterium etc. The objection that the negation of the possibility of the "natura pura" destroying definitely the pauline message of the absolute gratuity of grace and salvation has possibly some value on the purely abstract level of conceptual thought. In concrete life it is valueless. The "functional" in human life does not necessarily evacuate the gratuitous. Education in a climate of love and warmth has doubtless a functional role to play in the integration of a human personality, and nevertheless this climate is necessarily and constitutionally a spontaneous and gratuitous creation of parental love. This love is necessary for the expansion of any human personality, and it remains a gift of freedom. If this is true among human beings, what to say about God's love, which, since it is fully transcendent, reaches us at the very source of our freedom, where the depth of our person flows out of His creative hands (92).

Positively P. Schoonenberg and J. B. Metz defend that the property of the divine activity is to posit the creation, especially the human creature in his own identity and freedom. Schoonenberg coined the expression: "our divinisation is our humanisation", and "whatever God gives, we do not have it, but we are it." (93). Our time is obsessed by our human reality and our earthly responsibility, again in reaction against a alienated form of spirituality, even so much that too many feel rather ready to give up their relation to God, if they only are able to save their relation with their fellow-men. This extreme position is, of course, revealing for the deeper trend of our time. Therefore many theologians have succumbed to the temptation of a sloganlike preoccupation with "secularity", and "secularisation", so much that they wanted to extract "a theology of secularisation". We have only to read the criticisms of sociologists and psychologists to become aware of this sometimes naive infatuation (94). A little less "secularisation", and a little more "realism" would help our theology immensely. There is probably no more ambiguous term in modern theology, even if it is in fashion (95).

Whatever this may be, we want to find God in this world, and among our fellow-men. And that is indeed the message of the Gospel.

b. The corporate nature of man's existence.

This trend has been enhanced by the many philosophical and phenomenological approaches to the corporate nature of man's existence, either in the philosophy of language, or of personalism, or of corporeity etc.

This modern evolution, especially then on the level of Fundamental Theology is brilliantly exemplified by the steady evolution of J. B. Metz's thought. Starting with the anthropological and transcendental theology of his master, Karl Rahner in the beginning of the sixties, he first fell, as many others, for the abstract "theology of secularisation" of Fr. Gogarten, and from under the influence of J. Moltmann, discovered his "political theology". Under the heavy criticism of a catholic layman, Prof. Dr. Hans Maier, ordinary professor of political sciences in Munich (96), he introduced into his Fundamental Theology the, at first sight, odd notion of "memoria Christi" (97) of which the Church is the public and visible historical form (98).

In this new approach Metz rediscovered the dimension of our faith we were confronted with in the first chapter of this second part, the importance of the spiritual experience of the Church throughout history, as cumulatively expressed in her language, her doctrine and her way of life, what we were used to calling tradition, and this in the structure of our concrete act of faith. Our time in reflecting about the act of faith is of course retaining the traditional aspect of the "assensus fidei", but existentialized by the element of "Entcheidung" and "Ereignis" so dear to Bultmann and existential thought. But we are still enclosed in our subjectivity, the "fides qua". Metz corrects this subjectivism by the

historical dimension of the "memoria", the living Church to which we belong and which shapes the human expression of our faith through her language, doctrine and life, in fidelity to the "memoria Christi". Every act of faith is only real now, but a "now" which looks at the past of Christ's salvation, and so is situated in the authentic christian freedom, looking into the future, the Christ of the completion of our history.

In relation to our topic, the "confessional statements" have to be the public and condensed expression of this "memoria". They exercise their ecclesial function within this living "memoria".

#### c. The historical dimension of man

There is another important fundamental orientation of modern thought. We have chosen decidedly for the historical dimension of man's existence. We could not even do otherwise, since for the first time in history the movement of history has accelerated in such a way that we are talking of "future shock".

This means that human life, and therefore that our life of faith, is not only in evolution and growth, but that every expression of faith in doctrine and life is situated. We formulate our faith out of a rich past, and reaching for a God-given future, but in the concrete, pluralistic and evolving situation in which we actually stay. Confessional statements are situated too. They are not only formulated in a particular language, within a given context of thought and life, but mostly as a direct answer to a given crisis or problem. Every human language belongs to a dialogal context. That any "definition of faith" would acquire by force of the "definition" of the Church a kind of super-historical and absolute value in sheer supernaturalism, and I am afraid, juridism.

Every authentic formulation of the Church is according to M. D. Chenu "an occasional, partial and utilitarian intervention, not an organic and intern research of the revealed truth" (99). We shall return to this description in the final conclusion.

