

## THE SOUND AND FURY OF RENEWAL

A tidal wave of change was set in motion by the Second Vatican Council. The decade after its closing in 1965 appears as the most tumultuous in the whole modern history of the Church. So many spiritual and religious landmarks were suddenly swept away that the average Catholic was left in a state of complete bewilderment. No doubt much of this sense of uprootedness is simply one manifestation of a general feeling common to everyone today and so well described by Alvin Toffler in his *Future Shock* and attributed to the constant acceleration of change affecting every aspect of our lives-not only religion, Toffler says, but all the old roots, family, nation, community, and profession are now "shaking under the hurricane impact of the accelerative thrust."

For the average Catholic the first wave of the deluge struck when the new liturgy was introduced shortly after the council. Having been taught to think of the Mass as a mysterious unchangeable set of ceremonies originating with Christ himself, the average Catholic was not intellectually, spiritually, or emotionally prepared for what happened. The altar was brought forward, and the priest now faced the congregation; instead of whispering the prayers in Latin, he now read them aloud in the language of the people. Many of the old rites and ceremonies were discarded. Previously the faithful were taught to keep a prayerful demeanor and attitude, hardly noticing their neighbor, but now they were asked to turn and greet him with a "sign of peace."

As might be expected, once the myth of the Mass as a transhistorical, unchangeable rite was exploded, all sorts of things began to happen. Some were angered and felt betrayed and stopped going to church. Others took the changes as a signal to improvise on their own; instead of attending the regular parish Mass, they gathered in small groups-often including a "liberated" priest-and discussed inspirational readings.

The State of Siege Is Slowly Lifted sometimes chosen from the Scriptures, and then with little ceremony simply passed around ordinary bread and wine after reciting Christ's eucharistic words.

At the other extreme stood those who regarded the changes with abhorrence and tried to maintain the Latin Tridentine Mass. With the help of sympathetic priests they found ways of carrying on the old liturgy.

Most Catholics, however, accepted the changes with more or less grace but with little enthusiasm and have learned to take in stride the continuing series of changes that have modified not only the Mass but the other sacraments as well.

The excitement over liturgical change, however, soon appeared mild in comparison with the uproar generated by more crucial issues. The bishops soon found that the debate over modernization could not be confined to the relatively placid precincts of episcopal assemblies. Priests and laymen soon jumped into the act, and the din of controversy exceeded anything in memory. Thanks to the omnipresent media, it was immediately reported around the world when priest or nun squared off against bishop, or even bishop against cardinal or cardinal against Pope.

The central issue was that of authority. Until the arrival of Pope John and the Second Vatican Council, the typical Catholic took the authoritarian structure of the Church as a dictate of divine revelation. They thought of the Pope as a kind of superhuman potentate whose every word was a command invested with supernatural authority; even the bishop they regarded with awe. In this state of affairs, few Catholics questioned the autocratic procedures customary in the Church, though to outsiders they often appeared medieval. The bishop, for instance, was seldom challenged in his claim to rule his diocese as a personal fief, and the same held good for the pastor in running his parish.

But the seeds of a democratic revolution were sown at Vatican II, particularly in such acts as its emphasis on the Church as being primarily the whole people of God, its call for dialogue between all members of the Church, its assertion of the collegiality of Pope and bishops, and its call for the erection of priests' senates and of pastoral councils that would include the laity.

The problem for the liberals, however, was that in spite of all these fine words, in practice little was changed. The basic structure still remained pyramidal, with power flowing downward from the Pope, its infallible head. And the Second Vatican Council took pains to safeguard his absolute authority; its concept of collegiality merely gave the bishops a consultative position, leaving the Pope free to use them or not in his governing of the Church and granting him broad discretionary powers as to the calling of synods and as to the topics to be discussed. The same was true of other reforms endorsed by the council; the bishop, for instance, still remained juridically absolute in his power over his diocese.

In the light of the new understanding of the Church projected by the Council, however, many Catholics found these authoritarian structures intolerable and scandalous and began to agitate for democratic reforms. They dissented, demonstrated, engaged in Church sit-ins, and made use of the press. They also received support from such prestigious bodies as the Canon Law Society of America, which in 1966 said that the Church should strive for maximum feasible participation by all in the deliberative and decision-making processes.

In most countries the bishops showed great reluctance to move down this road. But in Holland bold initiatives were taken in an effort to reform the decision-making process. The bishops set up the National Pastoral Council, based on very democratic and representative principles. Its delegates were elected by the people and charged with voting on proposals that often originated at the lowest level.

