

## LEISE TRETEN: AN IRENIC ECUMENICAL HERMENEUTIC<sup>1</sup>

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**T**HAT THE ECUMENICAL movement is no longer flush with the enthusiasm of the mid-sixties can hardly be contested. The worst fears and best hopes of all sides have been rendered otiose, notwithstanding some continuing interchurch social action and the doggedly enduring bilateral discussions among various churches.

Not all, however, is decay and decline. The Lima report of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches in early 1982 spoke of "a *kairos* of the ecumenical movement when sadly divided churches have been enabled to arrive at substantial theological agreements . . . that theologians of such widely different traditions should be able to speak so harmoniously about baptism, Eucharist and ministry is unprecedented in the modern ecumenical movement."<sup>2</sup> Another ray of light came from the Final Report of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, which has found sufficient "convergence . . . to call for the establishing of a new relationship between our Churches as a next stage in the journey towards Christian unity."<sup>3</sup>

The "Luther Year" of 1983 is regarded with fear and hope: with fear by those who wonder whether it will occasion a revival of the polemical "most Lutheran Luther," with hope by those who take the "Luther jubilee as an ecumenical challenge and duty."<sup>4</sup>

The greatest disappointment of Pope John Paul's otherwise generally successful trip to Germany was in regard to the Augsburg Confession. Nevertheless, according to Otto Hermann Pesch, on the occasion of his Paris visit Pope John Paul is to have said: "I follow all the discussions about the Augsburg Confession with great intensity. Indeed, I follow it in a manner which I don't understand myself. Something in me does this

<sup>1</sup> "Leise treten" comes from a letter of Martin Luther about the Augsburg Confession. It means "to tread lightly." Its ecumenical significance will become clear during the course of this article.

<sup>2</sup> Preface to the texts. See also Avery Dulles, "Toward a Christian Consensus: The Lima Meeting," *America* 146 (1982) 126-29.

<sup>3</sup> Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, *The Final Report* (Washington: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1982) 99.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Manns, "Das Lutherjubiläum 1983 als ökumenische Aufgabe," *Ökumenische Rundschau* 38 (1981) 290-313.

following, in the manner of Christ's statement to Peter: 'Another will lead you' [Jn 21:18]. . . ."<sup>5</sup>

The papal trip to England also enjoyed ambivalent success. The worst fears of antipapal demonstrations were not borne out. There were touching scenes of ecumenical mutuality. Nevertheless, many ecumenists were disappointed, if not discouraged. Especially after the publication of the above-mentioned Final Report, more was awaited than agreement to establish yet another international study commission. Study commissions may well be helpful, even necessary, to achieve adequate mutual understanding; but they can also serve as excuses for postponement of practical programs, deferral of decisions.

This general decline in ecumenical activity is even more disappointing in that the bilateral consultations have steadily discerned a hitherto unsuspected doctrinal convergence among the various churches. And the Final Report of ARCIC was even able to admit forthrightly: "Nevertheless, although our unity has been impaired through separation, it has not been destroyed."<sup>6</sup> Of special importance for this impaired but not destroyed unity is Karl Rahner's contention: "In the general, common understanding of the faith (*Glaubensbewusstsein*), as it in fact exists among contemporary Christians in the various churches, essential differences can hardly be found. . . . The *de facto* *Glaubensbewusstsein* among normal Christians in today's churches is the same."<sup>7</sup> Rahner goes on to ask why official institutional-ecclesial (*kirchenamtlichen*) and scholarly differences and disputes should continue to thwart that public ecclesial unity which would be but the recognition and expression of the unity in faith which does in fact exist among the members of the various churches. In support of this position, he invokes the normativity of the *consensus*

<sup>5</sup> Cited by Gerd Geier, "Der Reformator auf der Waage," *Rheinischer Merkur/Christ und Welt* 28 (July 10, 1981) 21.

<sup>6</sup> *Final Report* 5.

<sup>7</sup> Karl Rahner, *Schriften zur Theologie* 12 (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1975) 560, 561. Unexpected support may be mined from a perhaps unexpected source. "We talked," recorded Boswell of a conversation with Dr. Johnson, 'of the Roman Catholic religion, and how little difference there was in essential matters between ours and it.' . . . "True Sir," commented the doctor, 'all denominations of Christians have really little difference in point of doctrine, though they may differ widely in external forms. There is a prodigious difference between the external form of one of your Presbyterian churches in Scotland and a church in Italy; yet the doctrine taught is essentially the same.'" In another conversation Dr. Johnson goes on: "For my part Sir, I think all Christians whether Papists or Protestants, agree in the essential articles, and that their differences are trivial, and rather political than religious" (James Boswell, *Life of Samuel Johnson* [Chicago: Britannica, 1952] 188, 359). One need not, of course, subscribe to the evaluation of "trivial." Nevertheless, outside evaluations from those without vested interest can be helpful and sobering, especially to those whose livelihood can be bound up with the perceived differences—theologians, church officials.

*fidelium* for doctrinal orthodoxy. He concludes his reflections by noting that, if his contention is correct, "then the ecumenical question today is no longer a question directed to theologians, but a question directed to the officeholders in the churches."<sup>8</sup>

Against this background I make a twofold proposal to help these officeholders advance public and visible church unity. In the spirit of efforts at Augsburg and Trent to promote church unity, I shall propose the much-defamed and oft-misinterpreted "Leise treten" of Martin Luther as an irenic, ecumenical hermeneutical principle. I shall then suggest a threefold articulation of the Christian tradition into creed, theology, and spirituality as the structural framework within which the "Leise treten" can be put into practice in ecumenical discussions and decisions. On this basis, with the help of other principles to be noted later on, it might be possible for the now separated churches to find their way to the "One Church," whose *notae* would be unity in diversity, diversity in unity.

#### "LEISE TRETEN" AS HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLE

##### *Prolegomena*

Before we begin our considerations proper, it is important to recall W. A. Visser 't Hooft's contention that, although the unity of the Church has always been a burning problem, "the ecumenical problem [as such] is a relatively modern problem . . . that is, the problem of the *reunion of the separated churches* had not been posed generally and clearly in centuries other than ours."<sup>9</sup> He also notes that previously the emphasis had been on "unity among Christians" and not on the "unity of the churches." This distinction is important for our later discussions, as is Paul Ricoeur's description of "hermeneutics [as] the theory of the rules that preside over an exegesis—that is, over the interpretation of a particular text, or of a group of signs that may be viewed as a text."<sup>10</sup> Originally identified with biblical exegesis, hermeneutics now describes "a broad range of investigations into the basic human phenomenon of human understanding through language . . . methodological reflection in the interpretation of historical texts and ontological analysis of historical existence as a linguistic process."<sup>11</sup> This expanded understanding of hermeneutics is necessary if "Leise treten" is to be able to serve as a principle or rule to interpret that "text" which is really a whole tradition. As Edward Schillebeeckx notes, "On the basis of our essential being as

<sup>8</sup> *Schriften* 12, 567.

<sup>9</sup> W. A. Visser 't Hooft, "Le protestantisme et le problème oecuménique," *Foi et vie* 74/75 (September/October 1935) 613-27.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University, 1970) 8.

<sup>11</sup> Patrick Burns, "Hermeneutics (Contemporary)," *NCE* 16 (1967) 206.

men, understanding is a reinterpretative understanding of tradition—an understanding of tradition in the manner of reinterpretation.”<sup>12</sup>

### *Augsburg and Its Confession*

The interpretation of the religious tradition stemming from Abraham and Jesus was *the* question at the time of the Reformation. Earlier the crises in the interpretation of this tradition had been milder. The tradition had been able to preserve itself in spite of various conflicts.<sup>13</sup> However, the sixteenth century was to illustrate and prove the truth of Hans Georg Gadamer’s keen observation that “the hermeneutical problem only emerges clearly when there is no powerful tradition present to absorb one’s own attitude into itself and when one is aware of confronting an alien tradition to which he has never belonged or one he no longer unquestioningly accepts.”<sup>14</sup> Such was the case in regard to the religious-cultural tradition known as Christendom when in Augsburg in 1530 Emperor Charles V summoned a council “to hear with all possible discretion . . . the diverse opinions that exist among us, to understand and to weigh them, and to bring them together in a single Christian truth . . . so shall we all live in unity in a common church.”<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, polemical rhetoric then and thereafter has obscured the ecumenical irenicism achieved in both the procedures and the deliberations of the Augsburg Diet/Synod. Its ultimate inability to prevent ecclesial divisions and the subsequent hostilities between the “old believers” and the “dissenting evangelicals,” soon known as “Protest-ants,” have caused unduly negative appreciations of the Diet of Augsburg and the Council of Trent as well as their chief protagonists.

Perhaps no one has suffered as severely as Philipp Melancthon, whose person and *Confessio Augustana* have been accused of hypocrisy, venality, cowardice, downright deception, and even treason. To a considerable extent these suspicions and accusations have been inspired by a phrase in Martin Luther’s evaluation of the Confession in a letter to Duke John of Saxony on May 15, 1530: “I have read Master Philipp’s apologia. It pleases me very well, and I can find nothing therein to change or improve. It is also likely to be better this way, since I cannot tread so

<sup>12</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *God and the Future of Man* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968) 27.

<sup>13</sup> I do not wish to minimize the conflict between East and West, but it was different than the conflicts within the West. See Yves Congar, *L’Ecclesiologie du haut moyen-âge* (Paris: Cerf, 1968) esp. 324–93, who concludes that “la rupture de 1054” was relative, for the communion between the two sides of the Church was never totally destroyed.

