

THE ECCLESIOLOGY OF JOHANN ADAM MÖHLER

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THERE ARE few theologians who, 125 years after their death, are remembered outside of a few pages in some history of theology. Still less do we find their thought exercising a profound influence in current theology. Johann Adam Möhler, by any standard, is a magnificent exception to this rule.¹ Without any exaggeration, we can place his

¹ There is, unfortunately, very little in the English language on the ecclesiology of the nineteenth century in general and Möhler in particular. We give here a select bibliography on Möhler's ecclesiology: K. Adam, *The Spirit of Catholicism* (London, 1929); R. Aubert, *Le pontificat de Pie IX* (Paris, 1952); S. Bolshakoff, *The Doctrine of the Unity of the Church in the Works of Khomyakov and Moehler* (London, 1946); P. Chaillot, ed., *L'Eglise est une: Hommage à Möhler* (Paris, 1939); Y. Congar, *Vraie et fausse réforme dans l'église* (Paris, 1950); J. Geiselmann, "Der Einfluss der Christologie des Konzils von Chalkedon auf die Theologie Johann Adam Möhlers," in A. Grillmeier and H. Bacht, *Das Konzil von Chalkedon* 3 (Würzburg, 1954) 341-420; *id.*, *Die theologische Anthropologie Johann Adam Möhlers* (Freiburg, 1955); G. Goyau, *Moehler* (Paris, 1937); E. Hocedez, *Histoire de la théologie au XIX^e siècle* 1 (Paris, 1949) 231-51; S. Jákí, *Les tendances nouvelles de l'ecclesiologie* (Rome, 1957); C. Journet, *The Church of the Word Incarnate* 1 (New York, 1956); J. King, *The Necessity of the Church for Salvation in Selected Theological Writings of the Past Century* (Washington, D.C., 1960); J. A. Möhler, *Die Einheit in der Kirche oder das Prinzip des Katholizismus* (Cologne, 1957); *Symbolik oder Darstellung der dogmatischen Gegensätze der Katholiken und Protestanten nach ihren öffentlichen Bekenntnisschriften* (Cologne-Olten, 1958); *Symbolism or Exposition of the Differences between Catholics and Protestants* (New York, 1844); *L'Unité dans l'église* (Paris, 1938); M. Nédoncelle et al., *L'Ecclesiologie au XIX^e siècle* (Paris, 1960); H. Nienaltowski, *Johann Adam Möhler's Theory of Doctrinal Development: Its Genesis and Formulation* (Washington, D.C., 1960); O. Rousseau, *The Progress of the Liturgy* (Westminster, Md., 1951); G. Thils, *Orientations de la théologie* (Louvain, 1958); S. Tromp, *Corpus Christi quod est ecclesia* (New York, 1960); E. Vermeil, *Jean-Adam Möhler et l'école catholique de Tübingue* (Paris, 1913).

Some selected articles are: G. Bardy, "L'Unité dans l'église," *Revue d'apologétique* 67 (1938) 367-71; P. Chaillot, "L'Esprit du christianisme et du catholicisme," *Revue des sciences phil. et théol.* 26 (1937) 483-98, 713-26; "La tradition vivante," *ibid.* 27 (1938) 161-83; Y. Congar, "La pensée de Moehler et l'ecclesiologie orthodoxe," *Irenikon* 12 (1935) 321-29; *id.*, "Sur l'évolution et l'interprétation de la pensée de Moehler," *Revue des sciences phil. et théol.* 27 (1938) 205-12; J. Geiselmann, "J. A. Möhler und die Entwicklung seines Kirchenbegriffs," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 112 (1931) 1-90; P. Godet, "Drey," *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* 4 (1911) 1825-28; L. Grandmaison, "L'Ecole catholique de Tübingue et les origines du modernisme," *Recherches de science religieuse* 9 (1919) 387-409; A. Kerkvoorde, "La théologie du corps mystique au XIX^e siècle," *Nouvelle revue théologique* 77 (1945) 1025-38; S. Lösch, "Johann A. Möhler: In memoriam," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 119 (1938) 1-2; A. Moons, "Die Heiligkeit der Kirche nach J. A. Möhler," *Wissenschaft und Weisheit* 18 (1955) 81-94; D. Parodi, "L'Essence du

name among the greatest ecclesiologists of modern times. In many ways, too, he anticipated many of the theological advances of our own day: his notions on the universal priesthood of the faithful, on the relationship between the episcopacy and the papacy,² his deep and abiding love and understanding of the liturgy.³ But the great glory of Möhler shall always be his sublime conception of the Church in its internal and external structure. Few men have loved the Church as passionately and lovingly as he, and it was this deep and abiding love of the Church which drove him on to seek the depths of her mystery. In his short forty-two years of life, we can truthfully say that no one has had a greater part in the enthusiastic revival of ecclesiology in our era. In a sense, without Möhler it would be hard indeed to imagine the fruits of this revived ecclesiology which we enjoy today. It is he, above all, who was at the beginning of the long line of theologians of the last century who prepared this way which has culminated in the great Encyclical *Mystici corporis* of Pius XII.⁴ It is with more than light humor that Congar says of the whole line of ecclesiologists of the nineteenth century: "Moehler genuit Passaglia; Passaglia genuit Schrader; Passaglia et Schrader genuerunt Scheeben et Franzelin."⁵ And with what justifiable pride were his confreres able to erect the following inscription on his tomb:

Johannes Adamus Moehler

SS. Theologiae Doctor et Professor P.O. in Universitate

Tubingensi et Monacensi, Capit. Cathedr. Wirceburg.

romantisme," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 18 (1931) 520-32; E. Przywara, "Corpus Christi mysticum: Eine Bilanz," *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Mystik* 15 (1940) 197-215; G. Rouzet, "L'Unité organique du catholicisme d'après Moehler," *Irénikon* 12 (1935) 330-50; G. Thils, "J. A. Moehler: Le centenaire de Moehler," *Ephe-merides theologiae Lovanienses* 15 (1938) 521-25; H. Tristram, "J. A. Moehler et J. H. Newman," *Revue des sciences phil. et théol.* 27 (1938) 184-204; N. von Arseniew, "Chom-jokou und Möhler," *Die Ostkirche* (= separate volume of the quarterly *Una sancta*, 1927) pp. 89-92; A. von Schmid, "Der geistige Entwicklungsgang Johann Adam Möhlers," *Historisches Jahrbuch* 18 (1897) 322-56, 572-99; G. Voss, "Johann Adam Möhler and the Development of Dogma," *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 4 (1943) 420-44.

² Nédoncelle, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

³ Rousseau, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-68.

⁴ AAS 35 (1943) 220-35. It is interesting to note how many of Möhler's own developments are present in this pontifical document.

⁵ Y. Congar, "Affirmation de l'autorité," in Nédoncelle, *op. cit.*, p. 107. See also King, *op. cit.*, p. xi. King, in our estimation, would have performed a greater service, had he included a section on Möhler's ecclesiology.