The debate over the manner in which authority is exercised in the Church reached a state of extreme tension when Pope Paul issued his encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, condemning the use of artificial methods of contraception, including the pill. He put his authority on the line-making his decision against the overwhelming majority of his birth control commission. The whole affair precipitated the most serious crisis for papal authority since Luther. Leading theologians, a good section of the Catholic press, and

even national episcopates took stands somewhat at variance with papal declaration.

Gradually there formed a strong body of opinion critical of the Pope for not acting collegially with the bishops in issuing his encyclical. The outstanding spokesman for this point of view was Cardinal Suenens, archbishop of Malines, Belgium, since 1967, and one of the architects of Vatican II. In speeches, press conferences, and writings, Suenens called for an end to the Hildebrandine papacy and never tired of reiterating his theme: The Pope should no longer act as though he were outside the Church or above the Church. In elaborating major decisions he should be manifestly in union with the college of bishops. And he outlined a platform for progressives in the Church based on "coresponsibility"-a term he preferred to democracy. "The leader," he said, "is no longer the man who has all the answers but the man who succeeds in creating the environment in which dialogue, research, and constructive criticism are possible and in which the answers emerge by the gradual process of consent. I think that is the future direction of the Church-all parts moving together through, with and under authority."

The root of the current problem of authority in the Church, as Suenens saw it, was a conflict between two ideologies: One sees the Church as above all a fellowship of spiritual communities held together in essentials by their recognition of papal primacy; the other, the traditional one, still sees the Church on the Hildebrandine model-a superstate governed by an absolute monarch whose aim is to impose the maximum amount of conformity.

One of Suenens' major concrete suggestions was to terminate the old role of the papal nuncios as watchdogs of the Vatican whose job was to keep the bishops of any particular country in line. He wanted them transformed into mere ambassadors or mediators whose main task would be to keep Rome in touch with the national episcopates as well as with the individual governments. The national episcopates in turn would send similar representatives to Rome for the same purpose. Another proposal he made was to have the Pope elected by the bishops. If the laity took part in the election of bishops-

which he also proposed-then they too would have some influence on the selection of the Pope.

This was the background of the Second Synod of Bishops, held in October 1969. Observers expected a confrontation between the Suenens-type progressives and the traditional papalists. But it never materialized as the Suenens forces failed to rally any appreciable support. The bishops merely agreed that it would take more time to work out the full implications of collegiality. And in a key proposition they reaffirmed full freedom for the Pope to act on his own, both in governing and in exercising his teaching authority. They also timidly expressed the hope that he would willingly accept their collaboration, just as they promised to seek his collaboration in their own declarations and decrees. This latter proposition passed with only 4 dissenting votes out of 143.

Since then it seems obvious that the Vatican is determined to keep the bishops in line. It has won a notable victory in Holland, where over the protests of the Dutch episcopate it elevated two staunch conservatives to the episcopate. And it forbade the continuance of the democratically elected Dutch National Pastoral Consultation, which was supposed to be a permanent body replacing the National Pastoral Council.

The whole controversy over the exercise of authority in the Church, painful and disturbing as it is for the faithful, has certainly aroused the ordinary member of the Church to a much greater awareness of his own personal responsibility. It has made him realize that the hierarchy does not have all the answers, and it has forced him to think about the role of the individual's conscience.

In the pre-Vatican II Tridentine Church the independence of the individual conscience was kept to a minimum. In fact, the task of the layman was simply to obey the directives of the bishops and priests, and when perplexed to consult a confessor who, skilled in casuistry, could usually come up with a concrete solution. The mood of questioning engendered by the events of the past decade wrought an enormous change in all of this. Many Catholics suddenly found themselves no longer willing to give blind obedience to Church authority.

And in a few years the climate in the Church changed so drastically that few bishops dared to espouse a hard line on Pope Paul's birth control encyclical. Most of them have followed a generally permissive policy. Father Bernard Haring, one of the chief opponents of the papal position, retained his post as professor of moral theology at the Redemptorist seminary right in Rome itself. An important reason for this weakening of the Church's absolute authority in the realm of morality is a deepened sense of history. Catholics are now more aware of the relative nature of past decisions by ecclesiastical authority in the realm of morality. They are also very conscious of the failure of Church authorities in recent times to give strong leadership on moral issues-war, race, peace.