<sup>14</sup> Hans Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977) 46.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Reu, ed., *The Augsburg Confession* (Chicago: Wartburg, 1930) 71–72\*.

softly and lightly (*leise treten*). May Christ our Lord help that it produce much good and great fruit, as we hope and pray. Amen."<sup>16</sup>

In spite of Luther's obvious pleasure with the Confession, does not this "Leise treten" imply that he thought Melanchthon was really pussyfooting and not clearly and forthrightly stating the position of the protesting evangelicals? Such a suspicion is supported by a later letter (July 21, 1530) to J. Jonas: "Satan still lives and has understood very well how to tread lightly (*leise treten*) in your apology, and to pass over the articles on purgatory, the veneration of the saints, and especially the pope, the Antichrist." Admittedly, the Confession did not say everything. And Melanchthon's claim that the "tota dissensio est de paucis quibusdam abusibus"<sup>17</sup> is obviously an extraordinarily benign evaluation of the situation of the Church at the time. Nevertheless, the Confession is not merely the private and personal opinion of a single theologian who happened to be mild-tempered and pacific. On June 20 the reform theologians in Augsburg, all of Lutheran provenance, examined the Confession article by article and accepted it unanimously. The document was also found acceptable by the "electors, princes and estates" as "a declaration of our confession and the teaching of our preaching."<sup>18</sup>

What, then, of Luther's "Leise treten"? Does it describe a treason of the truth or diplomatic dexterity in the presentation of the truth? The former opinion has enjoyed great favor among both Protestant and Catholic scholars. Nevertheless, the latter is correct. This is clearly and certainly testified by a letter of Luther himself, in which he praises both the diplomatic dexterity of Melanchthon and the moderate style in which he had written the Confession. That Luther could not claim such finesse for himself, he himself admits when he acknowledges: "I am hot-blooded by temperament, and my pen gets irritated easily."<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, in a

<sup>16</sup> WA Br 5, 319. Also, "I can't combine brevity and perspicacity the way Philip and Amsdorf can" (WA Tr 3, 210, n. 3173a). On the epistolary evidence of the "Leise treten," see Harding Meyer *et al.*, *Katholische Anerkennung des Augsbургischen Bekenntnisses?* (Frankfurt: Knecht, 1977) 19, 67-69.

<sup>17</sup> From the conclusion to Part 1 (articles 1-21) of the Augsburg Confession. I have used the English translation in Theodore G. Tappert, ed. and tr., *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1959) 23-96.

<sup>18</sup> Preface and Conclusion of the Confession.

<sup>19</sup> Cited by Owen Chadwick, *The Reformation* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964) 51. Also, "I am a prattler, much more the orator" (WA Tr 5, 204, n. 5511). On the problem of Luther's language and its influence on his doctrinal positions, see Otto Hermann Pesch, *Die Theologie der Rechtfertigung bei Martin Luther und Thomas von Aquin* (Mainz: Grunewald, 1957) 13-25; in regard to the Confession, 350-53. The problem of Luther's exuberant personality and rhetoric for a proper interpretation of his theology is widely acknowledged. How much more cautious must one be, then, lest Lutheran idiosyncracies, perhaps personally legitimate in themselves, be elevated to the status of ecclesial, credal

letter of July 9, 1530 to Jonas, Luther had spoken exuberantly of the "public and glorious Confession" of his friend. This positive evaluation continued to be repeated throughout the Reformer's career.

It is, consequently, doubly unfortunate that as late as 1980 a Catholic historian, Remigius Bäumer, could still describe the Confession as "rather a document of *Verschleierung*"—veiling, masking, concealing, camouflage, glossing over.<sup>20</sup> Even the pioneering Joseph Lortz had felt compelled to describe the Confession as the "breaking in of this trivialization (*Bagatellisierens*) [of the dogmatic] and the relativizing [of the Christian] into Lutheran Christianity."<sup>21</sup> And the usually urbane Philip Hughes, leaning on Adolf von Harnack's opinion that "It was not entirely sincere. . . . Its statements . . . intentionally incomplete," concludes: "It cannot be denied that, *as written*, it was an attempt—and how naively executed!—to throw dust in the eyes of the emperor, and that Luther (for example) who had no share in drafting the document understood this well. Some of the main contentions, or doctrines, of the new school were passed over in silence; others were stated so ambiguously that they might equally well stand for views directly contradictory."<sup>22</sup>

On the other hand, Ludwig von Pastor argues persuasively that Melancthon's "correspondence indicates that he cannot have lied and spoken the untruth (*die Unwahrheit*) continuously in this matter."<sup>23</sup>

confession. Would not the one-sidedness, individualism, and subjectiveness of Luther, this "homo duplex et multiplex," belong more properly to the dimension of spirituality than even to theology, certainly creed? It seems clear that Melancthon's "Leise treten" is much more congenial to church unity than Luther's "easily irritated pen." See J. T. McDonough, "The Essential Luther," and W. Pauck (referring to Lortz), "The Catholic Luther," in *Luther, Erasmus and the Reformation*, ed. John Olin (New York: Fordham University, 1969) 59–66, 48–58. Joseph Lortz speaks of Luther's "linguistic genius—paradox and exaggeration—highly individual linguistic style . . . his uniqueness of language . . . an inclination toward amplification, a verbosity . . . a high degree of superlativism . . . unrestrained exaggeration." He also notes the aptness of the polemical term *doctor hyperbolicus* to describe at least certain aspects of Luther. Cf. "The Basic Elements of Luther's Intellectual Style," in *Catholic Scholars Dialogue with Luther*, ed. Jared Wicks (Chicago: Loyola University, 1970) 11–13.

<sup>20</sup> Remigius Baumer, "Die Confessio Augustana—Bekenntnis des einen Glaubens oder Dokument der Verschleierung," *Deutsche Tageszeitung* 25 (June 20/21, 1980) 13. This otherwise tendentious article is of some value in that it does call attention to the temptation to gloss over the difficulties inherent in all ecumenical dialogue, particularly in a possible Roman Catholic acceptance of the Augsburg Confession as a legitimate official confession of faith.

<sup>21</sup> Joseph Lortz, *Die Reformation in Deutschland* 2 (Freiburg: Herder, 1948) 53.

<sup>22</sup> Philip Hughes, *A Popular History of the Reformation* (Garden City, N.Y.: Hanover, 1957) 141.

<sup>23</sup> Ludwig Pastor, *Die kirchlichen Reunionsbestrebungen während der Regierung Karls V* (Freiburg: Herder, 1879) 37.

Furthermore, Vinzenz Pfnür has been able to show that Lortz's criticism was awry, for the particulars adduced by him do not support his contentions.<sup>24</sup> Finally, from Melanchthon himself comes the most forthright clarification of his intentions: "I realize that our moderateness has stirred up the displeasure of the crowds. . . . But we thought it desirable to maintain ourselves in union with the bishops in some way or other, so that we would not have to suffer everlasting accusations of being responsible for the division."<sup>25</sup> The point, then, was to state the chief doctrinal positions—the "new faith," if one will—of the "dissenting evangelicals" in such a way that both their "souls and consciences" and the unity of the Church would best be served. As we shall see shortly, Melanchthon was at least partly successful in doing this. "Leise treten" is, consequently, not a device of deception but a principle of interpretation, as the conclusion of the Confession indicates. "Leise treten" desires to demand no more than the matter itself requires; it wishes to do this in a manner neither "hateful nor injurious."

If Melanchthon's (and the Augsburg Confession's) "Leise treten" is truly an irenic hermeneutical approach to the Christian tradition on the part of the "dissenting evangelicals," the question about the hermeneutics of the "old believers" remains. Their original response at Augsburg was hardly a "Leise treten." The first draft of the *Confutatio pontificia* (at least slightly misnamed, although Charles V's clear awareness of his role as an official leader of the Church, responsible for its common weal and common unity, might nevertheless justify such a title<sup>26</sup>) was rejected by the Emperor as entirely "zu hässig" (too hateful and disagreeable), "malicious, sullen, and unnecessary" in both style and content.<sup>27</sup> Subsequent drafts and the ensuing "bilateral" discussions indicate that a "Leise treten" could also be achieved by the "old believers," even the disputatious Johann Eck, about whose "wilde Raserei" (wild fancy, frenzy, and raving) Melanchthon complained to Erasmus.<sup>28</sup> It is most interesting that Michael Fleischer has deemed it possible to include Eck in his catalog of precisely irenic Catholic and Lutheran theologians and ecclesiastics.<sup>29</sup> At

<sup>24</sup> Vinzenz Pfnür, *Einig in der Rechtfertigungslehre?* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1970) passim; also his "Anerkennung der Augustana durch die katholische Kirche," *Communio: Internationale katholische Zeitschrift* 4 (1975) 298–305; 5 (1976) 374–81, 477–78.

<sup>25</sup> "Scio nostram moderationem," a letter written on August 23; CR 2, 303. "Ich weiss, dass unsere Massigkeit das Misfallen des Pobels erregt hat. . . ." Both "Moderationem" and "Massigkeit" certainly emphasize not Melanchthon's guile and wiles, but his "Leise treten."

<sup>26</sup> See Henri Daniel-Rops, *The Protestant Reformation* (New York: Dutton, 1961) 506–8. Charles's stipulations for his burial clearly indicate his awareness of being not only a civil but also an ecclesial leader.

<sup>27</sup> Pfnür, *Einig* 227; Reu, *Augsburg Confession* 124.

<sup>28</sup> CR 2, 232, an opinion in which Erasmus concurred: *Op. ep.* 9 (#2392) 58.