Another evident conclusion of this approach is that a statement of the Church is primarily valid for its contemporaries, and has only a secondary, though very important significance for later generations. In the meantime the situation has changed, the crisis, and therefore the question has disappeared, and the language ask for an interpretation (100). But this "confessional statement" necessarily still belongs to the public "memoria" of the living Church, and therefore continues its function, though in a very different context and in a different way. The flat "univocity" of a Denzinger-theology is disastrous (100a).

#### d. The corporate nature of our activity

A fourth characteristic of our fundamental orientation, evidently related to what we have already seen, is the corporate dimension and significance of our **activity**. Human beings do find truth (101), discover the meaning of life, the true values of morals together. Vatican II has reintroduced the original tradition of the "communion of faith" and "the collegiality" as the deepest aspect of the reality of the Church.

This makes that the Magisterium is unable to formulate the faith, independently of the life of faith in the whole Church. At the same time we are now reintroducing a structural aspect of every formulation of faith, well known to the Russian Church (102), what we call the "reception" by the whole Church of any confessional statement. If we are sincere in accepting the fact that other christian denomination partake in the life of the Church, this aspect of "reception" would have also its own function with them (102a).

The value of the four first Oecumenical Councils, acknowledged as the Gospel in the Patristic era, and recognized by most of the Christian Churches, is of course greater than that of Trent or Vatican I, which were not "received" by the East. We are by no means defending the idea that Trent or Vatican I are therefore valueless. "Reception" is not a juridical term, but a corporate term, belonging to the reality of the Church's living communion. It is therefore a question of more or less, of

an hierarchy, not only in the christian truths, but also in the confessional statements of the Church's Councils, and not a question of either black or white.

This reception continues to function during history. Important statements of the past can lose their "corporate relevance", because they were too narrowly linked to a particular situation. So for instance the decrees of the Council of Vienne about aristotelism (103). Not that they are "invalidated" - again a juridical term -, but they occupy a proper place and function in the "memoria" of the Church, established by the actual communion of faith in this particular moment of history.

#### e. Infallibility or indefectibility?

Further our time cannot believe in any true infallibility of man. Our technical age and the scientific honesty of science has made us all too sensitive to the many possibilities of error in man. There is certainly no automatic guarantee against error. In the realm of faith this would be a return to an artificial and heteronomous supernaturalism .

We are also profoundly conscious of the precariousness of human truth. This is the more so with divine truth, since any human formulation of it necessarily has to come short of the richness and fullness of the divine reality. If we are allowed to talk of infallibility in relation to man, it must be first a qualification of an activity, and not of a sentence, and that under the guidance of the infallible God. Infallibility is a property of a free person; never of a sentence, since any sentence, as such, without its context, can be understood and read in many different ways (104). When ever we are allowed a participated form of infallibility, then this infallibility does not lie so much in the formulation itself, but in the concrete intention, the affirmative direction, the so-called "signification" of this particular formulation (105).

Whenever we speak in this context of "irrevocability", this has no meaning for our time at all but in a very special sense. Every confessional statement to which we may attribute a form of "irrevocability" belongs to the living fidelity of the "memoria" of the Church, who out of this fidelity, and under the continuous guidance of the Spirit remains aimed and directed towards the coming Christ. The "irrevocability" means that notwithstanding her errors and sins the Church remains indeed under the guidance of the Spirit, and therefore shall always fundamentally be witness to the real Christ and the true God. So "irrevocability" can only mean that any confessional statement is able to inspire the actual faith within the living "memoria" of the Church, and secondly that no future statement of the Church shall ever radically evacuate or invalidate the "signification" of a former statement.

That is the reason why more theologians today want to return to the term "indefectibility" which as a matter of fact, was accepted by Vatican II (106). Finally when we speak of the Church, we always think firstly and primarily of the living communion of the People of God, within which the Magisterium has the ministry of authority. This was the idea Newman exposed in his "On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Faith" (107).

#### f. The organic unity of man's and God's activity

Finally our time has chosen for the organic unity of soul and body, of action and thought, and this in the living unity of God's creation and salvation. It is only in our activity that we can experience grace, in our acceptance of it (108). That is the reason why any reflection about the meaning and the content of our faith at any particular moment of history must have some relation to experience, and therefore with activity in faith and charity. That is the reason why within certain limits "orthopraxy" has to come before "orthodoxy". It is only in the actual reality of faith that its meaning reveals itself. Here again the dialectical tension between "memoria" and "expectatio" has to function. Not that there can exist "pure" activity, which then has to be "legitimated" by whatever "dogmatic rationalisation" we favour to invoke. The interaction between reflection and experimentation in life remains untouched, but the important fact that we want to stress that there is no theological knowledge, outside the spiritual experience of



grace, and since the experience can only be found in actual life, life of faith is necessary for a further reflection in the actual formulation of the faith.