Numerous prominent Catholic moral theologians have accepted this trend toward greater recognition of personal responsibility and have lent it their support, with theoretical arguments along personalist lines. As one Catholic moralist, Fr. J. H. Walgrave, O.P., recently put it, all morality involves encounter with the other person; in measuring the morality of our acts, recourse to absolute standards-whether derived from a revealed code or natural law-is often impossible. It is often a matter of choosing among competing values, sacrificing some to realize another. And Father Haring, in a recent address to two hundred Italian moral theologians, declared, "Whoever requires automatic conformity of all believers to a formulation of natural law made without any regard for the concrete facts sins not only against the respect due to conscience but also against that due to the Church's teaching authority itself."

One of the most important spokesmen of this new approach to morality is J. Fuchs, professor for many years at the Jesuit Gregorian University in Rome. In several recent addresses he has sketched the outlines of a dynamic and evolutionary Christian approach to morality, as opposed to the static one so long prevalent in the Church. Its fundamental principle is human dignity: Whatever promotes human dignity, whatever contributes to humanization is moral. Lying and adultery are excluded, for instance, not because we are Christians but because we are human. Morality therefore will

develop in tandem with our understanding of the nature of humanity. New data from the human sciences can lead to changes in morality. Many of our moral rules are only provisional. The Christian Gospel does not give us any additional concrete rules of morality; it does, however, point us in a certain direction by equipping us with deeper insights into such basic moral options as love and forgiveness.

Moreover, as Christians we are obliged to do our thinking about morality in dialogue with a community that has been nourished by a certain moral tradition. This moral tradition is summed up in the official teaching of the Church and shows that in certain situations Christians have always acted concretely in the same way. Such consistency itself provides a presumption that a particular way of acting is the right way, willed by God. Nevertheless, this official teaching is not infallible, even though the Church is guided by the Holy Spirit.

The difficulty of harmonizing this personalist approach to morality with the traditional, norm-centered school was underscored by the "Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics" (Persona humana), issued by the Vatican on January 15, 1976. In preparing the document, an attempt was made to utilize the insights of both the personalist and the traditional schools, but the task proved impossible, and the final text, it seems, simply reproduced in large part a recent work of Cardinal Palazzini, a practitioner of the old methodology and one of the authors of the statement.<sup>4</sup> Principles are laid down and conclusions drawn without much reference to the complexities of individual persons. One of the many Catholic theologians who took a very negative view of the document was Father Charles E. Curran, a professor at Washington's Catholic University and one of the outstanding champions of the personalist school. He characterized the document as "theologically inaccurate, psychologically harmful, and pedagogically counterproductive." Curran objected most strenuously to the document's teaching that masturbation was an intrinsically and seriously disordered act. While not denying that masturbatory acts constitute a withdrawal from the full meaning of sexual

behavior, he insisted that when they are viewed in the context of the person and the meaning of human sexuality they "do not constitute such important matter • • • providing the individual is truly growing in sexual maturity and integration."

One of the most difficult moral precepts in the Church's moral tradition has been its absolute prohibition of divorce. According to this law, no truly sacramental marriage between baptized Catholics can be dissolved-even by the Pope. In cases where the partners no longer can live peacefully together, they might be granted ecclesiastical permission to separate but without the right to remarry as long as either partner remains alive. In spite of the tremendous hardships this policy created for those involved in broken marriages, few dared to challenge the law until Vatican II.

But once the facade of immutability and infallibility began to crack under the pressure of postconciliar events, a number of priests and theologians began to question the wisdom and scriptural validity of the rigid divorce law. They want the Church to continue preaching the sacredness of marriage as a sacrament and as a divinely willed lifelong commitment. But they call for a more flexible pastoral approach in dealing with couples whose marriage has failed. Some even want the Church to give up its marriage tribunals altogether and leave the whole business of marriage legislation to the civil courts. Some pastors regularly circumvent the tribunals by giving their pastoral blessing to Catholics whose second marriages cannot be regularized by Church authorities. As with the birth control controversy, the debate promises to be long and painful but probably not so traumatic, since many Catholics are learning to live with diversity of opinion, even on important issues.

It is not only traditional moral precepts that have been called into question; some prominent theologians have even subjected traditional dogmas to critical scrutiny. Many of these theologians were first given notoriety at the Second Vatican Council when their ideas won the approval of the progressive bishops and were incorporated into the decrees.



Since these theologians were regarded with suspicion before the council, their sudden rehabilitation had the earmarks of a Horatio Alger success story, and as the powers behind the scenes they were elevated to almost rock-star celebrity. The Rahners, Schillebeeckxs, Congars, and Kiings were suddenly in great demand on the lecture circuit, and their opinions were featured in the headlines of the world press.

