Infallible?—Fallible?*

JOSEPH KOTTUKAPALLY, J. S.

Hans Küng's explosive book *Infallible? An Inquiry*[1] and the high-tension debate it occasioned are too well known to require now either another review of the book or a lengthy report about the debate[2]. The intention of this paper is briefly to review the theological dialogue that has taken place, with a view to pointing to a dimension which seems to

* Since this paper was completed there has taken place an exchange of conciliatory letters between Küng and Rahner (*Publik-Forum*, 1 June 1973, pp. 12-15). It is reported that the two theologians have agreed to bury the hatchet. While this may be true so far as personal relations are concerned, there is little sign of advance in the resolution of the theological tangle involved in their previous controversy.

[1] Original German, *Unfehlbar? Eine Anfrage*, Benziger Verlag, 1970; American translation, *Infallible? An Inquiry*, Doubleday and Company Inc., Garden City, New York, 1971. English (British) translation, *Infallible? An Inquiry*, William Collins Sons and Co., London, 1971, First issued in the Fontana Library, 1972; (The references that follow are to this last mentioned edition).

[2] To mention selected literature: *Zum Problem Unfehlbarkeit: Antworten auf die Anfrage von Hans Küng*, Herausgegeben von Karl Rahner, Herder, Freiburg. Basel. Wien, 1972; (The second and third essays of this volume by Rahner appeared originally in *Stimmen der Zeit* 186 (1970) 361-377 and 187 (1971) 145-160 respectively and their English Translation, along with Küng's answers (see below), in *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* (hereafter, HPR) May, 1971, 10-26 and August-September, 1970, 11-27; Gregory Baum, 'Infallibility beyond Polemics', *Commonweal* 94 (1971) 103-105; *Id.*, 'Truth in the Church—Küng, Rahner and Beyond', *The Ecumenist* (1971) 33-48; *Id.*, 'The Bible as the Norm', *ibid.* 71-77; Leonard Swidler, 'The Ecumenical Problem Today: Papal Infallibility', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 8 (1971) 751-767; John T. Ford, 'Infallibility—From Vatican I to the Present', *ibid.*, 768-791; Brian Tierney, 'Origins of Papal Infallibility', *ibid.*, 841-864; Arthur C. Cochrane (Review of Küng's book), *ibid.*, 872-876; Walter Kasper, 'Zur Diskussion um das Problem der Unfehlbarkeit', *Stimmen der Zeit* 188 (1971) 363-376; F. J. Yarnold, 'The Charism of Providential Teaching', *The Month*, November, 1971, 131 ff.; Minor contributions and reports on the debate: 'Hans Küng's *Infallible? An Inquiry:* A Symposium': *America* 124 (1971/1) 427-433; G. Dejaifve, 'Un debat sur 1, infallibilité': La Diskussion entre K. Rahner et H. Küng', *Nouvelle Revue Theologique* 93 (1971) 583-601; L. Bruce van Voorst, 'Küng and Rahner: Dueling over Infallibility', *The Christian Century*, May, 19, 1971, 617-622; Henri Holstein, 'Infallible? Une Interpellation' (Review Article), *Etudes* 334 (1971) 748-752; Charles Davis 'Küng on Infallibility' *Commonweal* 93 (1971) 44-447; E. J. Yarnold, S.J.,

have received scant attention and yet is vital for a balanced understanding of the basic issue involved in the dialogue, namely, the saving truth of God in the Church. The dimension I would point to is the essentially dialectical and existential nature of all theological and dogmatic propositions.

Obviously, Küng's book made rather unpleasant reading, not only to 'Roman'[3] theologians, but also to many of his friends and colleagues. In fact, Karl Rahner, the very respected doyen of moderately progressive Catholic theology, who can hardly be called a 'Roman' and whom Küng reveres as his own master and had hoped would be a strong ally in his struggle against curialism, seemed to have lost his balance in this debate.

The book, really, is not as explosive as the title, with the ominous question mark, would seem to suggest.[4] Its contents fully justifies the explicatory subtitle, *An Inquiry*. It is an exasperated and impassioned inquiry whether, indeed, the theology that is practised at the Roman curia, which has been engaged in undermining the spirit and enterprise of Vatican II from its inception and which, built upon the dogma of the papal infallibility as its ideological infrastructure, holds even the Pope as a hostage in the Vatican and disables him, in spite of himself, from carrying out the necessary reforms in Church life and theology, is also the really Catholic theology[5]. Yes, the book is written with the passion and eloquence of a deeply disturbed spirit unreservedly and passionately committed to and concerned for his Church, for the Church where alone he feels at home as Christian and theologian, where alone he feels he belongs, not in spite of his being a Christian, but

'Küng Examined', *The Month*, September, 1971, 74-80; Peter Hebblethwaite S. J., 'The Critics of Kueng', *ibid.*, 81 ff.; Leo Scheffczyk, 'Die theologische Diskussion um das Unfehlbarkeitsdogma', *Muenchner Theologischer Zeitschrift* 22 (1971) 282-295. If we may add to these Küng's own answers and interviews: 'Im Interesse der Sache. Antwort an Karl Rahner', *Stimmen der Zeit* 187 (1971) 43-64 and 105-122 (English Translation in HPR June 1971, 9-29 and July 1971, 17-33. The September 1971 issue of this review also carried a 'Postscript' by Küng (28-31) added after Rahner's 'Reply'); 'Why I am Staying in the Church', *America* 124 (1971/1) 281-283 ; 'Infallibility Questioned' (Discussion between Hans Küng and Robert Murray S. J., *The Month*, October 1971, 117-121; 'Christianity with a Human Face: An Interview with Hans Küng', *Commonweal* 94 (1971) 105-107; 'A Reply to Gregory Baum', *ibid.*, 326-330.

[3] Küng sometimes uses this term to designate Curial ideology.

[4] One wonders whether it was not Rahner's criticism that catapulted Küng's book into notoriety and fame. In fact, even a very sympathetic reviewer like Charles Davis has remarked that the book leaves very much to be desired in what concerns tone, accuracy and theological acumen. A standard theological literary review like the '*Theologische Literaturzeitung*' (Protestant) took almost eighteen months to publish a review (97 (1972) 298-300), and then only with moderate interest, even though the debate around Küng had by then been raging for quite some time in German Catholic theological cicles.

[5] cf. *Infallible?*, Foreword.

because he is a Christian[6]. He does not consider ecclesiastical authority or the Petrine office superfluous or expendable. He has neither disrespect nor resentment against Pope Paul, whose integrity and sincerity he does not doubt. Only, he would like to unburden the Pope of a concept of his teaching office that would seem to sit upon him like a nightmare[7].

Küng's concern is the many and serious errors of the teaching office. Most theologians, not excluding Rahner himself and Küng's other critics, concur with Küng, generally, on the fact and the gravity of these errors. An honest and saving theological confrontation with error in the magisterium, Küng feels, is rendered impossible owing to the current 'Roman' and 'text-book' theology's understanding of infallibility, which would maintain that dogmatic propositions are, as such, *a priori*, i.e., by the very formal authority of the teaching office which defines them, infallible and irreformable.