### Conclusion

We have insisted very much upon the importance of an historical study of the facts. History has the important function to free us from the "conventional wisdom" behind which even theologians tend to entrench themselves. That is probably what Metz means when he repeatedly mentions the "dangerous and challenging and liberating" force of the memoria Christi, stored and lovingly treasured in the Church, her teachings, her doctrinal traditions, her councils and pontifical decrees and teachings, her liturgical life and moral experience and wisdom.

But we have done only the half of the necessary work. We should now start with the deeper philosophically founded hermeneutics of the conciliar documents and teachings of the Church, the confessional statements we are talking about (109). But this would ask for another paper.

Our intention was primarily to initiate a real "examination of our theological conscience", before we risk to address ourselves to our brethren in the faith, separated by century-old differences of doctrine.

### III. General Conclusion: The mission of the Magisterium

Our historical approach and tentative survey has probably raised a fundamental question to which occasionally we have alluded in the course of this paper: what is precisely the function of the Teaching Authority in the Church?

There is no doubt that our theology of the Magisterium since the XVIth century has suffered a lot from the continuous attacks inside and outside the Church. As we said in the beginning, this situation of controversy does not favour a balanced vision. Therefore this theology is being obscured by many myths, that is, by an abstract and theoretical systematic conceptual structure which, at least in our experience, has very few contacts with real life in the Church.

We are most decidedly not going to embark upon writing another paper, though that is what we would need. I only want to sketch a few outlines for a more realistic solution, a solution which corresponds much more to the traditions of the Church before the Reformation.

When Card. Van Rossum, the Prefect of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide at the beginning of this century wrote his De essentia Sacramenti Ordinis in 1914, he added a most remarkable Introduction to his work, at least for a curial cardinal. In solving the difficult question of the essence of the Priesthood he warned his readers that he would not at all refer to any decision of the roman Congregations in the matter. Their decisions about practical questions were necessarily governed by the principle of "sacramental tutiorism", and therefore not relevant to solve a question of truth. They were an expression of ecclesiastic prudence and wisdom (110).

My question is whether this principle would not have to be generalised to all the acts of the Magisterium, of course in different ways according to the nature of the decision. In other words my question is whether some similar pastoral and prudential concern is not primarily at work in all the statements of the Church, pastoral and doctrinal, either from the ordinary or of the extraordinary Magisterium of the Hierarchy. No doubt there ought to be a real difference between a "definition of faith" and a concrete decree of a Congregation, between a symbol of faith, formulated in an Oecumenical Council and an instruction for practical purposes. But fundamentally there would only be a difference of quality, not of nature.

We were in the course of this research deeply impressed by a unique text of the young M. -D. Chenu, in which we recognized the unmistakable touch of reality.

He posits the principle: "Actually, as the history of the Church witnesses, and recently the deliberations at the Council of the Vatican (I) showed, the definition, as act of the extraordinary Magisterium, originates from a defensive reaction against heresy. It is a judicial act of the Church over a delict against the faith, and therefore an occasional, partial and utilitarian (pastoral or tutioristical?) intervention, and not an organic and intern research of the revealed truth" (111). This was written in a short review of a few pages (112). I have looked desperately for another article of Fr. Chenu where he might have expanded and founded this remark, so realistic and honest. I did not find anything.

Let us try a solution according to his lines. This solution depends obviously from the vision upon the very nature of the Church. In the well-known and up to recent times commonly accepted pyramidal and exclusively hierarchical view of the Church, only the Hierarchy has the competence to solve any question of faith, and this formally as a question of truth, that is as an authentic and true formulation of the content of the Revelation.

My fundamental objection, leaving out the discussion about the nature of the Church, is based on a question of fact. This view supposes that the Hierarchy does possess a special "organon" or "sense" or "light" which enables it to discover some aspects of the truth, impervious to the other members of the Church. Practically this view would imply a kind of inspiration or even of revelation. The classical Fundamental Theology, even in the last centuries, has never accepted this. Mgr. Gasser, the president of the theological commission at Vatican I has explicitly excluded this implication from the definition of the infallibility of the Pope. Looking again at the facts there is nothing to favour this solution. Nevertheless many bishops act, as if this were true.