Bold theories and reinterpretations of dogmas that formerly slumbered in the pages of obscure theological monthlies now became front-page news, and Catholics were regaled almost weekly with the latest Dutch speculations about the Eucharist, original sin, or papal infallibility.

The impetus for all of this was no doubt given by Pope John in his opening address to the Council when he called for a study and exposition of doctrine that would employ the literary forms of modern thought, since he said: "The substance of the ancient doctrine is one thing and the way in which it is presented is another." In this phrase John seemed clearly to endorse the concept of historicity—the idea that Church doctrinal formulas are not immutable in themselves but historically conditioned answers given by the Church at a particular moment to questions raised by the thought currents of a particular time. Until Vatican II the general feeling in the Church was that its dogmatic formulas were unchangeable—concepts like transubstantiation, infallibility, original sin, and sanctifying grace were regarded as perfect expressions of the truths contained in the Scriptures and definitive formulations that would be valid as such until the end of time. And Pius XII in his encyclical *Hutnani Generis* decried attempts by some theologians to update the Church formulas and "to weaken the significance of the dogmas . . . by seeking to free them from concepts and formulations long held by the Church and to return instead to the language of the Bible and the Fathers. . . ."

John, however, gave a clear signal in favor of the new school that subscribed to historicity. And his initiative was followed up in many of the conciliar decrees—notably in its decree *On Divine*

Revelation, which made full allowance for the historical dimension of Christian doctrine.

The guiding principles of this historical view of dogma were first worked out by a number of French theologians in the 1940s. These were mainly priests associated with the Dominican school of Le Saulchoir in Etiolles, and the Jesuit school of Fourvieres at Lyons under such leaders as Yves Congar (b. 1904), M. C. Chenu (b. 1895), Henri de Lubac (b. 1896), Jean (later Cardinal) Danielou (d. 1974), and to some extent Teilhard de Chardin (d. 1955)-men who were concerned with the problem of relation of faith and doctrine to the changing context of cultures and civilizations. Or as one of the younger members of the school, E. Schillebeeckx (b. 1914), puts it: "The problem of the language of faith

• • • presents us with a conflict between the historical ambiguity of Jesus' life, work and death on the one hand, and on the other, the religious and social expectations, aspirations and ideologies [derived] from [what] was expressed in Jesus himself. •••

The guiding principles of this new historical theology were: 1. the inadequacy of every era to define truth for future eras; . the traditional neo-Scholastic view of revelation as the transmission of definite fixed concepts was replaced by the idea of revelation as a personal self-disclosure by which God encounters the total person and communicates with him in a historical dialogue; . no formula of faith can therefore exhaust the truth; it can be exchanged for another formula more meaningful to the contemporary mind; . every formulation of a divine mystery is only the beginning, never the terminus; a theory of the development of dogma that has many links with Cardinal Newman's seminal "Essay on Development" which emphasized the social, historical, and nonconceptual forces impinging on this process.

One of the first attempts after the council to reformulate Catholic doctrine in accordance with this "new theology" was the Dutch New Catechism, which appeared in October 1966 under the general responsibility of the Dutch hierarchy, Its fresh, novel approach captured attention, and it was soon translated into many languages and became an international best seller.

But it was too novel for many, and complaints soon brought the Holy See into the affair. A commission of cardinals was appointed by the Pope to examine it, and they issued a report on October 1 ;, 1968, that listed a number of doctrines that the cardinals found inadequately treated, including the explanation of original sin, the nature of the Eucharistic sacrifice, the virginal conception of Mary, infallibility, and the source of authority in the Church. And they asked that it be rewritten with the modifications needed. After lengthy negotiations between the Holy See and the Dutch bishops a compromise was reached: The amendments recommended by the Holy See were included in an Appendix.

Some churchmen were alarmed at the unprecedented wave of theological speculation, and an attempt was made by Cardinal Ottaviani at the First Synod in 1967 to persuade the bishops to issue an updated Syllabus of Errors. But in spite of their own concern, the bishops refused to retreat back into the fortress; they renewed their commitment to dialogue and freedom. They agreed, nevertheless, that the theologians were going too far and too fast for the man in the pew. Their solution to the problem was to set up an international commission of theologians to aid the Holy See in dealing with the doctrinal confusion. Thirty well-known scholars drawn from a wide spectrum of theological thought and geographical areas were appointed. It included such progressives as Rahner, Congar, and De Lubac, although it omitted some other notables like Schillebeeckx, Bishop Butler, and Kung.