Küng does not deny that the Church can and indeed must infallibly proclaim and bindingly teach the saving truth of Jesus Christ. He does not contradict the intent of Vatican I, which dogmatized infallibility. But he considers the term itself highly questionable and fraught with serious dangers. For, as it is generally interpreted not only by 'Roman' but even by progressive theology, it attributes to dogmatic propositions an absoluteness and irreformability which not even the Scriptures claim for themselves[8]—as, indeed, no proposition at all, necessarily and inevitably subject to the limitations of language and expression, can. Therefore Küng proposes his central thesis, as '*an attempted answer*' to the dilemma in which Catholic theology would seem to be caught by the inescapable fact of error in the magisterium, that the qualification of the magisterium as competent to define propositions that are *a priori* infallible can be dispensed with. And because the term infallibility itself is generally misinterpreted as the *a priori* or 'guaranteed'[9] infallibility of *ex cathedra* pronouncements, he would substitute for it *indefectibility*, a term that has much greater theological warrant (in terms of Scripture and the earliest tradition of the Church) and greater ecumenical prospects than *infallibility*, to express the essential theological content of the Vatican I dogma.[10]

[6] cf. 'Why I Am Staying in the Church'; In his interview quoted in *Commonweal* (see note 2 above) Küng said: 'I have had numerous temptations, never that of leaving the Catholic Church. If I criticize more than some others do it is, on the contrary, a sign of profound adhesion. . . I feel the Church is where I belong'. (107)

[7] cf. *Infallible?*, Foreword.

[8] Should not the cautious and open-ended answer Vatican II gave to the up to then highly controverted and delicate problem of the inerrancy of the scriptures be instructive when we discuss the infallibility of dogmatic propositions? See *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, no. 11.

[9] Küng writes in his 'A Reply to Gregory Baum': 'My "inquiry" . . . is concerned with *infallibly guaranteed* or *guaranteed infallible* pronouncements, which seem to me to lack any foundation either in the New Testament or in the ancient, truly Catholic tradition' (*loc. cit.*, 326)—Küng's emphasis.

[10] *Infallible?* 142-164.

As has become very clear from Küng's dialogue with Rahner, for him (Küng) the crucial issue is the *guaranteed* or *a priori infallibility of propositions;* this is what he rejects. Yet it does not seem to be clear, too, what precisely is meant by 'guaranteed' or '*a priori*' infallibility. The phrase occurs, at least in four different senses, and these have to be carefully distinguished from one another, if dialogue is to be fruitful. The most obvious sense in which Küng rejects *a priori* infallibility is the 'Roman' ideological and authoritarian one, which can be summed up in the sentence: 'if he wishes to, he (the Pope) can act as he chooses even without the Church' (*Infallible*? 86). Küng's critics will say this caricature of the Catholic doctrine of infallibility is defended only by the worst kind of curial theology; they will have no hesitation in rejecting it as resolutely as Küng (though it may be another matter how far the *practice* of the Church will bear out this claim).

In a second sense Küng rejects the *a priori* infallibility of propositions inasmuch as it would place these above and immune to the essential limitations of all human language and expression, which 'always fall short of reality' (130), are 'susceptible to misunderstanding' (*ibid*), 'translatable only up to a point' (*ibid*), 'in a state of perpetual motion' (131), and 'susceptible to ideology' (132). When 'a theology, a Church, fails to take seriously this dialectic of truth and error' (141), then that theology and Church must inevitably become absolutistic, partisan, intolerant of criticism, dogmatist, juridicist, authoritarian, rationalistic etc. (cf. 141-142). How delicate and embarrassing so ever this issue may be, who can say that today's Catholic theology, of no matter which school, can, at this point, with a clear conscience, stand up to Küng's criticism? Those who hold the 'development' theory (and we shall have to admit that Küng shows too little sense for this factor) will point to the 'historicity' of dogmas and the need to 'interpret them so as to get at the core of truth' they always contain. This is legitimate. But what is unfortunate is that, alongside this concern for the core of truth in the historically conditioned dogmatic pronouncements, theology has not developed a *diacritical hermeneutic*, which would render it essential that the *ex cathedra* pronouncements of the magisterium should be in a very real sense *negated* and *transcended* and so (only so) affirmed in terms of the One Magisterium and the One Truth in the Church—Jesus Christ. However shocking and dangerous this may sound not only to 'Roman' and 'text-book' theology, but also to the schools of 'transcendental theology'—indeed to 'all Catholic theology at least since the Reformation' (*HPR*, May 1971, 13), here *is* a problem which Catholic theology may no more evade, if it is to be theology and Christian. In his discussion with Küng on this point, Rahner (who agrees with Küng that here there *is* a serious problem) does scant justice to Küng when he makes him say that an, avowedly, 'inadequate, dangerous, one-sided etc. dogma' *is* or *can be*, therefore also false

(*HPR*, August-Sept., 1971, 21). What Küng does say (and that is the crucial issue for him) is that a dogma which is confessedly inadequate, dangerous, one-sided etc., cannot be said to be *a priori* infallible, that is, infallible merely and exclusively by the fact that it has been formally defined by the magisterium. In other words, Küng will hold it as imperative that the fundamental theological concern for the continuity of the magisterium with the Word of God and Tradition should be kept awake as inner moment of belief in dogmas. Küng will also say that an actually misunderstood dogma is, also, *as such*, actually false. In other words, a dogma as a mere proposition, as a mere form of words, has no guaranteed infallibility; for a proposition can be said to be true or false only in terms of what it means. And one can only wonder why Rahner, who, though he need not be blamed for not being a pragmatic or analytic philosopher, should know his scholastic logic with its theory of distinctions, should not whole-heartedly agree with Küng here! The practical consequence of this consideration is that dogmatic faith should keep alive the concern for the actual theological meaning of the dogmatic formulae in terms of the foundational Truth of the Church.

There is a third sense in which we must consider the *a priori* infallibility of dogmatic propositions. Küng touches upon this when he speaks about the Church's 'indefectibility', which 'is a truth of faith' (*Infallible?* 154). He says: 'It is based, not on evidence observable by me as a detached observer, but on a promise that is a challenge to my confident commitment. He who accepts this is rewarded with knowledge. Only the believer can know the real meaning of love. The Church though certainly not invisible, is only relatively visible. In spite of her often only too massive visibility, that on which and by which and for which she lives is hidden. Thus the promise that it will remain in the truth is a challenge to faith; and he who responds to the challenge with faith shares in the truth'. (*ibid*). On this point it is Küng's position that lacks consistency. Should he not apply this principle, by which he believes in the indefectibility of the Church, in spite of problems and difficulties, also to the infallibility of dogmatic propositions? Would he not then have to confess that, no matter what the inevitable limitations they are subject to as human expressions of truth, no matter what difficulties and obscurities they must involve, they are and must be absolutely true and credible and demanding of faith (*credenda*) because of the authority of the One who has committed his word of promise to them, his own absolute infallibility to them? Given the promise of Christ, which, in a sense, holds unconditionally and absolutely, should we not say that if at all the Church can proclaim and teach the saving truth of Jesus Christ (which she *must* do in her own human language), she can do this only and exclusively believing in the *guaranteed* and *a priori* infallibility of the one saving truth, which alone will render the Church's proclamation and teaching

surely and certainly infallible? But while raising this question we should not forget that Küng would choose to give up the term 'infallibility' not out of theoretical but historical and practical considerations.