Decanus Designatus, ordin. St. Michel. Pro Meritis Eques.
 Natus Igersheimii in Wuertemberga
 Pridie Non. Maias 1796
 Defensor Fidei
 Litterarum Decus Ecclesiae Solamen
 Obiit Monachii Pridie Idus April. 1838.

INTRODUCTION

A theologian is in many respects a product of his time, and his speculations are tempered by the milieu in which he lives. There are few who can rise above it and see the whole theological conspectus as it is. There is the added danger that in so doing he will differ from those of his time, rendering himself suspect to many of his own confreres. The result is that he will become either a stumbling block or a landmark for later theology. It is interesting to note in this respect the difference between a Möhler and a Döllinger. Both were historians of the Church; both lived in the nineteenth century; both confronted the same ecclesiological problems in the same type of milieu. But while Döllinger at the beginning of his studies professed a doctrine singularly more exact than Möhler with regard to the hierarchy, and we see, by a slow progression, his falling away from orthodoxy in his *Pope and Council*, Möhler on the contrary, by an exactly inverse movement in a much shorter life, taking as his point of departure the erroneous doctrines of Constance and Basel, advanced little by little to an almost perfect Roman doctrine.⁶

Möhler's theological and ecclesiological doctrine is intimately bound up with both the age in which he lived in Germany—one of romanticism—and the traditional Catholic legacy with regard to the Church. We shall examine both of these aspects as a preparation for the understanding of Möhler's own ecclesiology.

Jean Leclercq and George de Lagarde⁷ have shown well the beginning of the seeds of the resultant teaching of ecclesiology in the nineteenth century. Without entering into the gross exaggerations

⁶ Goyau, *Moehler*, p. 37.

⁷ Jean Leclercq, *Jean de Paris et l'ecclesiologie du xiii^e siècle* (Paris, 1942); Georges de Lagarde, *La naissance de l'esprit laïque au déclin du moyen âge* 1 (Louvain, 1956). The latter work is extremely important in showing the slow separation not only of Church and state, but also of the whole of society from theological influence. In our present study this is important in the development of an ecclesiology which was apologetic and juridical against the encroachments of secular power.

condemned by Pius XII in his Encyclical *Humani generis*,⁸ we can truthfully say in the words of Congar that ecclesiology from the thirteenth century on was built like the Second Temple of the Jews, sword in hand.⁹ The sword was directed toward the disputes of infringements on the Church by the state and her consequent struggle for her freedom and independence. The struggle was started as far back as Gregory VII and the connected problems of lay investiture.¹⁰ The result during the later Scholastic period was that the conception of the Church was formulated essentially as a juridical *societas* with its own rights, in opposition or rather in contrast with the *societas civilis*. For the first time in history the religious body, in this case the Church, begins to formulate this separation and independence vis-à-vis the secular power. Certainly, the notions were already in vogue as far back as St. Ambrose¹¹ and St. Augustine¹² as well as the famous "duo sunt" formula of Pope Gelasius of 494.¹³ The real formulation of this, however, was left to the medieval canonists, with the resultant struggles between Church and state throughout the Middle Ages. Thus begins the separation of the tract of ecclesiology from the other tracts of theology, to become one of apologetic and defensive tone in the face of secular and civil encroachments.¹⁴ In later centuries we have the added difficulties of conciliarism and the exaggerated elements of the "spiritual Church" of Occam, Wyclif, and Huss in opposition to the external and hierarchical element in the Church. This in turn led to further emphasis in ecclesiology on external elements in the Church. If one wishes proof of the excessive emphasis on the external aspects of the Church due to both heresies and conciliarism, we may consult one of the greatest ecclesiologists of the fifteenth century, Turrecremata and his famous *Summa de ecclesia*.¹⁵ Its sections are

⁸ AAS 42 (1950) 563.

⁹ Congar, "La pensée du Moehler et l'ecclésiologie orthodoxe," p. 324.

¹⁰ Cf. A. Fliche, *La réforme grégorienne* (3 vols.; Louvain, 1924-37); de Lagarde, *op. cit.* 1, 37-46.

¹¹ Ambrose, *Epist.* 12, 4 (PL 16, 1003-1004).

¹² Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 5, 19 (PL 41, 166).

¹³ Cf. Hincmar, *De institutione Carolomanni* 1 (PL 125, 1007).

¹⁴ It is noteworthy to observe that St. Thomas did not treat the Church outside of the total context of its relationship to the other Christian mysteries in the *Summa*, *Partes secundae*; cf. Congar, *Esquisses du mystère de l'église* (Paris, 1941) pp. 59-71.

¹⁵ Rome, 1489.

divided into: (1) The Universal Church; (2) The Roman Church; (3) The Primacy of the Roman Pontiff; (4) Ecumenical Councils; (5) Schismatics and Heretics. Not one word on the interior and spiritual element of the Church. The result, then, of this whole movement was an excessive emphasis on the hierarchical and external aspects of the Church.¹⁶ Even the titles of these first treatises *De ecclesia* betray their one-sided emphasis.¹⁷

The earlier errors of Huss and Wyclif, coupled with a need of true reform in the Church "in capite et in membris," led to the revolt of the sixteenth century. Once again for the Reformers, the external is relegated not only to the secondary and nonessential but to sinfulness itself. The ecclesiological elaborations since this period have been dominated by polemics between the Church and the Reform. Abundant evidence of this can be found in such eminent ecclesiologists as Stapleton (1598) and Bellarmine (1621). After this period, ecclesiology takes on a strictly apologetical point of view in defense of the hierarchy, clergy, sacraments, etc.—in short, the visible aspect of the Church.¹⁸ It became, in the words of Congar, a true "hierarchiology"¹⁹ instead of a total ecclesiology.

Starting in this same period, we have further errors which only served to harden the above tendency: Gallicanism, Jansenism, Febronianism, Josephism, and finally, in Germany, Episcopalianism. All these errors had in common the denial of the Church in one or other element of her hierarchical structure or teaching authority. These could be combated only by emphasis on the Church as an independent society, with a divinely constituted hierarchy and teaching authority.

Against all these errors and encroachments, ecclesiologists tended to define the Church as being not only a spiritual institution but also a society properly speaking, visible, institutionally unequal and hierarchical, independent, having its own spiritual finality—having

¹⁶ For abundant bibliography cf. S. Jáki, *Les tendances nouvelles de l'ecclésiologie*, pp. 5–17; Congar, "Affirmation de l'autorité," in Nédoncelle, *op. cit.*, pp. 76–98.

¹⁷ James of Viterbo, *De regimine christiano* (1301); Giles of Rome, *De potestate regia et papali* (1301); Bartholomew of Lucques, *De regimine principum*; H. Noel, *De potestate papae* (1309); etc.

¹⁸ Jáki, *op. cit.*, p. 11; G. Thils, *Les notes de l'église dans l'apologétique catholique depuis la réforme* (Gembloux, 1937).