Hans Kung is a Tübingen theologian who has pushed the concept of historicity to its ultimate limits by calling on the church to admit that its dogmas might not only be historically conditioned, open to extension, and replaceable, but even downright false. In his book *Infallible? An Inquiry* for example, he called for a revision of the dogma of papal infallibility, which he said should not simply be reinterpreted but actually discarded, since it was disproved by historical and biblical research and was no longer operative.

In obvious reaction to Kung's ideas, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith issued on June 24, 1973, a "Declaration

Against Certain Errors of the Present Day," in which it repeats the Catholic teaching on the infallibility of the Church and the Pope which, it says, is a charism that guarantees immunity from error to Pope and bishops when they define doctrine. However, it does admit the factor of the "historical condition that affects the expression of Revelation"? and that can be found in the language used, the incompleteness of formulation of the doctrine, and other circumstances that might affect the expressions used. It therefore admits the possibility of finding later formulas that would improve the way of formulating the dogma. But it excludes as untenable by Catholics all dogmatic relativism, which would hold that dogmas are only a series of approximations, always falling short of the truth.

In addition, the Roman authorities instituted a process to examine officially the orthodoxy of Kung's views and repeatedly requested him to come to Rome for discussions, which he persistently avoided, claiming that he would not receive a fair trial. He demanded the right to see the full dossier on his case before submitting to any inquiry and also wanted to choose his own defense counsel.

Many theologians regard the Kling affair as the acid test of how liberally the Church will interpret its Vatican II declarations favoring freedom of inquiry. Although the Index of Forbidden Books was abolished in 1965 by Pope Paul, many theologians claim that an inquisitorial mentality still holds sway in Rome, and they cite the Kung affair as a case in point. In 1968 some 1,360 theologians signed a statement calling for due process for theologians in cases where the Roman authorities object to their teaching.

But amid all the upheaval, no postconciliar trend has been so disturbing to the bishops as the spectacular decline in vocations and the exodus of large numbers of priests, brothers, and nuns. From 1962 to 1974 the total number of seminarians in the United States alone decreased by 31.4 per cent, the number of religious brothers by 20 per cent, and the number of sisters by 18 per cent. The number of American priests who left the public ministry between 1966 and 1972 stands at around 8,000, or thirty times what it was in any corresponding period before the council.

Moreover, figures released in 1974 show that while the Catholic population around the world increased since 1960 from 530 million to 659 million, the number of priests has remained virtually static.

No doubt the desire to get married has been a major influence on the decision of many to leave the priesthood, and polls taken worldwide indicate that a majority of priests favor changing the law of celibacy. But there is much more to the crisis than that, and it is doubtful whether a mere change in the law of celibacy would halt the leakage from the priestly ministry.

The root cause of the crisis, it appears, is the question of the priest's identity: What does being a priest really mean today?

Before the council the answer was easy. Most Catholic priests would have readily accepted Cardinal Suhard's famous definition given in his book *Priests Among Men*: "He is not a lay person vested with a temporal function but a man set apart from the faithful, endowed by God with transcendent powers and marked with a consecrating character which sets him apart, makes him at once a pontiff and head in the community of the baptized."

The changes of the past ten years, however, have called into question all three basic points of this definition: the sacred character of the priest, his apartness, and his unique powers.

First, the sacredness attached to the very person of the priest is now seen as a historical development that is unsupported by the data of the New Testament, and even an actual hindrance to the exercise of the ministry in a world that no longer thinks in terms of the sacred and the profane as two distinct realms.

Second, by emphasizing the nature of the Church as the whole faith community, it set in motion a democratic trend that makes the old caste system of priesthood seem medieval. Moreover, for various reasons the Church is becoming the affair of the personally committed rather than the born Catholic type. And hence there is no longer as much need for the priest to bear practically the whole burden of the Church's mission-which takes away one of the main historical reasons for his being set apart.

Finally, his strictly cultic tasks-presiding at the Eucharist, administering the sacraments-have lost some of their capacity to make him feel set apart in view of Vatican II's affirmation that all the faithful participate in the priesthood of Christ and in view of the proposals to restructure the ministry to allow a greater variety. Moreover, on his own terrain of theology, the priest in this age of specialization often finds himself challenged by lay persons who may be better informed on particular topics than he is. Finally, laymen are beginning to take over much of his job of administration.

It is no wonder then that many priests suffer from a sense of confusion about their role. With regard to the problems facing the priest, the Dutch Church once again showed its willingness to grapple publicly and imaginatively with key issues of renewal. At the Dutch Pastoral Council held at Noordwijkerhout in January 1970, an overwhelming majority voted that the compulsory link between celibacy and ministry be abolished. The Dutch bishops agreed to work in consultation with the universal Church for changes whereby married priests could be admitted to service in the Latin Church and priests who have married could be reinstated in the ministry under certain conditions.