There is still a fourth sense in which the *a priori* infallibility of dogmatic propositions should be considered. Vatican I spoke of dogmatic propositions as 'irreformable of themselves (ex sese) and not from the consent of the Church' (D 1879 DS 3074). Though here the issue is not directly infallibility but irreformability, theologians have argued from this clause that dogmatic definitions are infallible solely by the fact of their being formally defined by the magisterium, and not owing to their conformity with Scripture, tradition or *sensus fidelium*. (So Otto Semmelroth, 'A Priori unfehlbare Saetze?', in *Zum Problem Unfehlbarkeit*, 196-215). Semmelroth finds this the real stumbling block of faith for Küng the theologian. However, Walter Kasper (*art. cit.*) shows that the problem here is not as simple as Semmelroth would make it out to be. If infallibility is restricted and bound to Revelation, if Scripture is *norma normans* of the Church's faith and teaching, and if the magisterium is bound (however dynamically it be) to the Church's tradition, we cannot meaningfully talk of the infallibility of the magisterium except in terms of these factors. Besides, does or can the Pope speak *ex cathedra*, that is, formally as Pope, except when he is in communion with the episcopal college and the people of God? These are complex and still obscure questions. What Küng will deny is that either the believer or the theologian should or may safely and securely entrust his faith to the magisterium as though signing a blank check.

Rome is reported to have initiated a process on Küng. However that may be, from his theological friends and colleagues, especially among the German theologians, one feels, Küng generally failed to get a fair hearing. In his reply to Rahner's 'Critique' Küng complains with unconcealed pain and disappointment of being let down, discourtesy, misunderstanding and rudeness. What is anomalous and deeply disturbing about the critics of Küng is that while they do not care to deny the relevance or the seriousness of the problem that he has raised, they do not at all seem to be concerned about suggesting their own alternative solutions, as they stoutly reject the one that Küng has offered. Luigi Sartori, the Italian theologian contributing to the refutation volume edited by Rahner, with more speculative acumen than Küng, clearly sees the danger of Monophysitism in the current theology of the magisterium. But Sartori's only concern is to refute Küng's position which seems to Sartori to lean towards the opposite extreme of Nestorianism[11].

It is a fact that Küng has openly and explicitly challenged a formally and solemnly defined dogma and rejected it *secundum litteram*.

[11] Luigi Sartori, 'Ueberlegungen zu den hermeneutischen Kriterien von H. Küng', *op. cit.*, 71-96.

But should that exclude him from the Catholic communion? I believe that Rahner has not only behaved 'intemperately'[12] but contradicted Vatican II's and even his own hermeneutical principles in attributing heresy to Küng's thesis.

In his contribution to a Roman symposium on Infallibility Rahner had gone so far as to predict that, given the inevitable theological pluralism that asserts itself with increasing force and the corresponding multiplicity of legitimate interpretations possible, no more new dogmas would be defined in the future[13]. Should this theologian raise the alarm of 'heresy' when Küng, for grave theological and practical reasons, interprets the Vatican I dogma of infallibility as indefectibility, especially, also, seeing that Küng confesses that he has nothing against infallibility in principle? Should a scholastic theologian, schooled in hermeneutic of analogy, which will have it that 'every positive statement about God must at first be negated'[14] be shocked at Küng's reservations against the literal acceptance of the dogma of infallibility?[15] Can we, who are told to be alive to the distinction between the unchanging 'substance' of the faith and its essentially changeable and

[12] So George A. Lindbeck, *art. cit.*, 432.

[13] cf. 'Quelques considérations sur le concept d'infallibilité dans la theologie catholique', in *L'Infallibilità: L'Aspetto Filosofico e Theologico* (Special number of *Archivo di Filosofia* 1970) 57-72. This article appeared also in *Stimmen der Zeit* 186 (1970) 18-31—reprinted in '*Zum Problem der Unfehlbarkeit*, 9-26.

[14] cf. *Gregory Baum*, 'Truth in the Church—Küng, Rahner, and Beyond' *loc. cit.*, 41.

[15] According to Rahner, Küng's thesis 'contradicts the explicit teaching of Vatican I and II' (*HPR*, May 1971, 13). What Rahner should not have missed is that Küng is contradicting the *letter* of the teaching of Vatican I and II. Küng neither means to nor thinks he does contradict the intention and spirit of the dogma of infallibility (cf. 'Answer to Karl Rahner', *HPR*, June 1971, 27; 'Christianity with a Human Face', *loc. cit.*, 106). That Küng, in spite of his intention and profession to the contrary, does in fact contradict the spirit and intention of the councils, is, to say the least, not evident. Further, it should be stressed that Küng's thesis is not that dogmas are, of and by themselves, *de facto* erroneous or can be erroneous, owing to the inevitable limitations of human propositions; he only questions their claim to *a priori* infallibility. Kevin McNamara, like Rahner, misses the point when he writes: 'Perhaps the crucial question here is the following: is one justified in describing as *error* what after all is the inevitable accompaniment of any human attempt to express the truth, namely the expression of that truth within the limits of a given historical situation and the incomplete perspectives that are inseparable from the human condition? Is it possible to do so except by assuming a definition of truth which removes it from the sphere of human thought and language and locates it in some transcendent, other-worldly religion?' ('Indefectible but not Infallible?', *Irish Theological Quarterly* 38 (1971) 337). If we were to slightly modify the first sentence we should have Küng's 'crucial question' thus: Is one justified in describing as *a priori* infallible what after all is subject to the inevitable accompaniment of any human attempt, etc.

variable presentation[16], hold Küng's *Inquiry* to be heretical, because it would let the formula of infallibility go, in order to better safeguard the substance of the dogma concerned by means of a new formula? Should Rahner, who, if any one, should know Vatican II's doctrine of the 'hierarchy of truths'[17] and would consider the magisterium's teaching about itself in a certain (but real) sense theologically expendable in terms of the basic Christian truths, be so grimly critical of Küng's thesis? Or would Rahner, who would seem to attribute infallibility in individual dogmas[18] go still further and attribute it also to every dogmatic formulation as such?