¹⁹ Congar, "Affirmation de l'autorité," p. 113.

authority on earth to judge in a visible and judicial way. The authority of the bishops, but above all the authority formally instituted by God of the Sovereign Pontiff, vicar of Jesus Christ, is heavily emphasized throughout this period.²⁰

These remarks, then, must be kept firmly in mind when discussing the ecclesiology of Möhler. It will be in reaction to this definition of the Church²¹—which he finds incomplete—that he will elaborate his own ecclesiology. It was necessary for Möhler to rediscover the authentic and complete concept of the Church,²² a concept which had been lost partly through anti-Protestant, antistatist polemics, partly through the *Aufklärung* which we shall see in our next section.²³ His *Einheit* was to contribute greatly in overcoming this post-Tridentine ecclesiology by putting into focus the deeper mystical aspects of the Church.²⁴ This will be Möhler's continuous task throughout his two great works, *Die Einheit* and *Symbolik*.

ROMANTICISM²⁵

We must now examine some of the immediate background in which Möhler was to elaborate his ecclesiology. The eighteenth century had seen the almost complete victory of rationalism in the form of the *Aufklärung* and the individualism which was a necessary by-product of the rationalistic spirit. There were no true mysteries. There was only what reason could penetrate. This rationalistic and individualistic spirit made its way into Germany through France and its great *hommes de l'esprit philosophique*.

Romanticism, in short, was a reaction to this lifeless and logical mode of thought. The romanticists reawakened interest in the

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 90. Abundant bibliography can be found in these well-documented pages.

²¹ Even such a faithful theologian as Franzelin saw, as late as the Council of the Vatican, papal infallibility as being polemic in nature: "Hoc quoque sensu verissime dici potest conciliarium decretorium forma polemica" (Mansi 1, 339B).

²² Möhler rebukes Katerkamp for having conceived the history of the Church as if "the hierarchy was the central point around which all evolves." Möhler objects by saying that "it is the Holy Spirit who is in the Church the perpetual principle who conducts all according to the ends of Providence; all the rest is a means, organs of the Spirit" (*Theologische Quartalschrift* 5 [1823] 497-502, as quoted in P. Chaillet, "La tradition vivante," pp. 165-66).

²³ Rouzet, *art. cit.*, p. 339.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

²⁵ See appropriate articles cited at the beginning of this paper, particularly D. Parodi, *art. cit.*, p. 526.

Church's past—her history, her founding Fathers, and even her liturgy. With its social ideas or, even better, its communal character of Christianity, the ancient idea of the living community of the Church was rediscovered.²⁶ Romanticism may be compared to the continuous flow of a river in which each continuous generation plunges, takes part, and is by that very fact a continuous unity or union of those who are contemporary with those in the past. This grotesque image is but an image, but it shows very well that the rationalistic workings of individualism were definitely on the way out. Thus romanticism restored the sense of tradition to German thought; for far from surpassing the life of the individual, it conferred on him the harmonious realization that he was a part of mankind—in union with all men.²⁷ This notion will be of supreme importance in the Catholic teaching of Möhler and will play a fundamental role in his revived ecclesiology. This romantic period, with its many exaggerations and dangers of immanentism, was in a true sense a steppingstone for a new concept of the Church in Möhler. It is quite noticeable how, through the influence of this milieu,²⁸ the whole school of Tübingen was deeply infused with the living notion of tradition and the Church as a living organism, as well as a love for the writings of the Fathers. These notions will have a fundamental influence on the ecclesiology of Möhler. Chaillet was able to say of Drey, one of Möhler's teachers: "All Drey's studies on the Church, its organic unity, its living tradition, its progressive development, and its communal life vivified by the Holy Spirit, were the fruit of his careful reading of the Bible and the Fathers, and of his truly spiritual study of history."²⁹ We have Möhler's own testimony to this effect when he wrote to his old friend Lipp, future Bishop of Rottenburg: "It was through the study of the Fathers that he had discovered a living Christianity, youthful and complete."³⁰

There can be no doubt that these different currents all had their deep impression on the young Möhler. When he was only nineteen

²⁶ Rousseau, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

²⁷ H. Brinkmann, *Die Idee des Lebens in der deutschen Romantik*, cited by Geiselmann, "Aspects de l'unité et de l'amour," in *L'Eglise est une: Hommage à Möhler*, p. 162.

²⁸ Rousseau, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

²⁹ P. Chaillet, "L'Esprit du christianisme et du catholicisme," p. 449.

³⁰ P. Chaillet, *L'Unité dans l'église* (Paris, 1938) p. xxv.

he studied under such a master as Drey, and in 1823 occurred his so-called "experience at Berlin"³¹ and his experience with his Protestant teachers there. What captivates the whole group of thinkers of this movement is the notion of "organism" (*Geist*) which is both living and continuous. In Möhler it is certainly not the suprarational element of Hegel or even of Schleiermacher but becomes the personalized Spirit—the Holy Spirit of Love, who forms and guides the Church. In the words of Rouzet, how painful it must have been to see his Protestant teachers living this interior reality of the Church falsely, while so many of his fellow Catholics lived their own reality so little!³²

Möhler's *Einheit* is the result of this movement and its influence on his thought. By a slow purification of this first intuition, Möhler will develop an orthodox ecclesiology more complete than those of past centuries. We remain, however, unconvinced that the principal influence in this regard was that of his masters of Berlin. We believe that the principal source of his primal intuition as to the true essence of the Church and its final orthodox development in the *Symbolik* was his own Catholic teachers and predecessors, Drey and Sailer. It will be worth our while to examine each of these men.

SAILER³³

Sailer, by nature, was destined to be more of a spiritual director than an experienced theologian. By nature, Sailer was drawn to the deep mystery of God's union with men through the Spirit in the Church. Respected as a deeply spiritual figure by Catholics and Protestants alike, Goyau was able to say of him that with Sailer German religiosity learned once again how to pray.³⁴ His whole theology, then, was founded on a deep mystical plane, on the immediate experience of divine light, love, and Christ's life in us.³⁵

Sailer's main problem, however, was to establish the essential link between the objective, visible Church as come down to us from Christ

³¹ Rouzet, *art. cit.*, p. 332.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 331–32.

³³ For bibliographical material cf. Chaillot, "L'Esprit," pp. 449–60. See also corresponding articles in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* and *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*. These men have also been collected in one larger volume by Geiselman, *Geist des Christentums und des Katholizismus: Ausgewählte Schriften katholischer Theologie im Zeitalter des deutschen Idealismus und der Romantik* (Mainz, 1940).

³⁴ G. Goyau, *L'Allemagne religieuse: Le catholicisme (1800–1848)* 1 (Paris, 1905) 294.

³⁵ Chaillot, "L'Esprit," p. 486.