When we now accept that the deepest nature of the Church resides in the communion of faith under the guidance of the one Spirit, a communion which continuously is being renewed and activated by the confrontation of the "sensus fidei" of all her members in dialogue, work and life, then we must see the Magisterium in a different light.

In this vision the primary mission of the Magisterium is to maintain, to secure, to defend and to foster this living communion. There is no higher goal for his concern and pastoral care. The history of the Church especially that of the Councils, show that this communion was frequently threatened by dissent in doctrine, by an urgent need for reform, and by the Church's divisions. Therefore we had doctrinal Councils, reform Councils and Councils for reunion, or better Councils in which one of those three aspects predominated, without excluding the others.

If this is the primary function of the Episcopate in union with the Pope, then this function is predominantly pastoral, and that in a very particular sense. Doubtless this pastoral responsibility is deeply concerned with the question of truth.

But solving a question of truth is not an easy task, especially truth about God and His dealings with man. It is not a question of sound administration. Neither a question of holding on to whatever a particular bishop happened to learn in his seminary years. Nor is it a question of clean juridical management. We have seen that it can not emerge from a personal inspiration or revelation.

Solving a question of truth is an arduous hermeneutical task which entails time, method and study. Most of the bishops have not the training nor the time. The same must be said for solving technical questions of pastoral care. This too can only be done by specialists trained in view of solving those practical questions. We say "solving". This is presumptuous. Normally the technician, either the theologian or the pastoral specialist can only help towards a solution, which has to mature and to grow out of the Church's experience.

It is clear that the bishop, the theologian and the pastoral specialist has to work together, each according his competence and capacities. It is Fr. Schillenbeeckx who once wrote that the tragedy of our modern Church resides in

the fact that the three most important functions in the Church, the government, the theological reflection and the pastoral research has been merged into one competence, mostly that of the bishop. But their collaboration entails, because of the very nature of the Church as a communion, that the three of them are prepared to listen to what the Spirit is prompting in the People of God, to the "sensus fidei" of the whole Body.

Have we left something to be done to the bishop? Absolutely, and the most important task for that matter, but reduced to the realistic and true situation of the teaching authority as such. In most cases neither the theologians nor the pastoral specialists can "solve" an existing controversy, that is, leading it to that kind of answer to which the whole Church agrees. What can the bishop do, confronted with such a dilemma? In most cases he will have to use a kind of pastoral tutiorism, especially in the important questions. The Councils are not in a better situation. The memory of Vatican II is still recent enough to know how arduous a solution is in a Council. We know how Vatican II included in his texts two or three trends taken from the existing theological schools. The same was done at the Council of Trent. The pastoral solution at that time of crisis, controversy and obscurity was to determine and establish clearly the common doctrine and practice of the Church at that time.

I am perfectly conscious that some of us educated with the illusion that the Roman Catholic Church, because of the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is a privileged body of men, who contrary to the common fate of human existence, does possess the blessed prerogative to receive from their bishops clear cut, definite and irrevocable solutions to the most difficult questions there are in human life, the questions about God and His dealings with men.

The theologians have to look for truth in a methodical and scientific way. The pastoral specialists have their sociology, psychology, their statistics and experiments. The bishops have their ministry of authority and guidance. The truth, however, comes from elsewhere. To imagine that one of those three groups of responsibilities would be able to master the divine truth by their own power, would be a most crude doctrinal pelagianism. The truth comes from the living presence of God in the whole Body, from the attraction and inclination of grace which is the continuous source of the "sensus fidei". This source of truth irrigates the research of the theologians, the experiments of the pastoral specialist and the Church's government by the bishops, in so far as each of them, and all of them together remain open to the moving suggestions of the Spirit of God. That this Church is "indefectible" is only the gift of God. No automatic application of some canons of the Codex can guarantee the infallibility of a statement. No ordination to the bishophood is again able to guarantee an automatic illumination of the mind. But each member of the Church has his own charisma, and his own responsibility, and all belong to the one Spirit.

This vision of the Church, liberated from false privileges and illusions shall bring the Church nearer to the world, when the sense of man's limitations and arduous search for truth is so deep and real. This christian humility shall bring us nearer to our brethren of the other Christian Churches, where this conviction is generally deeper than in ours. This vision shall finally help us through this particular moment of crisis and darkness we are now confronted with in the Church. With more sincerity and urgency than before we shall be able to pray with the disciples of Emmaus: "Stay with us, Lord, for the night draws on, and the day is almost over" (Luk 24:29).