In fact, it is hard indeed to see the consistency of Rahner's position on this issue. In a lecture he delivered at an ecumenical gathering in June 1969, 'Das Kirchliche Lehramt in der heutigen Autoritaetskrise' (cf. *Schriften Zur Theologie* 9, 339-365) Rahner had said, commenting on the famous words of Augustine that he would not believe in the Gospel, unless he were moved thereto by the authority of the Church; 'In the hierarchy of truths, of which Vatican II speaks, the truth and reality of a magisterium in the Church is, after all, not a first and fundamental datum but a relatively scondary one, although it is not at all contested thereby that this truth, in its own place, does belong within the hierarchy of truths. Objectively as well as in terms of the subjective knowledge of faith, the teaching about the magisterium is a teaching that is supported by more fundamental truths of faith and not, either logically or ontologically, the foundation that supports everything. We should say "against" Augustine, precisely in order to believe as a Catholic: I would not trust the authority of the Church unless the Gospel moved me thereto' (359-60—my translation). But in his 'Reply' to Küng Rahner writes: '... it seems to me that what should be said here is that the basic methodological demand that Küng makes on me and on Lehman already *contains the whole disagreement* (emphasis mine) between him and us: namely, the difference, *which seems to me to be essential* (emphasis mine), in the interpretation of the normative meaning of the actual faith-consciousness of the Church as it is expressed in her dogmas. Naturally Küng can require that this self-understanding of the Catholic Church and her magisterium be demonstrated according to the norms of fundamental theology and not just be treated by me as a pre-supposition of an inner-Catholic dogmatic conversation. But in the context of the controversy with Küng I certainly do not have to take notice of this fundamental-theological task. It is without doubt difficult to fulfil it' (*HPR* August-September, 1971, 17). I must confess my inability to understand how these two passages can stand

[16] cf. 'Pope John's Opening Speech to the Council', in *The Documents of Vatican II*, New York, 1966, 715.

[17] cf. *Decree on Ecumenism* no. 11.

[18] cf. Walter Kasper, *art. cit.*

together. Gregory Baum commented on the latter passage: 'The great German theologian cannot be quite serious at this point!' ('Truth in the Church', *loc. cit.*, 40). Can this be a matter of mere inconsistency or, perhaps, the symptom of deeper malaise? In fact, there is something quite disturbing about Rahner's theology as it has been articulated in his various writings on the question of infallibility. In the paper 'On the Concept of Infallibility' Rahner writes: 'Since the last hundred years we have got into a situation in which a new definition can no more become false because in the case of a new definition the latitude of *legitimate* interpretations is so great that it can no more have an error by its side' (*Zum Problem der Unfehlbarkeit*, 23—my translation). On the other hand, in his 'Reply' to Küng he clearly and forthrightly professes such an absolute faith in the 'system' of the Catholic Church and her theology that he feels that 'in a time when our young people abhor bourgeois objectivism and hundreds of millions in China brandish aloft Mao's bible' (*loc. cit.*, 19) the theologian within the system, having 'handed over a kind of "blank check" to the magisterium of the Church' (*ibid.*), does not have to take notice of the fundamental theological question of the conformity of the 'system' with the Gospel, which is normative to it (*ibid.*, 14-17). So, provided there is absolute submission to the system everything would seem to be safe and every interpretation allowed (after all, who finally determines the question of 'legitimacy'?)! Rahner seems to see no third way beside the alternatives of either following the 'arbitrariness' and 'capriciousness' 'of one's own subjectivity' (*ibid.*, 18) or absolute submission to the system. And yet Karl Rahner is no stranger to the history of this 'system', which certainly was not *as such* instituted or established by Christ or *secundum evangelium*. He is not a stranger either to other systems and dogmas requiring absolute assent of the faithful. One can only feel astonished that he has to go as far as China to find millions brandishing their book of dogmas, when he could have easily picked up from memory far more telling examples very much nearer home!

The Vatican I dogma speaks of 'that infallibility with which the Divine Redeemer willed that his Church should be endowed for defining doctrine regarding faith and morals'[19]. Does 'that infallibility' of which the dogma speaks, necessarily and obviously mean the infallibility of propositions as such, and not rather the charism of the *magisterium*, also, to teach 'firmly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation'[20] by 'defining doctrine' making use of propositions which are, by and of themselves, inadequate, misunderstandable and fallible? Or, are we required to hold that the *magisterium's* definitions enjoy greater infallibility than the Scriptures themselves? That may be a 'theological opinion'. But should the contrary opinion be *anathe-*

[19] *The Teaching of the Catholic Church*, 388 D 1839 (DS 3074).

[20] Vatican II, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, no. 11.

matized by those who hold this opinion? The dogma cited above continues and concludes: '. . . therefore such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are irreformable of themselves and not from the consent of the Church'.[21] Here again, what does the last disjunction precisely mean? Does it necessarily mean that the Pope can do everything (or anything at all) that concerns the Church's faith without the Church? Is the Pope formally and meaningfully Pope 'without the consent of the Church'?[22] Does 'of themselves'(*ex sese*) necessarily and obviously refer to the *absolute metaphysical* and *theo-logical* essence of the definitions concerned? May we not rather, say, with greater justification in view of the 'historicity' of the definition, that the term has a juridical relationship in view, leaving out of consideration the question of absolute and theological reformability? My point is that these are really open questions and not dogmatically settled issues.

Again to quote from Rahner's lecture: 'Corresponding to today's situation as well as to objective reality itself the particular teaching set forth by the magisterium should, out of its own proper and inherent convincing power and by its being referred back to the one totality of faith, make its own formal authority of the proclaiming instance credible though the content (Inhaltlichkeit) of the proclaimed truth. That does not render the importance of the formal authority of the magisterium superfluous; rather, this demand is established, as we have said, by the fact that the formal teaching authority is founded on a truth that is prior to it and that the individually taught truth can never be an isolated truth of faith, but always truth in relation to the totality of what Christian faith at all is. Should both these facts be taken account of, then the demand is really self-evident that the magisterium should in a certain sense and approximatively in increasing measure render itself superfluous' (*loc. cit.*, 364—my translation). Rahner concluded his lecture thus: 'We should even ask further whether the future history of dogma of the Catholic Church and so, too, the further function of the magisterium will be decidedly laid much more radically and concentratedly in the simple keeping of the basic substance of the Christian message. If we are of this second view, then it will become still clearer that the magisterium of the Church will defend its formal authority in the best and most effective manner in the present and future critical situation by presenting itself as the instance which in the unconditional courage of faith and hope bears witness to the basic substance of faith, which is, or, to put it more cautiously, should be, common to all Christians. If the magisterium of the Catholic Church, in sure fidelity and ever new vitality, witness to faith in God and Jesus Christ, then, too, it has its greatest ecumenical chance' (*ibid.*, 365—my translation). Should this not mean that the Vatican I dogma about the magisterium should, 'out of its own proper and inherent

[21] *Loc. cit.*

[22] cf. Walter Kasper, *art. cit.*

convincing power', not only not preclude, but even demand its own demise in a certain sense? Does Rahner's censure of Küng's thesis leave his own thesis unaffected? On the other hand, when the magisterium, at the expense of its essential and most sacred function to bear witness to the basic truth of the Gospel, should be seen to be preoccupied with itself and its own authority and power, should not the theologian have a correspondingly essential and sacred obligation not only to warn and criticize but also to offer positive resistance to the magisterium, if only for the magisterium's own sake?