<sup>29</sup> Michael Fleischer, *Katholische und lutherische Ireniker* (Göttingen: Musterschmidt, 1968). Even the generally suspicious Reu recognized, already in 1930, that "this time we

Augsburg, at least for a while, "Leise treten" was the prevailing attitude and mood among the theologians and delegates. Even in regard to that most vexing topic, justification, Eck was able to say: "In regard to the matter itself we are able to come together. But about the words germane to justification we are still in conflict."<sup>30</sup> According to Pfnür, "A wide-ranging consensus was achieved, the pertinent basis for which was the mutual effort to accept the statements of each side in good faith. The Catholics declined to interpret the Lutherans on the basis of the extreme explanations and expressions of the early twenties. . . ."<sup>31</sup> John Jay Hughes contends that "Scholars now recognize that the *Confutatio* was in fact hardly less irenic than the Augsburg Confession itself."<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, some still persist in regarding the *Confutatio pontificia* as well as the *Confessio Augustana* as a "polemical response." Certainly, not all was peace and light at Augsburg, on the part of theologians and ecclesiastics, princes and emperors. But the judgments of Bäumer and Rausch must be faulted both historically and ecclesiologically. Historically, they simply do not correspond to the events and facts of the Augsburg discussions. Ecclesiologically, they misunderstand what the nature of the Church requires for ecclesial unity and demand uniformity instead of unity.<sup>33</sup> As Pfnür emphasizes, with the exception of the ecclesiological import of what the Confession termed "abuses" (*Misbräuche*; arts. 22-38), the reasons for the failure of these bilateral unification discussions were above all political.<sup>34</sup> In the wake of this failure the old polemic revived, and it has perdured, as Bäumer and Rausch demonstrate, even to our own day.

Failure to achieve unity at Augsburg was indeed accompanied by heightened polemical rhetoric on both sides. However, the "Leise treten" did not simply shrivel up and fade away. It persisted, even at the Council of Trent, whose irenic nature has often been overlooked and undervalued. There had been no official condemnations and rejections of the Augsburg Confession.<sup>35</sup> In the same irenic spirit, the Council of Trent was uncom-

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must give Eck and his co-workers . . . credit that they were able to write so objectively and moderately. . . . The conclusion especially is pervaded by the spirit of moderation" (*Augsburg Confession* 126).

<sup>30</sup> Pfnür, *Einig* 269, n. 319; also 253, 256, 260-64, 399.

<sup>31</sup> *Einig* 269.

<sup>32</sup> John Jay Hughes, "A Catholic Recognition of the Augsburg Confession," *America* 142 (1980) 17.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas Rausch, "Catholics, Lutherans and the Augsburg Confession," *America* 140 (1979) 86.

<sup>34</sup> *Einig* 270.

<sup>35</sup> Albert Ebner, "Anerkennung des Augsburger Bekenntnis der Lutheraner," *Orientierung* 42 (1978) 88.



monly circumspect in both its deliberations and its condemnations. Robert McNally notes that "in spite of the hostile atmosphere . . . its spirit was irenic, at least to the extent that it did not publicly condemn the Protestant reformers by name . . . the door remained open, at least slightly, for further discussions between the two factions."<sup>36</sup> The factual state of affairs at the time of the Council militated against its being a union or reunion council. Furthermore, Trent did not intend or pretend to offer a comprehensive version of Catholic doctrine or a detailed refutation of Protestant doctrine. Hubert Jedin correctly emphasizes that the Tridentine decrees were meant to be boundary markers (*Grenzsteine*) for the sake of doctrinal clarification, not barbed wire (*Stacheldraht*) for the sake of ecclesial condemnation and excommunication.<sup>37</sup> Only the postconciliar and *kontroverstheologische* interpretation of the decrees by Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Calvinist theologians resulted in the post-Tridentine Church becoming an anti-Reformation Church. Nevertheless, in themselves the Tridentine decrees were open to expansive interpretation (*ergänzungsfähig*) by later theologians and councils. A Tridentine "Leise treten" is also indicated by Jedin's contention that the "Council of Trent is not an insurmountable barrier for Christian reunion, as often alleged,"<sup>38</sup> for "it drew doctrinal boundaries, but did not divide where there was as yet no division."<sup>39</sup>

To be irenic is neither to treason truth nor to play Pollyanna. It is simply to emphasize that, for the sake of the truth of Christianity and the unity of the Church, one may "leise treten" (tread lightly) instead of "laut trampeln" (stamp, trample, stomp loudly). That is fortunate. Unfortunate is that even "Leise treten" does not guarantee success in striving for Church unity—as both Augsburg and Trent indicate. However, they did not only fail, for they do provide us with both example and inspiration in our current quest for the "One Church." However, it is also quite clear that by itself even an irenic hermeneutic like the "Leise

<sup>36</sup> Robert McNally, *The Unreformed Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965) 15.

<sup>37</sup> Hubert Jedin, *Krisis und Abschluss des Trienter Konzils* (Freiburg: Herder, 1964) 105, 117.

<sup>38</sup> Hubert Jedin, "Council of Trent," *NCE* 14, 278.

<sup>39</sup> Hubert Jedin, *Ecumenical Councils of the Church* (New York: Paulist, 1961) 140–41. Likewise, a papal directive stipulated "that the council fulfilled its task adequately by unequivocally and clearly expounding Catholic doctrine; its task was to say what was heretical, not who was a heretic" (August Franzen and John Dolan, *A History of the Church* [New York: Herder and Herder, 1969] 316). Even the apparently dreadful anathemas need not be so dreadful. See Piet Fransen, "Réflexions sur l'anathème au concile de Trente," *Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses* 29 (1953) 657–72. Even more mitigating evidence is provided by Franz Gräf, *Die Lehre vom richterlichen Charakter des Bussakraments, insbesondere der Absolution auf dem Konzil von Trient* (Innsbruck: unpublished Ph.D. dissertation in the Faculty of Theology, University of Innsbruck, 1971).

treten" is insufficient to enable the "old believers" and the "dissenting evangelicals" to find their way (back) to the "One Church." In the second part of these considerations I shall suggest a threefold articulation of the Christian tradition into creed (confession), theology, and spirituality. This structure would enable the hermeneutical principle "Leise treten" to bear greater fruit in the search for Church unity.

*Unity in Diversity, Diversity in Unity*

Before we proceed to this triple articulation itself, we must attend to some preliminaries. First, what I shall shortly suggest presupposes the legitimacy of plurality and pluralism in a possible future "One Church."<sup>40</sup> As such, diversity and difference do not violate the discernible unity, communion, at-one-ment of various individual believers and of various local and regional/particular churches within the one great, universal Church (the *Catholica*). Within the one, true Church "several" is not to be equated with sectarian, diversity with division.<sup>41</sup> How extensive and intensive such pluralism has been in the Judeo-Christian tradition is illustrated by the presence of the Yahwist, Elohist, Priestly, and Deuteronomistic traditions, of the prophetic, priestly, royal, sapiential, apocalyptic theologies in the Old Testament, and the Synoptic, Johannine, Pauline, Petrine, and even Jacobite Christologies and ecclesiologies in the New. Unfortunately, divisions have been not only threat but also reality during this sacred history. But there has also been legitimate diversity aplenty within a unity which has not been divided. Within Christian ecclesial history there has been great diversity, not only between East and West, North and South, but also within these symbolic direction-dimensions of the one, universal Church. We know this diversity as rites, schools of spirituality and theology, religious orders, pious confraternities and sororities, etc. Although the totalitarian temptation is always lurking, seeking to devour the Church's *de facto* diversity, it never succeeds perfectly, not even in the Church's most monochromatic moments. Does this inner-ecclesial diversity in unity have ecumenical possibilities?

As a second preliminary, we simply recall our earlier remarks about the relationship of hermeneutics and tradition. We must reinforce our awareness that the ecumenical task is to (re)interpret the entire Christian tradition. The entire tradition, not only this or that element thereof, is what we wish to understand and to appropriate. Of course, we can do this only through the whole tradition's individual "specific traditional

<sup>40</sup> Wolfgang Riess, *Glaube als Konsens: Über die Pluralität und Einheit im Glauben* (Munich: Kösel, 1979).

<sup>41</sup> Yves Congar, *Diversités et communion* (Paris: Cerf, 1982).

contents,"<sup>42</sup> as Wolfhart Pannenberg points out, since the tradition is not a *tertium quid* or independent thing with an existence all its own, separate from the believers (*credentes*) and believed (*creditum*). We can say that the tradition is borne by the confessing community of the believers. We can also say that the tradition is the community of believers, the ecclesial "we" who are the social memory, mediating the saving revelation of God within humanity throughout time and space.<sup>43</sup> One cannot escape tradition. Indeed, one is—and can only be—traditional, just as *one* can be only within the greater "we" (of humanity or Church). Thus the Faith and Order meeting in Montreal was right on target when it

pondered a draft which said that the Church lives *sola traditione*. It did not pass. But as an historically adequate statement, in the light of contemporary biblical studies, it is an obvious statement, a platitude. It is obvious that on this analysis, Scripture is tradition, a special kind of tradition, or it is better to say it is not a special kind of tradition, but it is a special amount of tradition set apart in a special way.<sup>44</sup>

Neither Protestant nor Catholic can evade or domineer the tradition, as if they were able to live apart from or over it. Both are reflective articulations of the pregiven tradition, within which, we might paraphrase, "they live and move and have their being" (Acts 17:28). Tillich noted well that "even the Reformers were dependent on the Roman tradition against which they protested."<sup>45</sup> Gospel and tradition need not be in conflict, as has been asserted so often. Rather, tradition describes the gospel as it moves through history, through the time and space of the world for which it is Good News.