But this door opened to change by the Dutch was quickly slammed shut by their brother bishops in the Synod of 1971, when they reaffirmed the Church's determination to maintain its law of celibacy for priests.

Like the secular priests, the nuns and priests of the religious orders have also entered a period of severe crisis. In fact, probably no sector of the Church has been so polarized as these communities of men and women bound to God, to each other, and to the Church by their vows of poverty and chastity and their obedience to a rule of life derived from some saintly founder. The battle between advocates of radical change and upholders of the status quo has torn apart many of these communities, some of whom have lost more than half of their membership. Until the council these orders were often rigidly, even grotesquely, traditional, with their outlandish dress and huge, fortresslike convents and monasteries. So in their case,

especially, the council's call for change and updating was bound to be extremely disruptive.

One of the most evident signs of Christian renewal since the council has been the progress toward greater Christian unity. This has been true both on the local level, where Roman Catholics and other Christians have worked-often with great success-to remove age-old barriers between them, and also on the upper levels, where a series of important doctrinal agreements have been reached by theologians.

Until the Second Vatican Council, the twentieth-century ecumenical movement was principally the work of Protestants, beginning at the World Missionary Conference of Edinburgh in 1910. Numerous world assemblies followed, including the Edinburgh Conference of 1937, which approved the proposal for a World Council of Churches, which was formally organized at Amsterdam in 1948. Its member churches officially proclaimed their faith in Our Lord Jesus Christ, God and Savior, and committed itself to "help the Church penetrate the churches and make them one."

In spite of fruitful contacts between some groups of Catholics and Protestants, the Catholic Church officially held aloof from the movement until the Second Vatican Council when it laid down a whole new approach to the problem of Christian unity. Above all, by loosening up the simple identification of the Church of Christ with the Roman Catholic Church, it gave an entirely new focus to the dialogue between these two divisions of Christendom.

Since then many things have happened. Symbolic of the changed situation was Pope Paul's visit to the headquarters of the World Council of Churches at Geneva in 1971, where he recited the Lord's Prayer with its leaders.

Without attempting to describe even in general terms the revolutionary changes that have affected Protestant-Catholic relationship on all levels, we will just limit ourselves to listing the main doctrinal agreements that have been reached by officially commissioned groups of theologians-keeping in mind that these

conclusions do not imply official status but are aimed at consensus building and eventual official approval.

Historically, the main theological differences have involved the relation of Scripture to tradition, the role of Mary in man's salvation the true meaning of the Lord's Supper, the nature of the ordained ministry, and papal primacy and infallibility. On all these points there have been significant advances as theologians in dialogue have been able to reach a consensus that was previously considered impossible.

Considering the historic centrality of the Eucharist in Christian faith and worship, it was fitting that it be given the greatest amount of attention. Progress here has been substantial through such dialogues as the Lutheran-Catholic Consultation on The Eucharist as Sacrifice (1968) and Eucharist and Ministry (1970), the Anglican/Roman Catholic Windsor Statement on the Eucharist (1971), and the report of the Groupe des Dombes, composed of French and Swiss, Lutheran, Reformed, and Catholic theologians. There was general agreement that Christ is present body and blood in the eucharistic mystery and that the sacrament makes present his sacrifice.

This growing consensus has affected the question of intercommunion as Protestants and Catholics have wondered whether they should not at least occasionally share the bread and wine together at their services. The Vatican Ecumenical Directory of 1967 allowed Protestants to receive at a Catholic Eucharist in case of grave spiritual need, but it made no provision for reciprocity. Some Catholic bishops, however, have allowed their faithful to take the Protestant Eucharist under limited conditions, including basic agreement on faith in Jesus' Real Presence.

The closely related issue of valid ministry has also been much discussed and explored by teams of Catholic and Protestant experts. Up to this point the Roman Catholic Church has always insisted that for a valid ministry one must be ordained by a bishop who was himself linked by imposition of hands with the historic episcopacy, supposedly stretching back to the apostles.



But the tendency among the dialogic groups has been to Situate valid ministry in a broader context. Apostolic succession is not simply identified with the historical chain of bishops but depends also on fidelity to the Gospel and conformity of life and \_word to the teaching of the Apostles. Insofar as a church is apostolic in this sense they consider its ministry valid.