What hardly any one seems to have seriously noticed is the almost glaring fact that Küng's specific 'adversary' is 'Roman' (Curial) theology and its absolutizing and totalitarian interpretation of infallibility. Many critics have found Küng rendering his case weak by making the case of *Humanae Vitae* his spring-board, finding here an 'indisputably infallible' doctrine 'proved wrong'. It has been pointed out that both the 'infallibility' of *Humanae Vitae* and the erroneousness of its doctrine are theologically unestablished assumptions in Küng. That may well be for the kind of theology represented by Rahner. But they are evidently not unwarranted assumptions, as far as 'Rome' is concerned. Küng's argumentation to show that 'Rome' considered the official doctrine on contraception as *de facto* infallible leaves neither loophole nor escape[23]. So for curial theology what is at stake here *is* an 'infallible doctrine'. Has Küng 'proved' that this doctrine is in reality erroneous? He hasn't. But what 'Rome' cannot escape is the fact that Catholics (lay people, theologians and bishops) *have openly and unmistakably rejected the official doctrine* (at least in its obvious 'Roman' sense) *and still remain within the communion of the Catholic Church*. For, whatever the *disciplinary* measures taken by some bishops (often more 'Roman' than the 'Rome' itself) against 'erring' clergy in this matter, 'Rome' and the bishops *have clearly said that those who for some reason or other cannot follow the Pope's teaching should not consider themselves excluded from the communion of the Church*[24]. Therefore the horns of the dilemma in which 'Rome' is caught are: either an 'infallibly set forth doctrine' is, *de facto*, objectively wrong, or 'Rome' has gladly acquiesced in the Church's being *in statu heresi*. Given this, should any one consider Küng's 'knight errantry' to save the magisterium from the dragon of 'infallibility' to be so quixotic?

What Rahner and progressive theology for their part may not responsibily evade is the *acknowledged fact and gravity* of error in the magisterium,[25] even if that should concern only 'non-infallible' teach-

[23] *Infallible?*, 43-52.

[24] cf. *Humanae Vitae*, no. 29.

[25] In his 'Critique of Hans Küng' Rahner clearly acknowledges the fact of error in the magisterium as well as the gravity of this error. He says: 'Theology should consider much more than it does the fact that there has been and today certainly still is much error in the Church and her theology. We should not play down this fact. This error is not always harmless; it pertains

ing. Can we legitimately conceive of the presence, guidance and protection of the Spirit as merely negative and limited to a few dogmatic formulae, of which Rahner anyhow does not expect more?[26] If, on the contrary, the Spirit's presence and operation is positive and all pervasive, as seems to be evident from the history of the Apostolic Church, and still the magisterium *has* grievously erred, how will Rahner escape the 'in-spite-of'? And if here the 'in-spite-of' must hold, why not also for 'infallible' dogmatic propositions?[27]

Mercifully, Rahner has been the only theologian of note who went to the extent of charging Küng's *Inquiry* with heresy. But even those who unhesitatingly affirm Küng's basic stand as wholly Catholic, have found his rejection of the term 'infallibility' in favour of 'indefectibility' unacceptable.

Walter Kasper, whose position on this question Rahner had sceptically coupled with Küng's, even before Küng's book was out,[28] and whom Küng quotes to support his own position[29], while acknowledging the legitimacy and relevance of Küng's *Inquiry* within the Catholic tradition, and deploring in stern language the manner of the Rahner-led 'refutation' of Küng's thesis, finds Küng's 'answer' defective in two respects: (1) Küng is neither logically nor theologically on safe ground when he refuses infallibility to the magisterium's witnessing of the faith, for instance, *in articulo stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*. (2) While Küng does not deny the binding character of confessional dogmatic propositions, he is prepared to grant them this property only pragmatically and situationally. As against this, Kasper would not hesitate to call dogmatic formulae infallible, not, as Rahner would, in their individuality and particularity, but as belonging within the complex whole of all dogmatic propositions. He would also consider dogmas in this sense infallible and absolutely binding even beyond their pragmatic confessional situation. With regard to

not just to secondary questions that are disputed among theologians.... This error is also amalgamated much more than one usually thinks with truths and dogmas of the Church, which by that very fact are threatened and damaged in their practical consequences. All that should also be pondered in theology and not just in respectable histories of the Church' (*HPR*, May 1971, 23).

[26] cf. 'Zum Begriff der Unfehlbarkeit', *loc. cit.*, 14-17. Rahner would seem to conceive of dogma as the fruit of cold scholastic speculation in the service of 'development', and not as the kairological or existential-situational confession of the central truth of faith in *articulo stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*.

[27] It may be instructive to draw attention to the parallel between sin and error in the Church. Here Rahner has not shied away from talking about the 'sinful Church' out of fear of compromising her essential holiness. (cf. e.g., 'The Church of Sinners' in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 6, 253-270). One wonders why the parallel between sin and error should not hold, seeing that as 'sacrament of salvation' the Church's life is her mission.

[28] cf. 'Zum Begriff der Unfehlbarkeit', *loc. cit.*, 9.

[29] *Infallible?*, 163-164.

the *a priori* character of dogmatic propositions, Kasper would leave it as a question still to be clarified[30].

I am not sure that Kasper, no otherwise than Avery Dulles and Yves Congar have done before him[31], does not miss Küng's real concern. As Küng has made abundantly clear, his rejection of the term is not a matter of theory or principle, but owing to eminently practical and historical considerations. Practically, infallibility has been considered the first axiom of the ideology of 'Rome', or the Roman version of 'political theology'. And Küng is not at all alone in realising the dangers of this ideology; not only Kasper, Dulles and Congar, but even his other severe critics including Rahner, are well aware of the situation, only without having a remedy to propose to meet it. Küng's historical reason for proposing the replacement is, as we saw above, that indefectibility has the solid backing of the Scriptures and the earliest tradition of the Church, while infallibility has very little and doubtful warrant on this side, if any at all[32]. Likewise, too, Kasper's case is weak indeed when he would attribute a metaphysical and absolute character to the infallibility of dogmatic propositions. Two criticisms may be made against Kasper's view. One is that, again in practice, it is by *de-situationing*, so to say, existential confessional formulae with the help of an absolutizing rationalistic metaphysics that have been turned into ideological axioms. Secondly, granted that dogmatic propositions cannot be interpreted *actualistically* (*situationistically*, *existentialistically*), neither can they be, as confessions of faith, legitimately and meaningfully considered apart from their existential and situational (and pragmatic)[33] actuality.

The Canadian theologian Gregory Baum, who also finds Küng standing 'wholly within the Catholic theological tradition[34]' and feels unhappy about Rahner's strictures, still feels that Küng is insufficiently appreciative of the historical character of the Church's life and doctrine. This historicity would make it imperative that dogmatic pronouncements are interpreted, even against the *letter* of the formulae, in order to reach their truth kernel[35]. Baum finds Küng also overdoing the (in itself legitimate and ecumenically convenient)[36] principle of

[30] Walter Kasper, 'Zur Diskussion um das Problem der Unfehlbarkeit' (See note 2).

[31] cf. Avery Dulles, 'Theological Issues' (see note 2); Yves Congar, 'Infallibilitaet und Indefektibilitaet: Zum Begriff der Unfehlbarkeit', in *Zum Problem der Unfehlbarkeit*, 174-195.

[32] *Infallible?*, esp. 144-146; 149-152; 158-164.