In this context, all theology (and ecumenical endeavor) is traditional. As Yves Congar has beautifully noted, "A tradition is an inestimable benefit. It means not having to start from zero, to be rich from the very beginning. . . . A tradition is to the intellectual life what fraternity . . . is to the life of the heart."<sup>46</sup> Tradition is not oriented to the past precisely as past or old. After all, Christians are not pristinists or archeologists. Tradition is, rather, oriented to the past precisely, and only, insofar as

<sup>42</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology* 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970) 122.

<sup>43</sup> John Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society* (New York: Seabury, 1980) 197.

<sup>44</sup> Krister Stendahl, "The Question concerning the Gospel as Center and the Gospel as Totality of the New Testament Witness," in *Evangelium-Welt-Kirche*, ed. Harding Meyer (Frankfurt: Knecht, 1975) 103.

<sup>45</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1967; 1 vol. ed.) 36.

<sup>46</sup> Jean Puyo, *Congar* (Paris: Centurion, 1975) 34.

the past is that whence the tradition, both believer and believed, comes. The Church is not oriented to the past as past, but as the source of the tradition which is to be interpreted and appropriated in the present. *Sola scriptura* is not a viable hermeneutic.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, Christian, and precisely ecumenical, theology would do well to focus on a hermeneutic whose orientation is not narrowly biblical but widely traditional. However fascinated Protestantism has been by the allure of actualism and occasionalism,<sup>48</sup> it also knows that it is beholden to the past as tradition, the handing on of the origin. Thus, Luther felt compelled to argue against the Landgraf Philipp von Hessen on the basis of the "old faith, preserved from the very beginning until now in all of Christianity."<sup>49</sup> Further, against "the papists [who] assert that they have remained in the old church as it existed since apostolic times . . . and that we have formed a new church against them . . . I reply: What will you say if I show you that it is we who stayed with the true ancient church, indeed that we are the true old church and that you papists have broken with the ancient church and established a new church?"<sup>50</sup>

The argument about tradition is really the argument about the Church, for Church and tradition are two ways of describing the same thing.<sup>51</sup> And it was precisely the nature of the Church, not only individual doctrines, that was in dispute at Augsburg and Trent. In a sermon in Pleissenberg Castle, Luther clearly proclaimed: "But what is the dissension about between the papists and us? The answer is about the true Christian Church. . . . What is the Christian Church?"<sup>52</sup> The inadequacy

<sup>47</sup> Gerhard Ebeling, *Wort Gottes und Tradition* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1964) 91-143. See also Karl Rahner and Karl Lehmann, "Kerygma und Dogma," *Mysterium salutis* 1, ed. Johannes Feiner and Magnus Löhrer (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1965) 622-704.

<sup>48</sup> Yves Congar, *Le Christ, Marie et l'église* (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1952).

<sup>49</sup> WA Br 5, 330.

<sup>50</sup> Cited by Wilhelm Pauck, "The Catholic Luther," in *Luther, Erasmus and the Reformation*, ed. John Olin (New York: Fordham University, 1969) 55, where several similar texts are provided. This is important, for it provides a counterbalance to the Lutheran tendency to equate *traditio* with *abusus*. See Joseph Ratzinger (and Karl Rahner), *Revelation and Tradition* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965) 27-29, 60-63. It is also important as a balance to Luther's pessimistic reading of history as decline and decay and the fascination the *senectus ecclesiae* exercised on him. See J. M. Headley, *Luther's View of Church History* (New Haven: Yale University, 1963) 106, 118-24, 178, 187.

<sup>51</sup> It is critical to rescue tradition from Lutheran negativity, for otherwise all ecumenical dialogue is not only otiose but impossible. Contemporary Lutheran thought has begun to give tradition clear, if guarded, validity. All is not sin and corruption. Thus Ernst Käsemann, *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen 2* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1964) 265: "Spirit and tradition are not necessarily identical, but neither are they necessarily mutually exclusive."

<sup>52</sup> LW 50, *Sermon* 1, 305. Of Luther, Peter Meinhold says: "His view of the church inspires his entire reformational enterprise . . . it is on the basis of his understanding of the

of both Protestant and Catholic ecclesiologies at the time of the Reformation has been widely noted and need not long detain us here.<sup>53</sup> The above comments are solely for the sake of reinforcing the conviction that the ecumenical problem is precisely the Church, and the Church precisely as the tradition.<sup>54</sup> The theological and ecumenical task is not properly focused on individual elements such as the papacy, church office, infallibility, Marian doctrines, works, righteousness, etc., however vexing they might be. Of course, these doctrines must be discussed; but they should not be the focus of ecumenical discussions. Indeed, they cannot be, if universal unity is ever to be achieved, for diversity does not contain its own principle of unification within itself.<sup>55</sup> In order for diverse things to be a unity—to be in union with one another—there must be a wider horizon or more embracing principle of unity than the individual diverse things themselves. On this principle one would not do well to expect Church unity to be achieved through serial agreement on all the disputed doctrines one by one. A greater horizon or more fundamental principle of unification is necessary whereby the main “traditional individual contents” of the Church can be examined to discern which might be absolutely necessary and which optional. Within the necessary one Church not all individual elements are necessary, although they may be legitimate. Ecumenical theology can legitimately be thought of as a discernment of spirits.<sup>56</sup>

Two attempts at this discernment of the necessary and the optional seem inadequate. One voids the Church by annulling all its “traditional individual contents.” This is the “voluntarist” approach. It simply declares that what have seemed to be differences dividing the One Church are not really (serious) differences at all, for we all believe in the same

Church that Luther is to be understood” (*Der Evangelische Christ und das Konzil* [Freiburg: Herder, 1961] 52).

<sup>53</sup> In regard to Trent, Giuseppe Alberigo emphasizes that the majority of the Council Fathers had no clear concept of the Church and that the central problem of the sixteenth century, the unity of the Church, was pushed off to the side (“Das Konzil von Trient in neuer Sicht,” *Theologisches Jahrbuch*, ed. Albert Dänhardt [Leipzig: St. Benno, 1967] 469, 477).

<sup>54</sup> According to Hubert Jedin, “In the forty years during which I have studied the history of the Reformation, I have become ever more convinced that the deepest gulf which separates Protestants and Catholics is not the doctrines of justification or salvation, but of the Church” (“Ist das Konzil von Trient ein Hindernis der Wiedervereinigung?” *ETL* 38 [1962] 849).

<sup>55</sup> According to St. Thomas, “non enim diversa secundum se uniuntur” (*Sum theol.* 1, 65, 1).

<sup>56</sup> Perhaps one might better say, of the sociohistorical embodiments of the one Holy Spirit missioned from the Father to bring to completion the saving work of the incarnate Son, Jesus. But that is matter for another time.

God who wants all people to be saved through Jesus (1 Tim 2:4–6). This approach achieves unity only at the cost of eliminating that which was to have been united in the first place, namely, differing interpretations (or traditions or churches) of the entire Christian tradition. By sheer dint of will it overcomes—by ignoring the differences which were to have been surpassed in an even greater unity. This approach could also be called “nominalist” or “conceptualist,”<sup>57</sup> for it denies individual finite realities their own proper and peculiar identity and being. This approach dissolves earthly realities amorphously into an amorphous divine will. Created realities, natural and supernatural, no longer reflect God as wise Creator but as *potentia nuda*. As Urs von Balthasar has put it, “The catastrophe of nominalism robs the creation of all divine light; it [all] becomes night.”<sup>58</sup> Nominalism’s drastic consequences are not only philosophical, but theological. And ecumenical too; for if created finite realities are deprived of their God-given illumination and identity, they can readily be dismissed. They are of no value, for they are of no (participated) being. Doctrinal differences can be declared nonexistent and ignored. They matter not; indeed, they exist not. The unfortunate logic of this position is that not only would the churches not matter or exist; neither would the “traditional individual contents.” In fact, neither would Christ. That is the unfortunate outcome of ecumenical voluntarism, nominalism, and conceptualism—certainly an unholy trinity.

The second inadequate approach is in sharp contrast to the first and can be called “intellectualist,” although “academic” might be a more pointed designation. The prime example would be the various bilateral discussions in which theologians of different churches (that is, different interpretations of the pre-given tradition) reason their way to clarification, convergence,<sup>59</sup> and perhaps consensus on doctrines which have been customarily controverted. Invaluable in itself, this method does not seem apt to produce unity among the churches. First, as an enterprise of, by, and for intellectual and professional academicians, it is not necessarily compelling for either the general membership or the institutional officialdom of the various churches. Of almost equal importance is the time

<sup>57</sup> Max Muller and Alois Halder, *Kleines philosophisches Wörterbuch* (Freiburg: Herder, 1971) 144, 190.

<sup>58</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Rechenschaft 1965* (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1965) 31.

<sup>59</sup> Convergence is certainly a favorite word of the bilateral discussions. Recent examples include ARCIC’s *The Final Report* 99. The United Methodist–Roman Catholic dialogue, according to an NC news release (Feb. 12, 1982), concludes that “there is clear convergence . . . in understanding how grace . . .” A German symposium on the Lutheran–Roman Catholic dialogue in the United States speaks expressly of “Konvergenz statt Konsens” (Harding Meyer, ed., *Luthertum und Katholizismus im Gespräch* [Frankfurt: Knecht, 1973] 42; also G. Gassmann, *Vom Dialog zur Gemeinschaft* [Frankfurt: Knecht, 1975]).

factor. How long will it take such experts to go through all the disputed and dividing doctrines? Need one be accounted venal to wonder whether, when the theologians have finally conciliated the last remaining dispute, the consensus achieved on the first will still hold? As the bilaterals have in fact demonstrated, the road to consensus by this method is indeed long and arduous. Furthermore, on even quite defined doctrines consensus is very difficult to achieve. How, then, would it be possible to achieve detailed doctrinal theological agreement on such fundamental topics as salvational optimism or pessimism, the sacramental dimension of creation and salvation,<sup>60</sup> the co-operation between divine and human in grace, etc.? Finally, this approach presupposes solid doctrinal and theological homogeneity within each of the dialoguing churches, certainly a bold presupposition.