Himself and this mystical, interior experience of Christ within the context of this visible Church. The danger of separation of these two aspects was evident from certain theologians of his time, such as Boos and Gossner. But Sailer wanted no part of this separation. He remained always faithful to fundamental orthodoxy in insisting on the link between the visible and the invisible Church, even though quite obscurely. There can be, however, little doubt as to his complete orthodoxy as gathered from his own words: "I repeat it: I regard every foundation of a sect, every separation from the Church—and I mean the Roman Catholic Church—as (1) unintelligent in the supreme degree, (2) most culpable, for if we separate ourselves from doctrine, from the sacraments of the Church, from the hierarchy, from the center of unity, we would be isolated by that very fact from the sources of the spiritual life."³⁶

Thus, for Sailer, there is no such thing as a "spiritual Church" distinct from the visible Church. To be separated from the one is to be deprived of all benefits of the other. But, for Sailer, the essential did not reside in the hierarchy and the external structure of the Church. One must have both, yes; one and the other are necessary, yes; but that does not mean that Sailer put them on an equal footing. On the contrary, the visible exists for the invisible; the visible is the continuation of Christ in the eternal design of the Father to save men in the Holy Spirit. "No happiness without love; no love without election; no election without faith; no faith without preaching; no preaching without a mission; no mission without the Lord of the Church."³⁷ Combining his ecclesiology of tradition and the union of the invisible and visible Church which was to have so much of an effect on Möhler's own ecclesiology, he says:

The Church of Christ is not founded on Scripture: it was before Scripture. It rests on the oral tradition, the living tradition. The apostles were the living witnesses; their living word was planted in the garden of God . . . the content of apostolic Christianity was therefore that of a living tradition. The deposit of apostolic faith becomes the rule of (the) Catholic faith, and this rule remains living in the consciousness of the Church. The living word of the Church has replaced the living word of the Apostles . . . The Scriptures were thus only a mo-

³⁶ Goyau, *op. cit.* (supra n. 34) 1, 300, and parallel texts in Geiselmann, *Geist des Christentums und des Katholizismus*.

³⁷ Goyau, *ibid.* 1, 288.

ment of the living tradition, fixed in mute letters; the written testimony is posterior to the living testimony, and it is the living word of the Church which gives it a living sense . . . thus the exegesis of Scripture independent of this tradition and authority can be only sterile interpretation . . . It is the Church, the divine-human organism, which continues through time the apostolic tradition.³⁸

Sailer remains, then, fundamentally orthodox, but his weakness is to express in adequate terms the relationship between the visible, hierarchical organism and the internal, mystical element of the Church. This weakness will also become evident in Möhler but, as we shall see, it is solved by the time he has completed his last major work, *Symbolik*.

DREY³⁹

Drey's ecclesiology will develop in much the same lines as that of Sailer and with the same difficulties: the problem of the continuation and permanence of tradition and the relationship between the visible and invisible elements in the Church.

The mystical and internal elements in the Church, says Drey, have been badly understood by theologians since the Middle Ages. The real damage arrived with nominalism and thereby, little by little, the sense of the supernatural in the Church was lost. Theology then developed separated from mysticism, with the result that Protestantism abandoned the living and concrete tradition of the Church. Drey thus blamed theologians of his day for abandoning what was essential in the Church and concentrating too much on the externals of authority. A legalism and Kantian moralism contaminated their works, leaving aside the historical and mystical symbolism of Christianity. The Church, for Drey, was not a system of ideas but essentially a living and sacred history, a participation in the eternal plan of which she is the organic development, a transhistorical reality.⁴⁰

It [Catholicism] has always recognized . . . the proper necessity of the Church, the only authentic incarnation of Christianity. . . . It is neither reflexion nor reasoning which has led Catholicism to this conviction. It has always been moved by a living intuition . . . the consciousness of itself in Catholicism is the conscious-

³⁸ Text quoted in *Grundlehren der Religion* (1805), found in Geiselmann, *op. cit.*, p. 492.

³⁹ Chaillet, "L'Esprit," pp. 719-22; see also Drey's article, "Geist und Wesen des Katholizismus," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 1 (1819) 237-82.

⁴⁰ Chaillet, "L'Esprit," p. 719.

ness of its perfect identity with primitive Christianity, identity resting on the unchangeable base of an uninterrupted and objective tradition . . . this is the true sense of the Catholic *paradōsis*. . . .

But Drey did not separate the invisible and visible Church. For him, they formed but one unity—a living, visible community whose invisible unity in the Spirit is assured by the necessary mediation of a visible center of unity, the papacy. Thus, the visible and invisible Church is always the unity of the same organism.⁴¹

The influence, then, of Sailer and Drey on Möhler will be paramount. Thus, Chaillot concludes that “the return to the live forces of revelation [by Sailer and Drey] has raised up, little by little, a more mystical, more organic, and more dynamic conception of the Church. With a very sure sense of unity, by working to spread a theology which answered to the new demands of souls, these theologians had the humble assurance of answering to the call of the Spirit.”⁴² Their searching for the organic unity of Christian doctrine and tradition, their mystical conception of the internal structure of the Church, and their endeavor at reconciling the visible and invisible Church into one living organism will mark, more than the romantic Protestant influences, the evolution of Möhler’s ecclesiology. It remains now to enter into the study of that thought. We shall divide it into three main sections, which represent the fundamental notions of Möhler’s ecclesiology: (1) pneumatology in the Church; (2) the visible and invisible elements in the Church; and (3) the hierarchy.

PNEUMATOLOGY IN THE ECCLESIOLOGY OF MÖHLER

We have chosen the title “Pneumatology”—the doctrine of the Holy Spirit—to signify what is certainly one of the basic notions of the Church in the thought of Möhler: “the Spirit of God whose action in the Church continues in an uninterrupted manner.”⁴³ It is essential to understand the role of the Holy Spirit in the Church, since it is He who gives the Church its direction and inspiration—in short, its depth and mystical content. He forms the inner core of the Church: “This Spirit, which penetrates and animates all the faithful, ought by that very fact to unite them in a great community and produce a

⁴¹ “Ein lebendiges und ununterbrochenes Ganzes durch die ganze christliche Zeit.”

⁴² Chaillot, “L’Esprit,” p. 726.