[33] It is hard to see how one may hold *orthodoxy* and *orthopraxis* apart. cf. Raymond Panikkar, 'Le subjet de l'infallibilité: Solipsisme et vérification' in *L'Infallibilità*, 423-453).

[34] Gregory Baum, 'Infallibility Beyond Polemics', *loc. cit.*, 104.

[35] *Id.*, 'Truth in the Church—Küng, Rahner, and Beyond' (see note 2).

[36] Baum writes about the qualification of Scripture as *norma normans non normata:* 'At moments of ecumenical fervor I have made use of the expression myself. It is, however, a most unfortunate phrase' (*ibid.*, 37).

Scripture as *norma normans non normata* in relation to the Church's authoritative teaching. He feels that Küng's conception of indefectibility overlooks 'God's ongoing self-communication to the Church, enabling her to discern the focal point of the Gospel in new historical situations'.[37] Baum sees no reason 'why this special gift should not be called 'infallibility'[38], though, on the other hand, he sees no reason, either, to stake his theology on the term[39]. Küng answered Baum's criticism in his 'Reply'. Without denying or minimizing the historicity of the Church and her doctrine nor the actual presence and guidance of the Spirit that she enjoys, Küng stressed against Baum the absolute primacy of the Person of Jesus as, not one among the many more or less important, but as the most important and decisive term of reference for the Church's faith and theology[40].

It has been alleged that Küng's rejection of the *a priori* infallibility of propositions owing to the essential inadequacy and fallibility of all human language and expression might lead him even to radical epistemological scepticism[41]. Küng did not touch upon this charge in any of his replies. But a one-page note by Peter Hodgson in the November 1971 issue of *The Month* offers a valuable clue to an answer[42]. Hodgson points out that the natural sciences, which are by no means infested with scepticism, have never claimed infallibility for any of their propositions. They are concerned with functional and working truths. 'This does not, however, shake the faith of the scientist, for he knows that science, while not infallible, is certainly indefectible'. 'No scientist would claim absolute truth for his statements, but they may well be the best attainable at that stage of his understanding. Our human concepts are frail, groping, limited; indeed it may be that the path to truth inevitably passes through error. Even if God wished to tell the scientist the fullness of truth about a particular phenomenon, He could not do so because the very language is lacking . .[43]' But the critic could insist that theology, unlike the natural sciences, is not concerned with any kind of truths but with salvific truths of faith, truths that concern and determine the highest destiny of man offered him to be accepted *auctoritate Dei revelantis*. To this it might be answered that God's absolute and salvific Truth is One, Jesus Christ as Lord, who can neither be infallibly defined nor adequately expressed by any number of propositions, which, as true, but by and of themselves fallible and inadequate, expressions of the one truth, are essentially ordained to that one Truth which essentially transcends them all individually and collectively. This again will not entail the infallibility of propositions as such, particularly if their relation to the one Truth of God is not only one of radical and entire dependence and subordination, but also of dialectic.

[37] 'Truth in the Church', *loc. cit.*, 48.

[38] *Ibid.*

[39] *Ibid.*

[40] Hans Küng, 'A reply to Gregory Baum' (see note 2).

[41] cf. Karl Rahner, 'A Critique of Hans Küng', *HPR*, May 1971, 20.

[42] Peter Hodgson, 'Science and Indefectibility', *The Month*, November 1971, 153.

[43] *Ibid.*

Küng is, both by profession and confession, a historical theologian. But while he does not have any special speculative axe to grind, he innocently, almost unconsciously, raises all sorts of unpleasant problems for the philosopher-theologian. Taking up Küng's argument against the *a priori* infallibility of propositions, George A. Lindbeck, who is not at all unsympathetic to Küng and declares himself to be 'wholly on his side in this present controversy with Rahner', wonders whether Küng should not be pushed by his own arguments into saying that 'there are no permanently true propositions'. Lindbeck writes: 'Apparently it can be false as well as true that Socrates died by drinking hemlock in the fourth century B.C., or that Jesus Christ died on the cross in the first century A.D., or, to take more nearly dogmatic assertions, apparently it can be both false and true that "the Nicean version of the faith is preferred to the Arian one", that "the Chalcedonian affirmation of Christ's full humanity is to be preferred to the monophysite denial of it", or even that "Jesus Christ is Lord" is to be preferred to "Jesus is not Lord".' But Lindbeck confesses that 'it is not clear that Küng intends to say any of these things'.[44]

What *is* clear is that Küng is not talking about the 'permanency' of true propositions but about their ***a priori infallibility***. His contention is only that merely as propositions and as formally defined by the magisterium dogmatic propositions are not guaranteed against error. This would imply that truth or falsehood cannot be predicated about a proposition merely as such, but only in terms of its actual meaning (content), its context and intention, and, no less, when propositions are dogmatic enunciations of faith, its subjective existential reference. To illustrate this point, we can say that, theologically speaking, an ununderstanding, noncommittal, mechanical enunciation of the proposition 'Jesus is Lord' is neither true nor false, being mere *flatus vocis*, while an antiwitnessing (if we may say so) enunciation of the same proposition, as it was on the lips of the devils who proclaimed Jesus as Son of God[45], may render it false. Thus we may very well say that the same proposition as a mere form of words, can be true or false, depending on its meaning, context and purpose. This is true even for Aristotelian and scholastic philosophy, not to speak (*a fortiori*) of existential, pragmatist or linguistic philosophy.

Now I may be allowed to make my own critique of Küng. From all that has been said it should be clear that, really, there is nothing so new or shocking in what Küng has actually said[46]. All that he rejects is 'Roman' ideology in its gross form, for which all dogmatic or quasi-dogmatic Papal pronouncements, which have even the appearance of an *ex cathedra* teaching, are in their isolated individuality and particular formulation *a priori* infallible and absolutely binding. Küng's position in rejecting this ideology can be easily upheld by the hermeneutical principles enunciated and made obligatory by Vatican II, namely, the hierarchy of truths and the distinction between the unchanging substance of faith and its variable and changeable presentation.

[44] *Op. cit.* (see note 2), 432.

[45] cf. e.g., Mk 1:34; 3:11-12; Acts 19:13-17; Jas 2:19.

[46] cf. Charles Davis, 'Küng on Infallibility' (See note 2).

There is no need to deny that in his passionate eloquence Küng has not always been careful to present and interpret historical facts accurately, and that his sense of the historical evolution of the Church and her doctrine is considerably defective. But it is not at all fair to allege that Küng, whose concern is the error in the magisterium, understands truth in terms of error.[47] Only, while the universal practice of Catholic theology seems to be to gloss over error and interpret it away in terms of truth with which it is certainly mixed, Küng would demand that theology face error as error and see the saving truth of God persisting, asserting itself 'and triumphing through and in spite of error'.[48] Nor is it fair to say that Küng has too little sense of the mystery of the Incarnation continued and evolving through history[49]. Here again, while Catholic theology would seem persistently to gloss over the endangeredness of the Word from inside the Church and its magisterium, Küng points his finger unmistakably at this endangeredness without thereby denying or ignoring the transcendence and victory of the saving Word over sin.