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## Footnotes

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3. "Bekennnis" and "Bekennnisschriften", RGK<sup>3</sup>, I, 988-1012 and 1012-1017; "Bekennnisschriften", Weltkichenlexikon, Stuttgart, 1960, 135-139 and LThK II, 140-152 with good bibliography. See also "Confessions of faith, Protestant", New Catholic Encyclopedia, IV, 137-141.
4. Hans Kung, Justification, London, 1964. See also Erwin Iserloch, Gratia und Donum Rechtfertigung und Heiligung, nach Luther's Schrift "Wider den Löwener Theologen Latorus" (1521), Catholica 24(1970) 67-83.
5. Yves-M. Congar, Le Christ, Marie et l'Eglise, Bruges, 1952.
6. M.-D. Chenu, Positions de Théologie, RevScPhilThéol 24(1935) 252-257, and especially: Introduction à la Théologie, RevScPhilThéol 24(1935) 705-707. See also Vie conciliaire de l'Eglise et sociologie de la foi, Esprit 29 (1961) 678-689, and more recently B. Sesboué, Autorité du Magistère et vie de foi ecclésiastique, NRTh 93(1971) 337-359.
7. Y.-M. Congar, Infailibilité et Indéfectibilité, RevScPhilThéol 54(1970) 601-618.
8. K. A. Meisinger, Die deutsche Tragodie, 1521, Bern, 1953
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 One of the few r.c. theologians who have a clear view on the relations between sociology and faith is the french dominican, M.-D. Chenu. See his articles, Position théologique de la sociologie religieuse, Sociologie de la connaissance et théologie de la foi, and, Orthodoxie et hérésie, Le point de vue du théologien, La Parole de Dieu, I. La foi dans l'intelligence, Paris 1964 59-62, 63-68 and 69-74.
10. L. Cerfeux, St. Paul et l'unité de l'Eglise, NRTh 55 (1926) 657-673; J. Y. Cambell, Koinonia and Its Cognates in the New Testament, Journal of Biblical Literature 51 (1932) 352-380; H. Soesemann, Der Begriff Koinonia in Neuen Testament (Beihefte z. Zeits. für die nt. Wissenschaften, 14), Giesse, 1933; H. Chirat, L'assemblée chrétienne à l'age apostolique, Paris, 1949; J. Haner, L'Eglise est une communion (Unan sanctorum, 40), Paris, 1962; L. Cerfeux, La théologie de l'Eglise suivant saint Paul (Unan sanctorum, 54), Paris, 1965<sup>2</sup>.
11. W. Kasper, Möglichkeiten der Gotteserfahrung heute, Geist und Leben 42(1969) 329-349, reprinted in Glauben und Geschichte, Mainz, 1970, 120-143. Both W. Kasper, and especially M.D. Chenu (see note 9) are defending the relation between both kinds of experience and their organic and mutual implications. See P. Eriksen, Openbaring en religieuze ervaring, Collationes 1(1971) 5-34. An exposition about the same topic is being prepared for print by the Raybooth's. St. Patrick's College,