⁴³ *Theologische Quartalschrift* 6 (1824) 105.

spiritual society, a unity of all the faithful." And, commenting on the text of St. Peter, "Ecce unus erit Spiritus et unum corpus," Möhler says: "This expresses well that Jesus Christ animates by the Holy Spirit the faithful who are held together by Him and united in one whole in such a way that the unique Spirit of the faithful is the operation of the unique Spirit of God."⁴⁴

One of Möhler's favorite themes is that Christianity—the Church—cannot be understood unless it is vitally lived. This is as true for the simple faithful as it is for the learned theologian. Again and again Möhler insists in the *Einheit*: no one can know Christ except through the Church. We can come to know other men and ideas by thought and by study; not so with the Church. We will understand the Church only if we live in her and cultivate her in us. Only then will we have the necessary competence to study her.⁴⁵ This is so because of the essential internal structure from which flows life and unity: the Holy Spirit of God. Since the Church is the community of the faithful in so far as it realizes the Spirit of love, the Spirit of God, it must be the Spirit who is the center of it all. This community of the people is carried by the same faith and by the same love, forming one sublime whole where each member works for the service of the others and where the bishop is the servant of all.⁴⁶ But behind all this there is the Holy Spirit, who inhabits and governs the community from the interior and in sovereign fashion. His action is over all juridical conventions and cannot be predetermined. He breathes where He will, giving grace where He will. "There where the Church is, there is Christ, for there is the Spirit."⁴⁷ "The Holy Spirit works in the Church," continues Möhler, "because Catholic mysticism has always recognized all that the profoundest meditation could ever imagine on the subject of our union and our existence in God. This mysticism is the very basis of the Catholic Church."⁴⁸

Unity within the Church is also the product of the unique Spirit. The Church is one because the divine Spirit who dwells in her is one. This Spirit who works in her is the principle of unity: "Since the word

⁴⁴ *Einheit* (cf. supra n. 1) pp. 4–5; text reconstructed according to Geiselmann.

⁴⁵ Cf. Goyau, *op. cit.* (supra n. 34) p. 21.

⁴⁶ J. Geiselmann, "La définition de l'église chez J. A. Möhler," in Nédoncelle, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

⁴⁷ Quoted by Rouzet, *art. cit.*, p. 468.

⁴⁸ *Einheit*, p. 237.

of Christ, together with His Spirit, found its way into a circle of men and was received by them, it has taken shape, put on flesh and blood which is regarded by Catholics as the essential form of the Christian religion itself."⁴⁹ In a true sense, says Möhler—at least in the *Einheit*—it is the Spirit who creates the Church. "We say that the active force communicated to the faithful by the Holy Spirit . . . creates the visible body of the Church and that the visible body conceives and supports the elevating force which is connected to it. . . ."⁵⁰

The presence of the Spirit within the Church is not simply of an accidental or transitory nature. He abides with her all days: having been sent just once on Pentecost Sunday, His presence with her is a continuous action, a continuous and essential abiding. For just as in Christ the divinity of the Logos was united in an essential way with a human nature, so too in the man who has received the gift of grace the divinity of the Spirit is united, not only in action but in His very essence, with man after the example of the Church, where the Spirit is present not only in action but also *ousiōdōs*. Only the character of union distinguishes the terms of the analogy: it is hypostatic in the first case, it is accidental in the second.⁵¹

This brings up the problem of the evolution of the notion of Spirit in the works of Möhler. Certain notions of the pneumatology in the *Einheit* are even disturbing. It would seem from reading some of the texts already cited that Möhler succumbs to a certain type of deism, a notion of the Spirit which is too external and mechanical. "It would seem that the Holy Spirit runs the Church in the same way that a charioteer leads his horses."⁵² A further critique could be made in saying that it is the Holy Spirit, not Christ, who institutes the Church.

Whereas in his courses of canon law (1822–23) he is not at all satisfied with the juridical definition of the Church as the *status ecclesiae* and *societas inaequalis*,⁵³ here in his *Einheit* (1825) he has made men too passive and the Spirit Himself ignorant of the functions and structure of the Church. Möhler was correct in stating that the exterior and visible Church is, in a sense, born and develops in an organic way

⁴⁹ *Symbolik* (cf. supra n. 1) p. 390: "welche somit als die wesentliche Form der christlichen Religion selbst. . . ."

⁵⁰ *Einheit*, pp. 178–79.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁵² Geiselman, "La définition," p. 153

⁵³ Cf. *Theologische Quartalschrift* for this whole period, specifically 5 (1823) 487, and 6 (1824) 105, 271.

from pneumatology and that this interior element is primordial; but he runs dangerously close to a sort of ecclesiological monophysitism, a confusion of the divine and human. Little room is left for the notion of Christ's action in the Church. It was this which led Möhler in 1835, in composing his last great work, *Symbolik*, to place Christ in the place of the Holy Spirit.

The *Symbolik* is the final result of the evolution of Möhler's ecclesiology. It is here that we find the balanced view of the exact nature of the Spirit in the totality of the ecclesiological structure. In the *Symbolik* the Church is no longer simply the new life born of the Holy Spirit, but a community which is more balanced in the reality of sin and evil in her members. According to the *Einheit*, the Church is the totality of believers who have the plenitude of the Spirit;⁵⁴ according to the *Symbolik*, the Church is the visible community of believers, founded by Jesus Christ in a body which now becomes His extension in time and space.⁵⁵ Therefore, we note a transition of thought which put Möhler on the more perfect road of orthodoxy: what was said in the *Einheit* about the Holy Spirit as the invisible principle of the Church, the *Symbolik* transposes to Christ, Son of God made visible by His extension, the Church. But this does not mean that the action of the Spirit has been banished from His Church. He continues to act in the Church—but as the envoy of Christ, as the Spirit of Christ. In the *Einheit*, the Holy Spirit represented the pure divine essence and action in the Church; in the *Symbolik*, having become the Spirit of the Son, He must adapt Himself to the instrumentality of the Incarnation. In other words, His role in the Church will be to form “other Christs,” to guide the Church along the ways of the Incarnate Son of God, since the Church in the *Symbolik* is the extension of the Incarnation of Christ. In the sacraments, in preaching, the Holy Spirit transmits to us what was merited by Christ, the pure doctrine of Christ, by a visible human intermediary, the Church.

But the fundamental intuition of Möhler remains the same: it is the Spirit present in the Church which forms all, guides all, inspires all toward the only-begotten Son of God. He is, as Pius XII would say, the “soul” of the Church. “It is He, Jesus Christ, who founded the community of the faithful It is He who has poured the Holy

⁵⁴ *Einheit*, pp. 8–9.

⁵⁵ *Symbolik*, p. 389.

Spirit into our hearts. . . ."⁵⁶ And Möhler continues: "The Father sends the Son, and He the Holy Spirit. It is thus that God has come down to us. We come to Him in the inverse way: the Holy Spirit conducts us to the Son, and He leads us to the Father."⁵⁷

THE VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE ELEMENTS IN THE CHURCH

This was certainly one of the most difficult questions to solve in Möhler's ecclesiology. It was the *crux problematis* of all of Möhler's teachers and predecessors, and proved to be one of the problems which Möhler solved only towards the end of his career when writing his *Symbolik*. What is most interesting in Möhler's thought is a constant evolution towards orthodoxy in the three "periods" of his thought. Geiselmann has shown how the thought of Möhler evolves along these lines.⁵⁸ First, his very notion of the Church can be divided into three distinct periods. (1) His first concept of the Church was during his teaching of canon law. It was a juridical concept, in line with the canonical conception of the *societas inaequalis*;⁵⁹ to use his own expression, "the concept of the Church falls under the more general concept of society."⁶⁰ (2) In the second period, marked by the composition of his *Einheit*, Möhler saw that this definition was too juridical, too formalistic. Through his detailed examination of the Church Fathers and early Christianity itself, he saw that this definition was at variance with that of the Fathers, since they conceived of the Church as "something one and real, with the Holy Spirit as its life principle, transcending all human categories, a work of God, the continuation of Christ."⁶¹ We have already seen how the interior element of the Holy Spirit was emphasized in this definition of the Church. What is important, however, is that Möhler sees that the canonical and juridical definition of the Church which he had in his earlier years has to be enlarged to include the interior, invisible element in the Church.⁶² (3) Möhler progressed further in his thought. By the study of these same Fathers and early Christianity, Möhler finally evolves in his *Symbolik* to the conception of the Church as the continuation of the Incarnation of the Son of God. The interior element, the mystical

⁵⁶ *Einheit*, pp. 2 and 16. ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁵⁸ Geiselmann, "Aspects de l'unité et de l'amour," p. 162.