My criticism of Küng is that he is not 'radically' enough 'conservative', as he hopes he is[50]. I find Küng wanting both ways. On the one hand, the answer Küng proposes to the problem he has raised fails to be really satisfactory or effective. For, ultimately, it would matter little either to the 'Romans' or to the 'barbarians', if in spite of errors in detail the Church and its magisterium will basically and ultimately remain in the truth. 'Roman' practice and ideology would not need to change at all in terms of ultimate and essential theological concerns. 'Minor adjustments' would seem to do, namely, that 'Rome' grant to the 'barbarians' that all that 'Rome' pronounces need not as such be taken as infallible and absolutely binding. Where Küng begs to differ from 'Rome' would seem to be, in the last analysis, a matter of semantics and detail. There would seem to be no quarrel between 'Rome' and the 'German', provided 'Rome' would not oblige him to take as oracles of God all that came from south of the Alps.

I would submit that the theological issue is more serious than that. When he comes to deal with the ultimate concern, the Church's basic and ultimate remaining in the truth in spite of errors in detail, Küng seems to be as much bound by ideology and metaphysics as his would-

[47] So John T. Ford, reviewing *The Infallibility Debate*, in *The American Ecclesiastical Review* 166 (1972) 250-254.

[48] Küng writes in his 'Reply to Gregory Baum': 'It would be a veritable witness to the working of the Holy Spirit in the Church if we Catholics would take hold of our Christian Freedom, if we would honestly admit our mistakes instead of constantly denying them, brushing them aside, or "re-interpreting" them away, if we would correct our mistakes clearly and apply ourselves to the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The encyclical *Humanae Vitae* could well be an occasion for such an admission of error. A pope who would courageously make such an admission would certainly not lose but gain stature.'

[49] So Henry Holstein, 'Infallible? Une Interpellation', *Etudes* 334 (1971) 748-752.

[50] cf. 'Reply to Gregory Baum', *loc. cit.*, 310.

be opponents.[51] Here he holds: 'Danger and threats can . . . never finally overwhelm (her)'.[52] 'This promise (of indefectibility) makes it superfluous for the believer to ponder on what would happen if there were no longer any community of faithful'.[53] 'The Church may forsake her God; he will not forsake her'.[54] These are dangerously onesided expressions of a vital theological truth. The danger is that, thus, *hope is subtly metamorphosed into certainty, security, and complacency, if not presumption.* This cannot be, if faith and salvation are, by definition, gift *as* task. In itself, and speaking from the point of view of the Church's humanity, there is no impossibility or safeguard against the Church's ultimate and final falling away from the truth. On this side (and that is not at all harmless) the Church's mission and salvation remain radically and entirely endangered.

True, there is the word of promise and the indwelling Spirit, which will defend the Church from errors and lead her into all truth (Jn 16:13). There is no denying or questioning that the word given to the Church is final, eschatological. There is no doubt that the new people of God are the bearers of the absolutely unsurpassable salvation. But, on the other hand, there is no possibility of denying that 'Where a man has been given much, much will be expected of him; and the more a man has been entrusted to him the more he will be required to repay' (Lk 12:48). There is no escaping the responsibility before God for the gift entrusted to us. The eschatological and unsurpassable salvation is the no less eschatological and unsurpassable judgement, and judgement 'is beginning with the household of God' (1 Pet. 4:17).

There is no evidence that the terrible warnings of the Letter to the Hebrews (6:4-6; 10:26-32; 12:25-29) are addressed only to individuals and not, as well, to the churches and the Church. There is no evidence to believe that, any less for the Church than for the individual believer, the indicative implies and is also determined by the imperative.

The Spirit that indwells the Church is as vulnerable as was the Word made flesh; if the Word could be crucified in the flesh, there is no *intrinsic impossibility* for the Church to sin against the Spirit, by a sin for which 'there is no forgiveness, either in this age or in the age to come' (Mt 12:32).

The point of all this is that the Church needs to be contritely self-critical on every level and absolutely, taking nothing at all for granted, either of her life or her mission—which are after all the same thing. Hence also the essential need for theology to cease to be partisan, self-righteous, adulatory and apologetical, and begin to be critical and honest. Criticism in the Church should not only be endured and tolerated but fostered and required, not by considerations of policy and expediency, but as theological necessity. Theology should recognise and own its duty and right as much to criticise and contradict the magisterium as to support and defend it, pledging its ultimate and unconditional allegiance and submission not to the

[51] cf. *Infallible?*, 146-149; 158.
[52] *Infallible?*, 147.
[53] *Ibid.*, 153.
[54] *Ibid.*

magisterium but alone to the 'Lord who is Spirit' (1 Cor. 3:18). The faithful must enjoy the freedom not only to submit to and obey the magisterium, but also to exercise it, under the guidance of the Spirit, to protest and disobey, when the need for it arises, remembering that Peter's words: 'Is it right in God's eyes for us to obey you rather than God? Judge for yourselves. We cannot possibly give up speaking of things we have seen and heard' (Acts 4:19-20), may not be out of place in the Church of God in relation to its magisterium. It will be as presumptuous on the part of the people and the theologians to take the Spirit in the magisterium for granted, as it will be on the part of the magisterium itself. The magisterium will do well to take to heart the famous words of Augustine, which Vatican II made its own: 'What I am for you terrifies me; what I am with you consoles me. For you I am a bishop; but with you I am a Christian. The former is a title of duty; the latter one of grace. The former is danger; the latter, salvation'.[55]

On the other hand, Küng should be somewhat more 'radical' in insisting on the actual and the Lordly presence of Jesus Christ in the Church and the magisterium. He should be able to appreciate better that Jesus' presence is *actual* (present) and that His transcendence is *trancendence within*. Therefore, inasmuch as Jesus and His Spirit are present in the magisterium, for the community in its relation *vis-à-vis* the magisterium, the latter is infallible and its infallibility is guaranteed and *a priori*. This is not to say that therefore I may resign or transfer my responsibility to the magisterium, that I need not be wakeful and critical, that I should hold my peace and watch helplessly when I see injustice and untruth cultivated and worshipped. But it does mean that I should do all I have to do, when called upon to speak and to act, without preoccupation, with equanimity of soul, with humility and detachment, with the sense of total belonging and devotion to the Church, realizing that, when all is said and done, nothing at all depends on my or any man's 'work', or virtue, or genius, but everything entirely on Him, His word, His work and His Spirit.

Therefore the Church's *divine* infallibility and indefectibility are fundamentally as well as in detail infallibility and indefectibility *inconfuse et indivise* united to her human fallibility and defectibility. To forget this polarity and dialectic will mean nothing less than perversion of faith.

It is therefore that the Church can proclaim and teach the saving truth of God in the firmest confidence that she is, no matter whether because of or in spite of herself, proclaiming and teaching the infallible truth of God infallibly, by God's own authority and power. She can do this in spite of and overcoming every obstacle: her own sinfulness and untruth, her human and radical inability to speak the truth no otherwise than approximately, the inevitable limitations of her human language and expression. Rightly understood, we may go as far as to say that she can afford to be what she is, weak, sinful, untruthful, because in her her God is Power and Sanctity and Truth. Therefore

[55] *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, no. 33.

it is that the community can afford to believe the Church and confide in the magisterium, not *fide humana* or *ecclesiastica* but *fide divina*.