But most Catholics still hold that due to the rupture of the sixteenth century the Protestants lost contact with the historic chain of bishops, thus losing the fullness of the sign of apostolic succession, and hence these Catholics argue that Episcopal ordination is something that all Christian communities should strive for.

Notice we say "most Catholics"; a Memorandum issued by some very prominent Catholic and Protestant theologians in Germany refused to place such a high value on episcopal ordination. The controversial document, issued by the University Ecumenical Institutes, maintains that the unbroken sequence of imposed hands was only a help in safeguarding the apostolic tradition and merely a good sign of the continuity and unity of the Church', Ordination itself, they hold, is only the customary way of being commissioned for service to the Church. It JS .merely the recognition of a call already given by the community or the Holy Spirit and gives one a participation in the mystery of Christ. For this reason, therefore, the document called for mutual recognition of ministries by Protestant and Catholic Churches, since the differences are no longer of such weight as to require separation.

Most observers, however, would probably agree with theologian Avery Dulles that the authors of the Memorandum have gone too far too fast. Serious doctrinal differences over ordination, episcopacy, and papacy preclude still, it seems any full mutual recognition of ministries. And so at this moment both sides have a serious question to ask themselves:

Protestants, whether the episcopacy of apostolic succession is not still the surest safeguard and clearest sign of pastoral authority and of the unity and authority of the Church. Catholics, whether their episcopal office as presently structured reflects \_historical

conditioning rather than New Testament imperatives and JS therefore in need of radical change if it is to serve as a unifying office for the whole Christian community.

The thorniest question of all is that of papal primacy-the chief issue that split the Christian Church in both the Eastern Schism and the Protestant Reformation.

Even on this question there has been some progress, although no such breakthrough as in the case of the Eucharist. Sentiments expressed by certain Christian leaders outside the Roman communion show a willingness to grant the bishop of Rome a pastoral sort of primacy. This idea has been voiced before his recent retirement by no less a figure than the Arch• bishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey.

The two most significant dialogues on this issue, however, have been the one involving American Lutheran and Roman Catholic theologians, completed in 1974, and the one involving Anglican and Roman Catholic theologians, completed in 1975. In the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue both sides agreed that a trajectory of images in the New Testament indicates that Peter exercised a ministry that involved responsibility for the unity of the whole Church. They also agreed that for many centuries the bishop of Rome validly succeeded to this Petrine office and in so doing made notable contributions to the cause of Christian unity. Finally, they agreed that history since the Reformation shows that Christians still have need of such a Petrine office and that the papacy in spite of its notable failures still has the best claim to such an office. But before the Lutherans would accept any kind of papal primacy over the Church, it would have to be extensively restructured so as to eliminate its autocratic and bureaucratic features.

The participants in the Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue reached conclusions quite similar to those just mentioned. Like the Lutherans, the Anglicans recognized the value of an office of universal primacy such as the bishop of Rome alone has exercised and alone still does exercise. And they agreed that in any future union the bishop of Rome would be the appropriate one to hold such an office. Like the Lutherans, however, the Anglicans still recognized some difficulties that remained, not insuperable they

believed, but ones that would require further study before they could accept papal primacy. These included their fears of abuse of papal power and reservations they entertained about two infallibly defined Marian dogmas, the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption.

. On the hypersensitive issue of Mary's role in man's salvation, there has not yet been a great amount of dialogue. In fact, a recent listing of conferences held between U. S. Catholic and Protestant theologians over the last ten years does

not mention a single one devoted to Mary.<sup>10</sup> This is a somewhat surprising fact when we recall that the Second Vatican Council laid down the groundwork for a new approach that does so much to meet traditional Protestant objections to the Catholic position on Mary.

. This new Catholic approach to Mary can be summarized in several points. First, after much debate the bishops decided not to issue a separate treatise on Mary but to include its statement on Mary as simply one chapter in its general Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, the implications of this decision were significant. It indicated that the bishops wanted to emphasize the fact that in spite of her unique prerogatives Mary was still to be regarded as a fellow member of the Church and not as some kind of semi-divine being exalted above the Church, all impressions to the contrary caused by misguided piety notwithstanding. Second, there was a distinct biblical emphasis in the Council's text on Mary, an emphasis duly acclaimed by Protestant observers at the Council. This effort to stay close to Scripture helped the bishops to produce a very sober treatise free of the excesses that have often characterized even official documents on Mary. The Council, in brief, stated that Mary was deserving of special honor and reverence as Mother of God and Mother of the Redeemer. She was also to be honored as Mother of the Church insofar as she cooperated out of love and embraced God's saving will with a full heart so that in Augustine's words, "there might be borne in the Church the faithful, who are members of Christ their Head." Moreover, she was to be hailed, venerated, and invoked "as a preeminent and altogether singular member... model and excellent

exemplar ( of the Church) in faith and charity" free from all stain of sin and a model of holy virginity and motherhood. And while admonishing the faithful to persevere in the various forms of piety which devotion to Mary has produced, the bishops at the same time cautioned them against exaggeration and vain credulity.