Another approach is possible: the threefold articulation of the entire Christian tradition, the Church, into creed, theology, and spirituality. A final preliminary remark remains, a cautionary admonition well phrased by Karl Rahner:

No human being can bring the fullness of his/her life and fundamental option into full, explicit conceptual expression. Human beings always live out of more than they can expressly say to either themselves or others. In spite of all due reflection and personal reflective reckoning . . . they can still not bring their lives and deeds into adequate [verbal, conceptual] expression. . . . Reflecting and reflective theology never purely and simply exhausts lived faith. As discursive reflection, theology may and must [always] be developed [even] further. . . . But Christian existence and faith are always more than such theology can illuminate.<sup>61</sup>

Elsewhere Rahner notes that "the starting point for an [individual, concrete person's] faith decision differs from person to person, from epoch to epoch, and has something about itself that inevitably escapes reflection, past, present, and future. Consequently, these various starting points . . . cannot always be brought into a greater or higher synthesis."<sup>62</sup>

<sup>60</sup> If theologians as learned as Karl Barth can worry that the Catholic understanding of the sacraments implies/requires "ein Gefangennehmen und Einschliessen Gottes ins Objekt" ("an imprisonment and encapsulation of God in an object") ("Die Lehre von den Sakramenten," *Zwischen den Zeiten* 3 [1927] 427-60), and if Paul Tillich can assert that "the whole protest of the Reformation was in fundamental opposition to the sacramental system of Catholicism . . . the Catholic tendency to a sacramental objectivation and demonization of Christianity" (*The Protestant Era* [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1957] 94-112, at 94), then it seems to me that Church union will be achieved not so much through the direct dialogic conciliation of differences as through the discovery of a wider horizon within which these doctrinal differences can be contained and relativized.

<sup>61</sup> Karl Rahner, "Ein Brief," in Klaus Fischer, *Der Mensch als Geheimnis* (Freiburg: Herder, 1974) 404-5.

<sup>62</sup> Karl Rahner, *Schriften* 10 (1972) 237. See also *Schriften* 12 (1975) 345.

Since lived reality, human and Christian, eludes exhaustive encapsulation in concrete concepts, one must "leise treten" when theologizing God, Christ, Church. This is cause for neither despair nor silence. As St. Augustine once remarked about the nature-person terminology of Trinitarian theology, "then speech reveals its insufficiency . . . not that thereby the truth is [perfectly] stated, but at least it is not consigned to simple silence."<sup>63</sup>

We are, of course, compelled to proclaim our faith to the ends of the earth and time (Mt 12:26-33; Acts 1:8), to "have your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you all have" (1 Pet 3:15). But we shall also be aware of the limitations of our concepts and words. In so doing, we shall also realize that there is more than minimalism, pessimism, and resignation in Heidegger's contention that "the teaching of a thinker is [precisely] what is not said in that which he has said."<sup>64</sup>

#### CREED, THEOLOGY, SPIRITUALITY

In view of all this, I propose a middle way of discerning the already existing unity of the churches and of promoting their further unity within the one Christian Tradition. All doctrines, explanations, practices, pieties of individual believers and ecclesial communities—in a word, all lower-case traditions—are to be distributed among the three categories of creed (confession), theology, and spirituality (piety). The principle of distribution is their relative role and value in preserving and promoting the entire Christian tradition.

#### *Creed*

In the creed may be included only that which is absolutely necessary for the preservation and promotion of the Christian tradition. The criterion for this category is not what one finds personally pleasing and delightful. Rather, only that which one can unconditionally demand of others for mutual communion in the profession and propagation of Christ as the unique Savior-Mediator between God and humanity (1 Tim 2:4-6) may be included here. An implicit assumption here is that one will always be more demanding of oneself than of others. As expressions of this category, the classical creeds are clearly paradigmatic. Even the *filioque* is not a univocal violation of the principle involved in this

<sup>63</sup> *De trinitate* 5, 10.

<sup>64</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit* (Bern: Franke, 1947) 5: "Die Lehre eines Denkers ist das in seinem Sagen Ungesagte." Also in *Was heisst Denken?* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1954) 72: "What is not thought is the supreme gift that any thinking (*Denken*) has to give."



category, since it is not prescribed for the Eastern churches.<sup>65</sup> It is an excellent example of theology's difficulty in achieving adequate concepts in its reflection on the Christian revelation-tradition. Given the enormous conceptual complexity of the *filioque*, one must seriously wonder about the advisability, indeed the legitimacy, of requiring its explicit profession in the compulsory creed of a Church intended for all, even "the foolish . . . the weak . . . those who are nothing at all" (1 Cor 1:26-31) and those whiling away in the byways and alleys of this world (Lk 14:20-24). This does not mean, of course, that the *filioque* is either erroneous or superfluous. It only means that its regular profession may not be necessary to the preservation of the Christian faith in time and space. I note also that, however intense was the desire in some quarters, the word "Roman" has not gained entry into the creed.<sup>66</sup> And Marian doctrines, even though infallibly decreed, have not been elevated to credal status. On the other hand, it is difficult to imagine even the "most Lutheran" and "most hot-blooded" of Luthers wanting to include the pope as Antichrist in the creed, or the dourest of all Calvins the "humana natura totaliter corrupta." Would Karl Barth insist on credal status for his contention that "All Christians [Note—not sinners, but Christians], in principle, are unfit to be used by God, unfit to be members of the Body . . ."?<sup>67</sup> What does such a statement say about God and the divine creative gracing power? To suggest a difference between what one, whether individual believer or ecclesial community, holds dear to itself and what it demands of others by way of credal profession is only to acknowledge explicitly as a principle what has always been in the tradition.<sup>68</sup> Not all that one personally "believes" necessarily qualifies for inclusion in the creed,

<sup>65</sup> LTK 4, 127.

<sup>66</sup> Yves Congar, "Die Wesenseigenschaften der Kirche," *Mysterium salutis* 4/1, ed. J. Feiner and M. Löhrer (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1972) 396. Although Charles Journet suggests "Romanitas" as a possible note of the Church, he also immediately calls attention to its ambivalence as a "name of servitude . . . of humility . . . at the same time a name of miracle" (*The Church of the Word Incarnate* 1 [New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955] 538, 433). Elsewhere Congar speaks of the "Mystique de Rome" (*L'Éclésiologie du haut moyen-âge* [Paris: Cerf, 1968] 148-51, 191-95).

<sup>67</sup> Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* 3/4 (Zollikon-Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1957) 560. In the same vein, would Robert J. Goesser really want to insist that all Christians accept as part of the *creed*, obligatory for *all*, his phrase "the law which is fallen man's religion and a fundamental perversion of creation"? ("The Doctrine of Word and Scripture in Luther and Lutheranism," in *Lutheran-Episcopal Dialogue* [Cincinnati: Forward Movement Publications, 1981] 116). Would such an expression more properly belong, not to the Christian creed but to Lutheran theology, or even more properly, to Lutheran spirituality, which, as we shall shortly see, is the most proper, peculiar, particular articulation of the Christian tradition for an individual believer or local believing community?

<sup>68</sup> See, e.g., evidence of the NT's struggle to establish a minimal creed in texts such as 1 Cor 3:1; 2 Cor 13:5; 1 Thess 5:12; Heb 5:11; 6. In detail, Riess, *Glaube* 204-11.

whose purpose is to mark or designate the communion of all believers in Christ. This approach to the creed has a unique advantage in that it is a communion or perichoresis of the minimalist and maximalist: minimalist in that it requires the fewest possible explicit statements, maximalist in that these fewest possible statements are the most important doctrinally.

### *Theology*

Theology can be defined in many ways. For our purpose, it can be understood as explicit reflection on the creed, which is itself a compendium of the whole tradition, for the sake of objectifying the tradition and its creed in concepts accessible to any given population. It must be immediately conceded that the creed, like revelation in its scriptural recording, is already conceptual.<sup>69</sup> Beyond this original and inevitable conceptualization, theology is the vigorous, deliberate, systematic conceptualization of the creed, correlating its more original concepts to contemporary cultures. Theology allows for and calls for greater variety and diversity, more options, than does the creed. To some extent the churches have historically tolerated theological diversity. There is, of course, a direct correlation between the size of the Church and the degree of diversity able to flourish within a given Church. In a free, independent Church consisting of one local congregation, great diversity can only illogically be awaited. Within the (Roman) Catholic Church, great diversity is possible and is designated by terms such as Eastern-Western, Platonist-Aristotelian, Augustinian-Thomist, Suarezian-Scotist, etc.

The principles of the local universal Church and unity in diversity are not stretched beyond recognition if one suggests that there can be local churches which are not only geographically stipulated but also culturally and even theologically.<sup>70</sup> Such a possibility is all the more real in our own age, marked as it is by high population mobility and cultural pluralism. Our age is further characterized by the knowledge explosion. This obtains in all spheres of human knowing, and theology or faith-knowledge is not excluded. Nor does theology enjoy some kind of favored or privileged status. It is not, therefore, automatically immune from the consequences of the knowledge explosion, which make it impossible for the individual to be universally expert and magisterial. This is in keeping with theology's general human condition, by which it is not immune from either volitional or intellectual (gnoseological) concupiscence.

<sup>69</sup> Karl Rahner, *Schriften* 10, 111-20.

<sup>70</sup> See Robert Kress, *The Church: Communion, Sacrament, Communication* (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, 1983) chap. 2.