⁵⁹ Cf. *supra* p. 575.

⁶⁰ Geiselmann, "Aspects de l'unité et de l'amour," p. 129.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 193.

essence of the Church, is kept but is now applied differently. Christ wished to be propagated through space and time by a divine-human organization: His representation to humanity through all ages through the action of His own Spirit, which has now become the Spirit of Christ, whose function is to lead to Christ. "The eternal unity of the Father and the Son in love is the source of Christ's mission, of the authority and law which keep the Church alive and produce her unity."⁶³

We have seen, therefore, the evolution of Möhler's conception of the Church itself. But the difficult question still remains as to the interaction of this "one unique organic body." For Möhler, there was no such thing as a separation or independence of these aspects. They were, in a very real way, two aspects of the same reality, to the point that in the *Symbolik* one cannot have the one without the other. Arguing against the Protestant conception of an invisible Church, he says: "Under a historical point of view, we know nothing about the Christ except the Church. . . . We cannot learn to know Him except in and through the Church."⁶⁴ Visible and invisible, the Church is the unity of those who believe, but of those who believe by the Spirit in Him whose Spirit they have received in the visible Church.⁶⁵ The community, visible in essence, becomes the place of the Spirit, where alone we can hear the truth of Christ.⁶⁶ Möhler is very insistent on the unity of these two aspects: "His word can nevermore be separated from the Church, nor the Church from His word."⁶⁷

The fundamental meaning of the visibility of the Church is the Incarnation of the Son of God. Just as the Incarnation was designed as an appeal to the whole man, so too with the Church. She must be visible and appealing as He was visible and appealing. "The divine truth, in one word, must be embodied in Jesus Christ and thereby be embodied forth in an outward and living phenomenon and accordingly become a deciding authority in order to seize deeply on the whole

⁶³ As quoted *ibid.* ⁶⁴ *Einheit*, p. 17. ⁶⁵ Rouzet, *art. cit.*, p. 463.

⁶⁶ Cf. *Einheit*, p. 178: "But just as the Divine Spirit, by the communication of whom the Christian spirit is formed, cannot and ought not to disappear, He [the Spirit] cannot evermore abandon the body, and it is thus that He is brought till the end of the world. Thus, it is in [the Church] that the faith is propagated exclusively."

⁶⁷ *Symbolik*, p. 391: "Sein Wort ist von der Kirche und seine Kirche vom Wort nimmermehr ablösbar."

man."⁶⁸ And Möhler continues in an *argumentum e contrario*: "If we adopt the idea of an invisible Church, then neither the Incarnation of the Son of God nor His miracles nor in general any positive outward revelation can be conceived because they compromise authoritative proofs—outward, visible manifestations of eternal ideas."⁶⁹ Once again Möhler insists on the visibility of the Church as a continuation of Christ's own Incarnation and as modeled on it: "Thus, as Christ in His life represented under a typical visible form the higher order of the world, so does the Church in like manner. . . . If the Church be not an authority representing Christ, then all again relapses into darkness, uncertainty, doubt, distraction."⁷⁰

Möhler has no patience with those like Luther who wished to make a division between the Church and Christ. (Luther would put conscience ahead of the Church.) "No less false is that idealism which separates the authority of the Church from the authority of Christ."⁷¹ Religion and the Church must be joined, and this for the reason that God became man.⁷²

Möhler insists on the unity between these two elements in the Church almost to the point of obsession. So intimate is this union that to destroy one is to destroy the other: "Could Satan succeed in annihilating the Christian Church, then the Christian religion would be at the same time annihilated and Christ Himself would be vanquished by Him."⁷³

It is true that most of the quotations which prove beyond the shadow of a doubt the profound sense and orthodoxy of Möhler are taken from the *Symbolik*. The *Einheit* was too preoccupied with the mystical element within the Church to devote much space to the external structure. But even if criticism must be made here, we must keep firmly in mind that in the three stages of Möhler's ecclesiological evolution the *Einheit* represents only the middle period and not his definitive thought as expressed in the *Symbolik*. The final result of his

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 397. ⁶⁹ *Ibid.* ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 389.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 401. Möhler even came to the conclusion that the Church (its hierarchy) must be the light for the Catholic both in scientific research and in spiritual guidance. When Bautain had difficulties with his own bishop in certain doctrinal and disciplinary matters, Möhler wrote him that for a Catholic only full submission would suffice. Cf. Hocedez, *op. cit.* 1, 238.

⁷² "Weil Gott Mensch geworden ist."

⁷³ *Symbolik*, p. 402.

thought in the *Symbolik* permits Möhler to join the invisible and visible elements in perfect harmony and unification of the institution of authority born of the Holy Spirit. This exterior society which offers us the goods of salvation by her teaching and her preaching, "by means of the durable and uninterrupted apostolate ordained by Christ," is the Church, an institution which is at the same time visible and invisible, divine and human, which is organized in hierarchical form, and which in its teaching and its sacerdotal and pastoral functions continues the prophetic, sacerdotal, and royal mission of Christ Himself. According to Geiselman,⁷⁴ this conception of the Church—the union of visible and invisible—came to Möhler via the notions of the Christology of Chalcedon, where the divine and human, visible and invisible elements were defined to be united in the one Person of the Word, but "*in duabus naturis inconfuse, immutabiliter, indivise, inseparabiliter agnoscendum.*"⁷⁵ Henceforth in Möhler's ecclesiology, in analogy with this fundamental concept, it is the God-man, in whom the divine and human are intimately united without mixture, who forms the constructive analogical principle from which the notion of the Church is to be constructed. In the words of Geiselman:

It is these men, who belong to the Lord in their Spirit and life and who live their faith, that Möhler sees as the living columns of truth. . . . Now, however, Möhler will place them in their precise place in the Church considered as the continued and living authority of Christ . . . these men raised up by the Holy Spirit and the exterior, juridical society. . . . The Church as an institution must be on guard to discard any danger . . . it alone has received the mission to transmit truth and salvation, which are given to us in Christ.⁷⁶

In conclusion, let us say that Möhler corrects his own thought in its establishment of relations between the visible and invisible elements of the Church. Unilateralism of the invisible element of the Spirit in the *Einheit* is counterbalanced and equilibrated by his *Symbolik*. Here he puts back the visible, hierarchical, and institutional aspects of the Church in their necessary function with the invisible and mystical element by the notion of the Incarnation. In his *Symbolik* the inverse is brought out from that of the *Einheit*. In this latter it is the visible

⁷⁴ Geiselman, "La définition," p. 162. ⁷⁵ DB 148.