But, obviously, there is the essential correlative to this. Inasmuch as the Lord's presence and the indwelling of His Spirit are all encompassing and absolutely transcendent—thus rendering the Church Christ's body with Him alone as head—and inasmuch as the magisterium in the Church is really and basically service and stewardship in the household, the magisterium's infallibility is decidedly and essentially dependent on the community and so *a posteriori*. Here there can be no question of onesided and exclusive dependence. Here there is no possibility to speak in absolute terms, concerned as we are with essentially correlative realities. As we must decidedly insist on the primacy of the magisterium, considering one aspect of the relationship; considering its other aspect, we should as decidedly insist on the primacy of the community, as the former's essentially correlative constituent. Here there can be no question of the one taking absolute and permanent precedence over the other, as they are mutually constitutive, mutually guaranteeing and upholding by a transcendental relationship. Surely, we must also speak in ecclesiology in absolute terms. And that must be solely about Jesus (and His Spirit), who has not left the Church, resigning it either to the papal magisterium (to rule the Church monarchically) or to the episcopacy (to rule it oligarchically) or to the people (to rule it democratically)[56]. He continues to live in the Church and rule her as her Lord God, distributing ministries and graces to whom He pleases, and being the ultimate instance and court of appeal in every relationship.

Such an understanding of mutuality and Christ's *transcendence within* the Church will require that the bearers of the charisms (which ever they be) will bear a corresponding responsibility not only before God, but also before the community, in the same way as servants should be responsible before the household. Therefore the necessity on the part of the magisterium to be open, communicative and listening to the community. Therefore, too, the need on the part of the community, without giving up the attitude of humility and trust and self-criticism, not only to listen and to obey, but also to be watchful and actively and constructively critical.

I believe that only such a conception of mutuality, fundamental equality among the various ministries and charisms in the Church can theologically explain the reality of the Apostolic Church, which must somehow be normative for the ecclesiastical structures of all time. How else can be understood the phenomenon of the Apostle

[56] The human government of the Church, however, must have all the three factors—the monarchic, the oligarchic, and the democratic—as essential constitutive elements in harmonious blend. To quote Cardinal Suenens: 'Within the Church there is at one and the same time one principle of unity (monarchy), a pluralism of hierarchical responsibilities (oligarchy), and a fundamental equality of all in the communion of the people of God (democracy). All of these must mutually integrate together since they are essential to the truth of the Church'.

Coresponsibility in the Church, New York, 1968, 190.

Paul or the enormous role played by the prophets of Yahweh in relation to the (legitimate) institutional authority in Israel? (cf. also Rom. 12:1-8; 1 Cor. 12:1ff; Eph. 4:1-7).

However painful the process, the isolation of the magisterium from the community must end. The mystique of authority and the mythical and idolatrous aura of the numinous with which the magisterium surrounds itself must cease to be.[57]

A balanced ecclesiology, which will steer clear of both the Monophysite and the Nestorian extremes, and will be taught by the mystery of the hypostatic union as confessed in the Chalcedonian formula, will have to take the human in the Church with utter seriousness without gainsaying the divine. This will require, among other things, the full and uncompromising acceptance, with all its consequences, of the newly reaffirmed truth of the Church as being the people of God. This will require, also, a thorough re-understanding and re-interpretation of the up to now one sided conception of the *de jure divino* dimension of ecclesiastical authority. In the same way as political Christendom had inevitably to acquiesce in the demythologization and de-absolutization and de-sacralization of political authority, so today ecclesiastical authority will have not only to acquiesce in but welcome this painful but redeeming and renewing process. Only so can it remain true and loyal to itself, to humanity, to the humanity of God. The people and theologians on their part may not simply look on with submissive patience when they see things going wrong with the Church and her administration. They must speak out; they must not only speak, they must also act, each one according to his calling and charism. The fact that the prophetic fire has, may be, so long been kept under the embers by institutional authority should be no reason why this situation should continue for ever. And we shall do well to remember that the prophets of Yahweh, those men whose heart and mind would seem to have been made of fire and steel, were no less the Spirit-filled and powerful executors of God's designs, than the spokesmen for His Word[58]. The consequences of such a new ecclesiology may be traumatic, even convulsive to the establishment today. But I do not see how they can any more be avoided, if, that is, the Church is to abide in the truth of the Word made flesh and be loyal to Him and His Spirit in her kerygma and doctrine.

[57] Should it not be matter of the gravest concern that the Spirit of prophecy (in the biblical sense) seems to remain extinguished in the Church of today? Why is it that even 'in contrast to medieval theology, the present-day theology of the schools pays relatively scant attention to prophetism' (Karl Rahner, writing in *Sacramentum Mundi*, vol. V, 112)?

[58] cf. J. L. McKenzie, *Authority in the Church*, London-Dublin-Melbourne, 1966; Yves Congar, *Power and Poverty in the Church;* Hans von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries*, London, 1969.

DESPAIR IN DUM DUM

At the end of July 1972 we read in the newspapers that four hundred people in the bustees of Ward 14, South Dum Dum, had been paralysed after eating food cooked in mustard oil adulterated by a plasticiser, tri-cresyl-phosphate T.C.P. People's immediate reaction was one of horror—for it was a horrible crime. Men, women and children of all ages were badly affected. No medical cure was known. The bleak face of despair was cast over the entire area. Who was guilty? Two men stole a barrel of oil from a local Plastics Works and sold it to a local grocer, who in turn mixed it with the mustard oil. It was a case of greed and quick money. The grocer's wife was also a victim.

The Cathedral Relief Service *was requested by the State Government to look after the people. The physiotherapy unit was run by the Health Department. The Cathedral was responsible for daily rations for five hundred and thirteen people, supervision of their physiotherapy exercises, and their general welfare and morale.*

A visiting journalist described the place as the slum of creeping death. Death was in the atmosphere, for the people had lost hope and little assurance could be given them for the future. For C.R.S. the monthly bill of Rs 17,000 was staggering. It was not a question of who was guilty, but of taking responsibility for the guilt—for all of us have a share.

The work has gone on for a year now. Today all the patients have shown a marked improvement. They are walking without sticks; some have even gone back to their jobs. Students are finishing their studies. Of the fifty-two bed patients, only two are now left. A school for one hundred children has been started. Women are working at a craft centre. Three tube-wells have been sunk, and a community centre and adult literacy classes opened. The slum of creeping death has a new life. Hope is born and love has come. The Chairman recently received a letter from the people; this is what they write:

> *"In August 1972 we were struck with paralysis and life seemed to be coming to an end. We were all awaiting a slow and painful death. At that time CRS came to our rescue. By their love and sympathy and devoted service they installed a new hope in our lives. A keen desire to live and be cured of our disability filled our minds. So today we can raise our voice and shout with joy and gratitude".*

For workers and donors alike, this is not the work of their hands, but the miracle of the lifegiving Spirit whose Festival we keep at Pentecost.