Rather, just as human-personal activity must strive for orderliness among the many human-natural drives and potencies, so must the theologian strive for orderliness among the various theological disciplines and between theology and the other sciences. In today's situation this striving for unity and coherence will be all the more difficult because of the massive amounts of knowledge which must be mastered. On this count, for example, Rahner has suggested that we are all—even the professional, academic theologian—*rudes*,<sup>71</sup> the classic moral-theological designation for those who could legitimately believe, although they were not in full intellectual control of all the motives of credibility and credendity.

The moral of these considerations is, of course, that we must be extraordinarily cautious in concluding that someone is credally unorthodox. The discerned difference may well lie in theological conceptualization, not in credal confession. Theological homogeneity has never been required for Church membership and Church unity, however strong tendencies toward monolithic uniformity can be at times. Given today's knowledge explosion and the attendant pluralism, it would be even more foolish to require such theological homogeneity now. Clearly, theological conceptualization which tries to explicate the creed must never contradict the creed. To discern such contradiction has never been easy, as the history of conciliar debates indicates. To urge even greater caution in ferreting out heresy and doctrinal unorthodoxy today is not to advocate doctrinal indifference or that vomitory lukewarmness already eschewed by the Apocalypse (3:16). It is simply to respect the heightened diversity which contemporary culture enables to exist within the ever-greater unity of the One Church. Furthermore, it is a sound scriptural insight to urge patience, forbearance, and long-suffering in regard to possible human failure, whether doctrinal error or moral decline (Mt 12:24-30; 2 Pet 3:8-10; 1 Cor 10:13; 1 Pet 3:20). In the future, theological propositions and affirmations will not lose their value and become an optional luxury in the Church. But they may not retain their heretofore importance in determining doctrinal orthodoxy. One's willingness to become and be an identifiable member of the Church may be indicated less by propositional orthodoxy and more by participation in the whole life of the Church, especially the Eucharistic celebration and tradition of the memory of the risen Lord (Lk 22:19-20; 1 Cor 11:23-27; 15:3-8). Once again, reflective, conceptual, propositional theology will remain a critical and crucial activity of the future Church. Only, in the future pluralistic Church it may not exercise the same critical function in determining ecclesial orthodoxy and membership that it did in the past.

<sup>71</sup> Karl Rahner, *Grundkurs des Glaubens* (Freiburg: Herder, 1976) 20.

### *Spirituality*

As theology correlates creed and concept, so does spirituality (piety) correlate creed and conduct. Admittedly, neither term, spirituality or piety, is really a choice creation of the theological enterprise—a welcome, if unintended, support for our above contention about the inadequacy of concepts. As adequate as any is Rahner's "definition" of spirituality as "the deliberate, conscious, and to some extent or other methodical development of faith, hope, and charity,"<sup>72</sup> Elsewhere he emphasizes the "concreteness" of spirituality as the precise configuration of any individual's Christian living in accord with the particular conditions of that individual's situation.<sup>73</sup> This emphasis allows for a diversity certainly equal to, perhaps even greater than, that of theology. Spirituality describes the practice (*praxis*) of Christianity in the precise historical, cultural, political, social, economic, psychological, and ecclesial conditions which constitute the context of an individual's daily life (*Dasein* or *Existenz*). Spirituality in Washington and Warsaw, in Cairo, Egypt and Cairo, Illinois, need not be the same. Such contrasts are not merely geographical and spatial; they are even more importantly cultural, ideational, and ideological. Again, within a large Church like the Roman Catholic, a diversity of spiritualities has flourished, at least officially tolerated, sometimes even encouraged. Benedictine, Franciscan, Dominican, Ignatian, Salesian, Theresan, Rhenish, and Russian describe not only *de facto* happenings within the Christian tradition but even "schools of spirituality." Any loyal Roman Catholic familiar with these and the multitude of other spiritualities available to members of that Church knows that none is obligatory, none preferable in itself, each optional, some objectionable, many discardable, all surpassable, new ones possible. The only absolute requirement is that the spirituality not contradict the creed. There are spiritualities for the optimistic and the pessimistic, the introvert and extrovert, the activist and the recluse. The operative paradigm here is the Church as the many-membered one Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12–30) and the manifold gifts of the one Holy Spirit (Rom 12:4–8; 1 Cor 12:4–11; Eph 4:7–13). The becoming of the one "perfect man," the fulness of the cosmic Christ, requires the diversity of gifted members. Therefore, in a word, no one need adopt or conform to the spirituality of another. Spirituality describes the precisely personal, particular, peculiar performance (*Vollzug*) of the faith by any individual. Here is certainly fodder for ecumenical energies. Can one seriously contest that much Protestant sectarianism (*Sektenbildung*) is not credal,

<sup>72</sup> Karl Rahner, *Schriften* 12, 335.

<sup>73</sup> Karl Rahner, "Die Rücksicht auf die verschiedenen Aspekte der Frömmigkeit," *Handbuch der Pastoraltheologie* 2/1, ed. F. X. Arnold et al. (Freiburg: Herder, 1966) 63–79.

not even theological, but precisely spiritual or “pietal”—a matter of modes of being pious?<sup>74</sup>

The question is, then, whether among all Christian churches a sufficiently wide horizon can be discovered, so that all these diverse churches may enjoy a “diversity in unity”<sup>75</sup> similar to that enjoyed by the local, particular churches within the universal Roman Catholic Church? Given the admittedly greater diversity, is there, nonetheless, sufficient unity so that one could legitimately speak of One, Holy, Apostolic, Ecumenical Catholic Church as we do now of the One, Holy, Apostolic, Roman Catholic Church?

I think that such is possible if we allocate the “individual traditional contents” (Pannenberg) of the whole Christian tradition to the three categories of creed (obligatory for all) and theology (optional) and spirituality (optional). Of course, this tripartite articulation is not a magical formula which automatically does the allocating of the “individual traditional contents” of Christianity. Still required on the part of all members of the Church as well as the official leaders and professional theologians would be both thinking and deciding. On the other hand, this threefold allocational structure does escape the deficiencies of the voluntarist and intellectualist approaches noted above. Likewise, it cannot be accused of either indifferentism or minimalism or false irenicism.<sup>76</sup> As we have seen, the New Testament already gives evidence of similar struggles to discern absolutely obligatory from optional requirements for ecclesial membership and doctrinal orthodoxy. The history of the Church can also be read as the struggle to discern the obligatory and the optional, and to avoid the imposition of the optional on all believers, as if it were universally obligatory. Insofar as today’s Christians are the recipients of a long and highly complicated doctrinal tradition, it is important to note that the conceptual means to insure credal orthodoxy and understanding can be equated with the creed itself: the means becomes or displaces the end. We have already noted this in regard to the dispute about the *filioque*. We can also mention the monogenism-polygenism dispute and

<sup>74</sup> See Franklin H. Littell, “Christian Faith and Counter-Culture: The Appeal of the Communes,” *Iliff Review* 30 (1973) 3–14.

<sup>75</sup> On this key ecclesiological and therefore ecumenical principle, see Yves Congar, *De la communion des églises à une ecclésiologie de l’église universelle* (Paris: Cerf, 1962) 227–60.

<sup>76</sup> The shibboleth of “facile irenicism” was immediately raised in regard to ARCIC’s *Final Report* (*Osservatore romano*, Oct. 16, 1981, 1). The best response was indicated several years ago by someone who can hardly be suspected of it himself: “False irenicism—I take it on faith that there must be such a thing, because people speak of it so often. I have never met it in any Catholic ecumenist. . .” (Bernard Leeming, *The Vatican Council and Christian Unity* [London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966] 150).

its connection with the doctrine of original sin.<sup>77</sup> In both popular piety and scholarly speculation, a metaphor intended to illustrate theological truth can become as *credibile* and *credendum* as the truth itself. Since doctrines are always amalgams of the doctrine and the doctrinal truth itself with other psychological, sociological, cultural, and folklorish elements from preceding historical epochs, vigilance is always required lest these other elements, often pedagogical, achieve doctrinal status themselves, or, even worse, unseat and replace the originally intended doctrine with themselves.<sup>78</sup>

Before we apply the preceding to various "individual traditional contents" in both Catholicism and Protestantism, two more insights, from the theory of knowledge, must be mentioned: *Denkform* (thought form) and *Denkvollzugsform* (performative style of thinking). Both emphasize that the act of thinking is as important as the thought which is the product of that act of thinking. Indeed, sometimes we can understand and appreciate the finished thought only if we understand the thinking which produced it. This is especially true for the *Geisteswissenschaften* (theology, philosophy, literature, etc.) in contrast to the *Naturwissenschaften* (physics, chemistry, etc.). The importance of this insight has been developed by John Baptist Metz for theology in general, by Otto Hermann Pesch for ecumenical theology in particular.

According to Metz, understanding (*Verstehen*) requires the discovery of the formal principle that is implicitly at the beginning, at the source, of all the explicit individual thoughts which come together to constitute a recognizable homogeneous body of thought.<sup>79</sup> To discover a thought form is to go behind the individual explicit thoughts to their common implicit source, principle, form, their *archê*. In regard to a body of thought, we can ask three questions: what was thought about, what was thought (that is, the thoughts resulting from the thinking), and why the thinking produced precisely these thoughts and not some others. To look for a thought form is to look for the answer to the third question. It is the thought form which enables and "makes" us think the way we do. Normally, the search for a thought form is prompted by the perceived difference between two contrasting bodies of thought; it seeks to understand how these contrasting bodies of thought came into being, how they were formed.

<sup>77</sup> See Karl Rahner (with Paul Overhage), "Die Hominisation als theologische Frage," *Das Problem der Hominisation* (Freiburg: Herder, 1961) 13-90.