Third, the bishops took another step that could further the cause of greater agreement about Mary. They laid down what might be called the principle of doctrinal relativity. This idea is contained in two important points which they make in their document on Ecumenism: First, that even past doctrinal formulations of the Church may be in need of reform; and second, that the truths of faith do not all occupy the same level of importance but form a hierarchy. These admissions have profound ecumenical implications. They allow much more flexibility for Catholics in discussion with Protestants since they would seem to permit disagreement on secondary issues if unity can be reached on more important ones. Theologian Avery Dulles, S.J., for instance, recently invoked the principle of a hierarchy of truths when he called for Rome to lift the anathemas directed against those who deny the definitions of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption.

While Protestant and Catholic theologians have moved slowly in exploring the ramifications of the Council's new approach to Mary, the impact of the Council on Marian devotion and theology within the Catholic Church has been enormous. As in so many other areas, it opened up an entirely new chapter. There has been a great decline in traditional forms of piety toward Mary: rosaries and medals have been tossed away, statues of Mary have been removed, hymns to Mary have faded out of memory, and May Day celebrations have disappeared.

Marian theology too has been much affected by the critical attitude engendered by the Council. A recent survey of studies on Mary from 1966 to 1975 notes that since the Council comprehensive studies of Marian doctrine have all but ceased. Much attention, on the other hand, is being devoted to the Scriptural and historical foundations of Mariology. Moreover, while little work is being done on topics like the Immaculate Conception, Mary as

Mediatrix or CoRedemptrix-topics formerly favored-questions like the virginity of Mary and the relation of the Church to Mary are intensely debated and studied.

The issue of Mary's virginity came to the fore when the Dutch Catechism appeared in 1966 and critics pointed out that it had sidestepped the question of the virgin birth. A commission of cardinals appointed by the Pope ordered the Dutch bishops to issue a revised edition of the Catechism clearly teaching the virginal conception of Jesus but the Dutch bishops refused. A compromise was finally reached when the latter agreed to add an Appendix containing the Vatican's instruction reiterating the traditional doctrine on the virgin birth.

Since then there has been considerable debate among Catholic theologians as to whether Catholic faith demands belief in Mary's virginity as a biological fact or whether one could regard the assertion of the virgin birth as a symbolic concept. To put it in even more precise technical terms: "Whether the virginal conception of Jesus in the Matthean and Lucan infancy narratives might simply be regarded as a theologoumenon, i.e., a theological assertion that does not directly express a matter of faith or an official teaching of the Church, and hence is in itself not normative, but that expresses in language that may prescind from factuality a notion which supports, enhances or is related to a matter of faith."

Considering the emotionally charged nature of the issue and the fact that it concerns a point that no Catholic would have dreamed of debating a few years ago, the controversy has been carried on with a relative serenity and objectivity that speaks well for the sophistication and maturity of the Catholic community of scholars. If we are to believe Father Rene Laurentin, one of the outstanding defenders of the traditional position, the school of opinion favoring a merely symbolic interpretation of the virgin birth is now the dominant one among continental European Catholic theologians. In fact, he maintains that the pendulum has swung so sharply that one even has difficulty getting a hearing for the traditional view. He is hopeful, however, that once Catholics have

learned to cope with the new and intoxicating atmosphere of freedom in the Church and have learned to take the constantly shifting theories of exegetes and historians in stride, they will recognize the scriptural necessity of the virgin birth and the importance of affirming it in the physical real sense in order to maintain the integrity of the Catholic faith.

The decade after the Second Vatican Council has been one of exceptional turmoil not only in the Church but in civil society as well. As the American historian Sydney Ahlstrom says in regard to the United States, it has been a time when "the old foundations of confidence, patriotic idealism, moral traditionalism and even of historic Judaeo-Christian theism, were awash. Presuppositions that had held firm for centuries-even millennia-were being widely questioned."

For Catholics, it amounted to a major revolution or, as some have called it, a Copernican shift in consciousness. Thanks to the Second Vatican Council, Catholics have been forced to re-examine many of their most cherished practices and traditions. Such a process was bound to be disruptive, but the sheer magnitude of the crisis it provoked astonished everyone.