⁷⁶ Geiselman, "La définition," p. 168. See references to *Symbolik*, p. 404.

which is the result of the invisible; in the former, the final thought of Möhler, it is the invisible which is the result of the visible.⁷⁷

It remains that Möhler never had occasion to syncretize well these two aspects which he saw so clearly. But those aspects which he does develop suffice to make him the great initiator of modern ecclesiological renewal. In the *Einheit* we have the first *ex professo* elaboration of the vital concept of the internal and mystical structure of the Church in modern times. The *Symbolik* brings out the danger of an unilateral vitalism. But one thing is sure, even if Möhler did not succeed entirely in uniting the two essential aspects of the same organic reality: there is no vague interruption or separation between them in the Church. His profound endeavor was to bring them together and show their own proper interdependency. We see this clearly in the chapter added to the second edition of the *Symbolik* where Möhler expressly mentions this problem. It is indeed marvelous to see how profoundly ecclesial Möhler was, and how far ahead of his own time were his efforts in this regard. This can be especially noted in contrast to so many ecclesiologists who, until the promulgation of Pius XII's *Mystici corporis*, were ready to admit a distinction between the visible and the invisible Church. This "original intuition" of Möhler has proven to be one of the deepest as well as one of the most orthodox aspects of his ecclesiology.

THE FUNCTION OF THE HIERARCHY IN THE CHURCH

It remains for us to investigate the meaning of the hierarchy in the ecclesiology of Möhler. Here as well as in his other notions on the Church the idea of the hierarchy was subject to evolution of thought.⁷⁸ There were the three characteristic stages in his thought on this subject: the period of the young teacher of canon law, the middle period of the *Einheit*, and the culminating period of the *Symbolik*. Our analysis will try to uncover Möhler's essential thought on this subject through the stages of its development in his ecclesiology. It will be seen that Möhler's thought is, once again, in evolution towards ever more perfect orthodoxy, and not like that of his successor and compatriot Döllinger,

⁷⁷ Congar, "La pensée de Moehler et l'ecclésiologie orthodoxe," p. 322.

⁷⁸ Geiselmann, "La définition," pp. 169-95; Goyau, *Moehler*, pp. 31-37; Hocedez, *op. cit.* 1, 237-41.

who evolves in the opposite direction.⁷⁹ His evolution, as Goyau so well observed, is fundamentally more and more Catholic and was the result of his continuous effort, once again, to establish the relationship of the invisible and visible elements of the one vital organism which is the Church.

As we have seen, Möhler's evolution of thought started on a singularly unorthodox conception. He himself was to admit this when he said:

I was a long time in doubt as to knowing whether the primacy [of the pope] is of the essence of the Catholic Church; I was even disposed to deny it; for the organic union of all the parts [of the Church] in one whole—which the very idea of the Catholic Church demands and which is her own self—appeared to be fully attained in the episcopacy; from the other side, it is evident that the history of the first three centuries of the Church is not so rich in materials as to be able to dissipate all doubts in this regard.⁸⁰

These and similar texts in his courses of canon law as well as in his *Einheit* have given rise to many answers by theologians. Möhler's refusal to re-edit the *Einheit*, saying that he had written some things there which he might well have left out, has also led to speculation as to Möhler's true ideas on the position of the hierarchy in the Church.⁸¹ There seem to be three main opinions on this evolution by theologians. (1) Following A. Schmid,⁸² some would say that Möhler professed a form of Episcopalianism in the *Einheit*. The bishops are here the expression and creation of the community and not of divine origin. The papal authority is not posited as of divine origin but only of historical necessity. In the *Symbolik* Möhler would have progressed to a form of Presbyterianism where Gallicanism is definitely eliminated. This is the opinion of F. Vigener as well.⁸³

2) A second opinion was offered by M. Vermeil.⁸⁴ According to him, Möhler and other Germanic theologians attempt a whole new revival of theology and pastoral science. Their influence passes on to England through Newman and finally into France, to culminate in the Modern-

⁷⁹ Supra p. 565. ⁸⁰ *Einheit*, p. 16.

⁸¹ Congar, "Sur l'évolution et l'interprétation de la pensée de Moehler," pp. 205-6.

⁸² A. von Schmid, *art. cit.*

⁸³ "Gallikanismus und episkopalistische Strömungen im deutschen Katholizismus zwischen Tridentinum und Vaticanum," *Historische Zeitschrift* 3 (1918) 495-581.

⁸⁴ E. Vermeil, *op. cit.*

ist movement. In other words, Möhler would be at the root of Modernism, making the hierarchy nothing more than a human institution. This view was combated vigorously by L. Grandmaison and other reputable theologians.

3) A third opinion was offered somewhat later by the German theologian, K. Eschweiler.⁸⁶ According to him, Möhler's theology and ecclesiology would represent a confrontation of German ideology and Catholic theology, borrowing from the former and purifying it at the same time. Schleiermacher's thought would be represented by the element of the Holy Spirit in the *Einheit*, in which case the hierarchy would be nothing but the expression of the Christian community of love.⁸⁶

All these analyses have in common one fundamental error: the failure to recognize the total evolution of Möhler's thought on the hierarchy. It is of extreme importance to follow Möhler's own development towards an ever-increasing Catholic conception, if we are to understand fully his thought on this important matter.

The first stage of thought is represented in his course of canon law (summer session of 1824 and 1825). Here he considers the Church from the point of view of a human society. "A church in the general sense is an association of men who confess the same religion, in order to spread and consolidate among themselves in common a religiosity and a moral which is conformed to that church."⁸⁷ The primacy as the external center becomes necessary because the original and fervent love of the primitive community has become cool.

It is absolutely incontestable that the Roman Church was considered as the first from the most ancient times Rome was not considered yet as the center of the Church In the measure that this internal tie [of love] became cool, in the measure that the egoism of the bishops increased, in the measure that heresies and schisms gained ground, we see the Church more and more constrained to group itself around an external center. It is from this moment that we see the testimonies of the Fathers of the Church multiply under the form of a precise indication that the bishop of Rome is the successor of Peter and that as [Peter] was, as it were, the center in the midst of the apostles, the bishop of Rome was in his turn in the midst of the bishops, their successors.

⁸⁶ K. Eschweiler, *Johann Adam Möhlers Kirchenbegriff* (Braunsberg, 1930).