<sup>78</sup> Karl Rahner (*Schriften* 12, 455-56) distinguishes the "thing intended" from the "illustrative model" (*Vorstellungsmodell*) and warns against "unreflective suppositions" which are always dangerous, but especially so when they result from the confusion of the thing itself with its illustrative material.

<sup>79</sup> John Baptist Metz, *Christliche Anthropozentrik* (Munich: Kösel, 1962) 30.

The thought form itself is not an object like other objects. It can be known only by deducing it from other things—in this case, individual, objectified thoughts or concepts. In scholastic terminology, the thought form is not an *objectum materiale quod* but an *objectum formale quo*. It is purely formal, a horizon (*Denkhorizont*) enabling, and at the same time restricting, certain thoughts to be thought. Within the *Geisteswissenschaften* various kinds of thought forms can be discerned: for example, psychological, historical, cultural, ontological. We are reminded of thought forms whenever we hear classifications or taxonomies like romantic, baroque, classical. Individual thoughts or works of art are the concrete objectifications of the general thought form, which exists and can be discerned/known only in and through these individual objectifications, thoughts, works of art. Hence, according to Metz, the discovery of a thought form is a work of “reduction,” a *re-ductio*—a tracing back, leading back, a *Rückführung*—of an individual product to its producer.

The whole purpose of Metz’s considerations is to describe the thought form of Aquinas, which he terms anthropocentric in contrast to the previously prevailing cosmocentric thought form.<sup>80</sup> In Aquinas Metz finds a prolepsis of the much-vaunted later “anthropozentrische Wende” or “Wende zum Subjekt” of modern philosophy. This “anthropocentric turn” or “turn to the subject” does not exist purely in St. Thomas. Often it is larded over with cosmocentric categories and even mixed with cosmocentric content. But Thomas truly marks a turning point—an epochal change, in Metz’s words—for he thinks in terms of the human subject instead of the objective cosmos. This means that Thomas’ thought is centered on and begins from the precisely human (intellect, will, choice, freedom, love), not the precisely cosmic (space-occupying, sensibly perceptible, material objects). That is, whatever Aquinas thinks about (“God, man, and the universe”), he thinks about on the basis of and in terms of subjectivity, of human being and experience. The preunderstanding of being (*Seinsvorverständnis*) operative in his thinking and “making” him think the way he does is being as knowing, loving, choosing. All beings are articulations of being thus understood. According to St. Thomas, for example, “anima verius habet suum esse ubi amat quam ubi est.”<sup>81</sup> We can translate thus: “the human being has its being more truly where he/

<sup>80</sup> See Robert Kress, *A Rahner Reader* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982) 98–103; “Cosmos and Conscience,” in *The Pedagogy of God’s Image*, ed. Robert Masson (Chico, Cal.: Scholars, 1982) 191–206. The term “anthropocentric” is not without its disadvantages, for it can easily be misused. It then eliminates or undervalues the corporeal, sensual dimensions of human being and becomes subjectivism. This need not happen, of course, but in anthropocentric, humanistic culture vigilance is required.

<sup>81</sup> *In Sent.*, d. 15, q. 5, a. 3, ad 2.

she loves than where he/she [merely] is." Contrasting definitions of the human being as "spirit in the world" and as "rational animal" also illustrate the difference between the anthropocentric and the cosmocentric thought form. These examples also highlight an important point: one is not correct and the other wrong. One does not necessarily lead to true thoughts and insights, the other to false ones. Although the anthropocentric thought form is more in tune with human and Christian reality, it is not solely able to produce true and reliable thoughts about "God, man, and the universe." Metz gives six illustrations of the theological significance of anthropocentric thinking: being, individuality (freedom and conscience), substance, world, God, grace.<sup>82</sup>

Space does not allow us to go into detail, and for our purpose we need not. Metz's theory is important for our considerations for two reasons. First, it emphasizes the role of human subjectivity (not subjectivism) in producing theological thoughts and systems. This subjectivity must be taken into account when comparing and evaluating differing theological explanations. It can help us understand that the same word does not always mean the same thing in different theologians and that the same thing can also be designated by different words. What can be said easily in one system may hardly be able to be said at all in another. Such differences may not be merely terminological or semantic. They may be the manifestation of deeply rooted differences in the starting point and manner of thinking. Differing thought forms may be operative. If so, mutual understanding and reconciliation, if it is needed, cannot be achieved merely by minor adjustments here and there. A thoroughgoing examination of entire thought worlds is required.

Consequently, great care must be exercised in assessing the orthodoxy of someone's theology. It may simply be different, not heretical. Second, the difference between the cosmocentric and the anthropocentric thought form is very deep. Metz says that it is ontological. If the Church can tolerate such great diversity and variety in theology, and it does, then not only great but extreme caution is required in the determination of someone's ecclesial loyalty and membership on the basis of theological

<sup>82</sup> It seems to me that some of the doctrinal confusion bemoaned in the post-Vatican II Church has its source in the contrast between anthropocentric and cosmocentric insights and language. Preconciliar theology was generally presented in the objectivistic vocabulary of the cosmocentric thought form. For example, grace is a liquid which is poured (infused) into the soul conceived as a container. Such an explanation is not wrong, but it is also quite different from an explanation emphasizing intersubjective relationality. How the two approaches are to be reconciled is not immediately evident and, it seems to me, seldom if ever explained by theologians, religious educators, and catechists, who may themselves be reflectively unaware of the deeper source of the difference. The difference becomes a source of agitation in the areas of personal freedom, conscience, and morality.



explanations of the creed. Again, I emphasize that doctrinal indifference and relativism are neither intended nor required by this approach. Concern for the truth and the unity of the Church does require, however, that we give due weight not only to the diastasis between creed and theological conceptualization, but also to the differences among modes of theologizing and systems of theology.

Presupposing the theory of the thought form, Otto Hermann Pesch proposes a further distinction in the *formale objectum quo* of theologizing: *Denkvollzugsformen* or "intellectual styles of performance . . . this basic difference of style in performing theology." Here "we are dealing with the deepest, pre-rational orientations and fundamental options of thought. These are most commonly recognized only by a third party."<sup>83</sup> As with the thought form, the discernment of these "intellectual styles" is a matter of reduction, that is, of finding a common, implicit source for a body of specific, explicit thoughts. Pesch uses the following examples to illustrate not only the different theological content, but also the differing theological performative styles of Aquinas and Luther: certitude of salvation, human co-operation with God, Christology-soteriology, sin and grace (the *simul justus et peccator*), salvation by faith or charity, freedom. To designate these two performative styles of thinking, Pesch has chosen the terms "existential" (which translates the German *existentiell*, not the Heideggerian "category" *existential*) and "sapiential." We can draw the main elements together under the following headings:

*Existential theology*

has as theme the act itself of faith as well as its theoretical implications.

is literally directed to one's own existential self-accounting before God.

looks from man toward God and then from God back upon man.

speaks prototypically within an I-Thou situation and only consequently and derivatively in the third person.

speaks in the mode of confession.

regarding salvation, stresses faith, humility, and repentance.

*Sapiential theology*

has the act of faith (only) as the basis for its statements, without it becoming thematized.

is directed to "wisdom," in the medieval sense of understanding through ultimate causes.

looks from God upon man.

speaks primarily in the third person.

speaks descriptively.

stresses wonder, charity, and friendship with God.

<sup>83</sup> Otto Hermann Pesch, "Existential and Sapiential Theology—The Theological Confrontation between Luther and Thomas Aquinas," in *Catholic Scholars Dialogue with Luther* (n. 19 above) 65; also his *Die Theologie der Rechtfertigung bei Martin Luther und Thomas von Aquin* (Mainz: Grünewald, 1967) 935–48.

By way of definition we might say the following. *Existential theology* is the way of doing theology from within the self-actuation of our existence in faith, as we submit to God in the obedience of faith. Its affirmations are so formulated that the actual faith and confession of the speaker are not merely necessary presuppositions but are reflexly thematized. *Sapiential theology* is the way of doing theology from outside one's self-actuation in the existence in faith, in the sense that in its doctrinal statements the faith and confession of the speaker is the enduring presupposition, but is not thematic within this theology. This theology strives to mirror and recapitulate God's own thoughts about the world, men, and history, insofar as God has disclosed them.<sup>84</sup>

Pesch maintains that "the distinction between existential and sapiential theology must be an essential hermeneutical element in the systematic comparison of the theologies of Martin Luther and Thomas Aquinas."<sup>85</sup> There is, of course, no reason to restrict this distinction to only these two theologians. It obviously has much wider application. It would be an excellent subordinate hermeneutical principle in the service of the chief hermeneutical principle I have proposed, namely, "Leise treten." The ecumenical import of Pesch's theory is immediately obvious. As he notes, "the terms 'existential' and 'sapiential' point to a difference which is not an opposition."<sup>86</sup> They are not exclusionary styles and methods of theologizing, but complementary—complementary not only in that they can serve as correctives to possibly innate erroneous tendencies in each, but also in that the richness of both divine and human being can be approached adequately only if both of these, as well as possible other, *Denkvollungsformen* are able to flourish within the One Church. The overarching ecclesiological principle of "unity in diversity and diversity in unity" is well served by the theories of both Metz and Pesch. Both encourage and facilitate the practical application of the hermeneutical principle "Leise treten." To this we now proceed.

One cannot but be impressed by the Protestant concern that nothing be allowed to overshadow or impinge upon the uniqueness of "Jesus Christ as the one mediator between God and man" (1 Tim 2:4–6). In spite of its tendency to an unacceptable "Christomonism"<sup>87</sup> which devalues not only other human reality but even the divine reality, it is a concern that can and must be shared by other Christians. This is clearly a matter of creed (confession), obligatory for all. But a question immediately rises about the obligatory quality of theologoumena invoked by Protestants to buttress and explain this obligatory credal tenet. Is, for

<sup>84</sup> "Existential" 76–77.