12. P. Fransen, The New Life of Grace, London, 1971, 24-57.
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14. L. Monden, Faith: Can Man Still Believe?, New York, 1969, 87-121; Dr. R. Boon, De Joodse wortels van de christelijke eredienst, (Prof. Dr. G. van der Leeuw-Stichting, Mededelingen, afl. 40), Amsterdam, 1970. The dialectical tension between "anamnesis" and "expectation", so important for every liturgical celebration, is also used by J. Moltmann and J. B. Metz in their anthropological theology of man in this world.
15. See our dutch and english article about Revelation and religious experience quoted in note 11.
16. P. Fransen, Man and Freedom, in: Man Before God, Towards a Theology of Man, New York, 1966, 68-89. We use it also in our article on Revelation and religious experience; see note 11.
17. P. Fransen, Sacraments, Signs of Faith, Intelligent Theology, London, 1967, vol. I, 126-148.
18. Emmanuel Levinas, Totalité et infini, Essai sur l'extériorité, (Phenomenologica, 8), The Hague, 1968<sup>2</sup>, now translated into English: Totality and Infinity, Pittsburgh, 1969 or Louvain, 1971. A summary is being presented by L. Monden, Faith: Can Man Still Believe?, op. cit., 27-30. See also S. Decloux, Existence de Dieu et rencontre d'autrui, NRTh 96(1964) 706-724. E. Schillebeeckx, in his work Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God, London, 1963 based his sacramental theology upon this philosophical approach to human existence.
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20. L. von Hertling, Communio und Primat, Miscellanea Historiae Pontificiae 7(1943) 1-48, reprinted in Una Sancta 17(1962) 91-125, or in an italian translation: Communio. Chiesa e papato nell'antichità romana, Rome, 1961.
21. Le Concile et les conciles, Chèvotogne-Paris, 1960, 19-43 and 301-314; Y.-M. Congar, De la communion des Eglises à une ecclésiologie de l'Eglise universelle, in: L'episcopat et l'Eglise universelle, Paris, 1962, 227-260, and Konzil als Versammlung und grundsätzliche Konziliarität der Kirche, in: Gott in Welt, vol. II, Freiburg, 1964, 135-165.
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34. Xavier Rynno, Letters from Vatican City, Vatican Council II (First Session), New York, 1963, 268-269.
35. J. H. Walgrave, Geloof en theologie in de crisis, Kasterlee, 1966, 85-104.
36. J.H. Newman, Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent, London, 1870, 57-70. In Lectures on the Present Position of Catholics in England, London, 1851, he focuses his attention on the "prejudices" and common opinions and ways of life of an historical particular group inside an all embracing anglosaxon culture.  
 J. Ortega y Gasset, Historia como sistema y del imperio romano, Madrid, 1942; La idea del principio en Leibnitz, Obras, VIII, 288.  
 H.-G. Gadamer, Wahrheit und Methode, Tübingen, 1965<sup>2</sup>, 253-254.
37. H. G. Gadamer, op. cit., 254-255.
38. J. K. Galbraith, The Affluent Society (Paperback ed.), New York, 1958, 17-26.
39. Réflexions sur l'anathème au Concile de Trente, EthLoy 29(1953) 657-672; The Authority of the Councils, in: Problems of Authority, ed. John M. Todd, London, 1962, esp. Excursus: On the Need for the Study of the Historical Sense of Counciliar Texts, *ibid.*, 72-78; Divorce on the Grounds of Adultery - The Council of Trent, Concilium 5(1970)89-100(with further bibliography), and most extensively: Wording en strekking van de canon over het merkteken, te Trente, Bijdragen 32(1971)2-33.  
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 I may be allowed to quote a few studies of my students, now colleague M. De Wachter, Het ontstaan van de Vormselcanones te Trente, II, Bijdragen 23(1962)408-413; J. Degraeve, Het kinderdoopsel op de 7de sessie van Trente, Bijdragen 25(1966)1-26; J. De Cock, L'Eglise et le Sacrament du Mariage d'après les Actes du Concile de Trente, Mayidi(Congo), 1966.
41. This can also be found in the Decretum Gratianum, cap. 7 In his rebus Dist.XI Freiburg, I, 25 : "In his rebus, de quibus nihil certi statuit divina scriptura, nos populi Dei et instituta maiorum pro lege tenenda sunt. Et sicut prevaricatores legum divinarum, ita contemptores consuetudinum ecclesiasticarum coercendi sunt". The first sentence is to be found in Augustine, Epist. 36 ad Casulanum presbyterum: PL 33, 136. The second could not be identified by Freiburg, who loc. cit. stresses the fact that this principle of "common law" in the Church is to be found in many law Collections before Gratianus.
42. At Trent only a very few theologians and bishops were acquainted with the works of the Fathers of the Church. The first Collections of the Councils had just been printed in Cologne, Paris and Antwerp between 1524 and 1567; See H. Quentin, J. D. Mansi et les grandes collections conciliaires, Paris, 1900. Most of the bishops had only at their disposal the "Denzinger" of that time, the unfailing source for quotations from the Councils, the Fathers and the Popes, the Decretum Gratianum and the other collections which form the Corpus Iuris. It was printed for the first time at Strasbourg in 1471 by Henry Eggesteyn.
43. A. Lang, Die Loci theologici des Melchior Cano und die Methode des dogmatische Beweises, Münster, 1925; Die Wege des Glaubensbegründung bei den Scholastikern Münster, 1931; Die Gliederung und Reichweite des Glaubens nach Thomas von Aquin und den Thomisten, Divus Thomas, Freiburg 20(1942)207-236., 335-346 and 21(1943)79-97; Das Problem der theologischen Konklusion bei M. Cano und D. Banez, DTh (Freiburg) 21(1943)87-89; Die conclusio theologica in der Problemstellung der Spätscholastik, DTh (Freiburg) 22(1944)259-290.