⁸⁶ For a rebuttal in detail of each of these opinions, cf. Geiselman, *Geist des Christentums und des Katholizismus*.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

The bishopric is conceived in this stage of Möhler's thought as an essential relation between the *presbyterium* and the *episcopus*.⁸⁸ Not only are the bishops and the pope of divine right, but also the members of the local hierarchy, the presbyters. Citing New Testament texts where *presbyter* and *episcopus* mean the same thing, Möhler concludes that they are all of divine origin in jurisdiction, the later-formed *episcopus* being the *primus inter pares*. Together they hold jurisdiction from divine institution, but the exercise of that jurisdiction is reserved to the bishop.⁸⁹

The primacy of the bishop of Rome is destined to safeguard the unity of the Church. This is a true primacy of both honor and jurisdiction, since it is the duty of the center of the Church to guard against heresy and schism. But in the management of the affairs of the whole Church, universal laws, etc., this falls on the assembly of the whole body of bishops. This is so true that the decisions of a council are invalid unless they are accepted by the whole of the episcopal body. The pope, then, is subordinate to the assembly of bishops, even though he has the presidency of that assembly. Möhler, then, at this point of his evolution of thought suffers from a real conciliarism.

The second stage of thought is to be sought in the *Einheit*, where the hierarchy has evolved in an entirely new direction. As we have seen, in the *Einheit* the Church begins with the coming of the Holy Spirit to form the community of love. Möhler has gone from a static conception of the Church in his course of canon law to a dynamic conception in the *Einheit*. In this latter conception, it is this love which is the principle of the episcopacy and the primacy as well as its origin. In each community the bishop is engendered as a visible and incarnate image of this internal love. "In the perfect community the bishop is the product of the love of the faithful, men rendered free by the Spirit."⁹⁰ The hierarchy is of divine institution, for they are the necessary organs of the love of the Holy Spirit. "He [the bishop] is . . . the father, the spouse of the Church, the organ of Jesus Christ, who vivifies all."⁹¹ Separation from him is separation from the Church: "The

⁸⁸ *Theologische Quartalschrift* 5 (1823) 263-99.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 273; professing the Scholastic opinion that "episcopatus non est ordo sed solummodo extensio ordinis sacerdotalis."

⁹⁰ *Einheit*, p. 190. ⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

bishop is the personification of love which reigns in the community, and the center of all; whoever is united to him is in communion with all, and whoever is separated from him is separated from the community of all and separated from the Church."⁹²

The primacy of Rome is the incarnated image of the charity of the whole Church and is tied to the Church of Rome, since she is the *centrum unitatis*.

The evolution of Möhler's ideas on the hierarchy bears a marked improvement over his course of canon law. Here the hierarchy is of divine origin, willed by the Holy Spirit. But the weakness of the theory is that it seems as if the hierarchical body is engendered by the body of the faithful. Furthermore, the relationship of authority is almost totally lost in the mystical conception of the Church. Besides, the human element in the Church is not emphasized, and the result is a misunderstanding of the community of juridical authority.

The final stage of thought is represented by the *Symbolik*. Here, as we have seen, the human element has been well distinguished from the divine. After Möhler made this initial jump (for the consciousness of sinful members in the Church forced this conclusion on him), he was able to distinguish more clearly the character of the visible authoritative hierarchy in the Church over the rest of the ecclesiastical body.

At this point Möhler has abandoned completely the theory of conciliarism. "This narrow doctrine, which we can consider as *dépassé*, would menace the Church with imminent ruin if one were to develop it to its logical consequences."⁹³ He taxes the partisans of Josephism as "canonists who lack a sense of the Church."⁹⁴ But the essential transformation in the *Symbolik* comes, as we have said, from the fact that it is now the visible aspect in the Church which produces the invisible. The Church is now totally dependent on the authoritative body of the hierarchy.

The relation, now, between the primacy and the episcopacy is defined in the sense that the pope is the center of the episcopacy and its head, with recognized rights and obligations. "What a helpless, shapeless mass, incapable of all combined action, would the Catholic Church not have been . . . had she been possessed of no head, no supreme

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 187. ⁹³ *Symbolik*, chaps. 5 and 43.

⁹⁴ *Theologische Quartalschrift* 11 (1829) 566.

bishop, revered by all!" And Möhler continues in the line of the divine institution of the papacy: "Had not the Church possessed a head instituted by Christ, and had not this head, by acknowledged rights and obligations, been enabled to exert an influence over each of its parts. . . ."⁹⁵ The Episcopalianism has definitely been overcome. In the *Symbolik*, therefore, we have the final form of Möhler's doctrine. The hierarchy—bishops and popes alone—are of divine origin; they are constituted in the Church to rule that community by the direct command of Christ and as such come "from above" the community, not "from below" as the product of the love of that community. Finally, the individual bishops as well as their entire assembly are subordinated to the Pope.

CONCLUSION

Möhler has given us a brilliant and balanced synthesis of the two essential aspects of the Mystical Body of Christ. The Church is a mystery. She is certainly visible in her institutions, her cult, her hierarchy, and her monuments; but she is, above all, a mysterious communication of divine life to humanity and the world, an intimate communion of souls with God and with each other in Christ—the two essential characteristics of the same living and organic reality which is the Church. Möhler tried to give us such a synthesis—imperfect, perhaps, in many respects, but perfect in one: that one can never be separated from the other. To define the totality of the Church, both of these characteristics must be taken into account. The truth lies in the synthesis of the two. In the words of Y. Congar, to sacrifice the invisible to the visible is a form of Nestorianism; to sacrifice visible to the invisible, a form of Monophysitism.

It will be to the everlasting glory of Möhler's ecclesiology that the fruits of a revived ecclesiology in our own day by such men as de Lubac, Journet, Adam, Vonier, Mersch, and Congar are due in no small degree to him. And one who compares Möhler's fully developed ecclesiology with the Encyclical of Pius XII, *Mystici corporis*, will find many areas of concord and agreement. In a sense, many of Möhler's own ideas were given apostolic approval by that pontifical document. Not that they were just Möhler's ideas; Möhler, after all, did

⁹⁵ *Symbolik*, chaps. 5 and 43.

nothing but bring to the fore the tremendous teaching of the Scripture and the Fathers of the Church. He has opened up for us a theology of the Church of great profundity and of great beauty, which later theologians developed to a more perfect degree.

No more fitting conclusion could be given the idea of Möhler's ecclesiology than the master's own words regarding the mystery of the Church in his *Symbolik*: "It is with the profoundest love, reverence, and devotion that the Catholic embraces the Church. The very thought of resisting her, of setting himself up in opposition to her will, is one against which his inmost feelings revolt, to which his whole nature is abhorrent." And again: "No more beautiful object presents itself to the imagination of the Catholic . . . than the image of the harmonious interworkings of countless spirits who, though scattered over the whole globe . . . yet preserving still their various peculiarities, constitute one great brotherhood (*Bruderbund*) for the advancement of each other's spiritual existence . . . and are become one body."⁹⁶

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, chaps. 5 and 37.