<sup>85</sup> "Existential" 80. In *Rechtfertigung* 941, he claims that it accounts for *all* the differences.

<sup>86</sup> "Existential" 81.

<sup>87</sup> Gerhard Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 106, 111.

example, the Lutheran "humana natura totaliter corrupta" really necessary to preserve the uniqueness of Christ?<sup>88</sup> Is the Calvinist preoccupation with the pure passivity of human nature really necessary to preserve the pre-eminence of divine grace?<sup>89</sup> Must Lutheran and Calvinist theology insist on these "doctrines" so intensely that they would also be obligatory for others, like Catholics and Orthodox? Do they not more properly belong to others, like Catholics and Calvinist theologies and spiritualities conceptually explicating and practically applying the creed confessing Christ as the absolute bringer of salvation? Need this creed itself be burdened with these ideas? The same holds true for doctrines dear to the Catholic heart and mind. Will they demand that all confess credally even the infallibly declared immaculate conception of Mary, especially since its theological conceptualization is so beholden to the terminology of a cosmocentric thought form that its unique content can hardly be expressed anthropocentrically?<sup>90</sup> Will they insist that everyone credally confess seven sacraments, neither more nor less, when neither the Council of Trent nor any subsequent council has given an official definition of sacrament;<sup>91</sup> when the traditional creeds themselves do not include such enumeration; when, of the seven, only baptism, not even the Eucharist, is explicitly mentioned in the classical creeds? Are Eucharistic devotions like Benediction and Forty Hours really to be required of all Christians as a matter of faith? On the other hand, would Protestants want to forbid these practices of piety to Catholics, especially insofar as precise equivalents exist in the piety of Protestants, namely, the private reading of the Bible and its reservation/exposition in church and home? Similar examples can be listed endlessly.

The threefold articulation here proposed is of inner-churchly value as well as inter-churchly. As we noted above, no doctrine exists purely, without any extraneous admixture. Every doctrine is an amalgam.<sup>92</sup> Hence, even within a particular church, doctrines and doctrinal formu-

<sup>88</sup> Would a Lutheran really want to require all Christians to confess credally the *Sündenpessimismus* contained in the texts assembled by Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966) 66–70, 149, 153?

<sup>89</sup> Is "human passivity" absolutely necessary to insure the initiative of grace, the pre-eminence of the divine in the work of salvation? Is it credally necessary? See Alexander Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans* (Freiburg: Herder, 1968) 83: "For Calvin, faith is so much the work of the Holy Spirit that it can be termed an *opus passivum*" (my emphasis).

<sup>90</sup> See Avery Dulles, "Moderate Infallibilism," in *Teaching Authority and Infallibility in the Church*, ed. Paul C. Empie, T. Austin Murphy, and Joseph A. Burgess (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980) 97–100, and Robert Kress, "A Feast for the Brokenhearted," *Sign* 56/4 (December 1976/January 1977) 7–10.

<sup>91</sup> Ludger Kruse, "Der Sakramentsbegriff des Konzils von Trient und die heutige Sakramentstheologie," *Theologie und Glaube* 45 (1955) 401–11.

<sup>92</sup> Karl Rahner, *Schriften* 13 (1978) 78–84, 323.

lations require ongoing purification and repair. And alertness as well, lest the doctrine itself be thrown out with the no longer necessary adjuncts. For example, the Petrine office or ministry requires neither the papalist piety nurtured by recent Pian popes nor an anachronistic Caesaropapalism. Likewise, the attribute of infallibility does not require the ideology of infallibilism. Indeed, infallibilism can be rampant where an explicit doctrine of infallibility is energetically denied.<sup>93</sup> Would it not be foolhardy to assume that among all Lutheran churches the same theology of justification, that *articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae*, reigns with univocal and unanimous clarity? Diligence in resisting lukewarm relativism must be accompanied by the resolve to resist totalitarianism, in which everything is equally and absolutely important because it is presently ours. Would, for example, Roman Catholics really want to assert a credal obligation to believe in the incapacity of women to be ordained to the priesthood? However sincere such a "belief" might be on the part of some, is it a matter of the creed, by which we explicitly identify ourselves as Christ-people and in which we publicly and solemnly assert this identification? Is it not, whatever its merits,<sup>94</sup> clearly a matter of theology rather than creed? Or, of "spirituality," in which case, the less said the better? Is it of such doctrinal dignity that it can in any way be grounds for the division of the churches, for the perdurance of diversity without unity? On the other hand, would Protestants really want to insist, as credal belief, that the apocalyptic monster 666 is the papacy, that the whore of Ba ylon and the Antichrist are the Church of Rome, as was suggested to me recently?

As I noted above, the "Leise treten" and the threefold articulation of the Christian tradition into creed, theology, and spirituality do not provide an automatic, magical means to sort out and order "individual traditional contents" according to their proper value. The line between relativity and relativism, between pluralism and chaos, is narrow indeed. But the line between unity and uniformity, between unanimity and univocity, is no wider. It may well be that, should the faithful, their official leaders, and professional theologians "tread lightly" and diligently discern creed, theology, and spirituality among the contents of their whole tradition, the One Church would still evade them. Perhaps our history is such that ecumenical celebration of the empirical One Church will always elude us.

<sup>93</sup> See my chapter on the systematic theology of infallibility in a symposium inspired by Bernard Lonergan's theological method: Terry Tekippe, ed., *Papal Infallibility* (Washington: University Press of America, 1982) 270-306.

<sup>94</sup> I myself think that the position is meritless; see my *Whither Womankind?* (St. Meinrad: Abbey, 1975) 223-62. On the difficulty of achieving infallibly binding doctrine in moral matters, see Joseph Komonchak, "Humanæ vitæ and Its Reception," *TS* 39 (1978) 221-57.

Nevertheless, I think that this suggestion has merit as a framework in which each church can examine its own tradition, those of other churches, and all together the whole tradition of the resurrected Christ (1 Cor 15:1-4). Within this framework they may more readily be able to discover the *vestigia ecclesiae*<sup>95</sup> in one another. This ancient principle, together with Vatican II's "hierarchy of truths,"<sup>96</sup> could combine with the other principles described above to form an adequate and effective irenic hermeneutic whereby the churches might find sufficient *vestigia* of the Church of Christ in one another, so that in recognizing them they will also recognize themselves and thus the One Church of Christ. Could we not hope that sufficient *vestigia* still and already exist in the various churches, so that these churches may perceive themselves to be diverse indeed, but also diverse in an even greater unity which embraces them all?

I do not feel that my proposal succumbs to indifferentism or relativism or minimalism. In fact, it relies on the most vigorous theological inves-

<sup>95</sup> The idea of the *vestigia ecclesiae* is customarily traced, at least verbally, to John Calvin: "so we refuse not to acknowledge, among the papists of the present day, those vestiges of the Church which it has pleased the Lord to remain among them. . . . He also caused other vestiges of the Church to remain. . ." (*Institutes of the Christian Religion* 4, 2, xi [Philadelphia: Westminster, n.d.] Vol. 2, 313-14). There is also a trace of this idea in Luther, who speaks of "reliquias servat" in his commentary on Genesis (WA 42, 299). However, the insight itself can be traced back to Augustine, who refused to allow the baptism of heretics to be their own property, claiming it to belong rightfully to the Church (*De baptismo contra Donatistas* [PL 42, 121]). Aquinas continues the same idea: "Although the heretic may not be a member of the Church by virtue of right faith, nevertheless, insofar as he observes the custom of the Church in baptizing, he hands on (*tradit*) the Church's baptism; hence he regenerates sons for Christ and the Church, not for himself and his heresy. For, as Jacob begot sons through free and servant women, so Christ through Catholics and heretics" (*In 4 Sent.*, d. 6, q. 1, a. 3; q. a. 2, ad 2). Similar viewpoints are represented in the *Decretum pro Armenis* (DS 1315) and the Council of Trent (DS 1617). In references to the churches of the East, Pope Pius XI noted that "detached fragments of a gold-bearing rock also contain the precious ore" (Jan. 9, 1927, to the Italian Catholic Universities Federation; cited by Yves Congar, *Divided Christendom* [London: Geoffrey Bles, 1939] 245). In 1950 the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches issued what has become known as the Toronto Declaration, which contains the following: "5. The member Churches of the World Council recognize in other Churches elements of the true Church. They consider that this mutual recognition obliges them to enter into serious conversation with each other in the hope that these elements of truth will lead to the recognition of the full truth and to unity based upon the full truth." W. A. Visser 't Hooft had emphasized this obligation at the Amsterdam Assembly in 1948, a theme he elaborated in "Das verschiedene Verständnis der Einheit und die Einheit für die sich der ökumenische Rat der Kirchen einzusetzen hat," *Ökumenische Rundschau* 5 (1956) 94-103. This idea is, finally, operative in the Second Vatican Council, especially in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (8, 15) and the Decree on Ecumenism (3), both of which speak of the "elementa" or "bona" which belong to the one Church of Christ and which are present in both the Catholic and Protestant churches. See Emilian Lamirande, "La signification ecclésiologique des communautés dissidentes et la doctrine des vestigia ecclesiae," *Istina* 10 (1964) 25-28.

<sup>96</sup> Decree on Ecumenism 11.

tigation and reflection,<sup>97</sup> but it does not raise this theology to the dignity of the creed. Thus it is not subject to the criticism implicit in Hans Urs von Balthasar's admonition that "every union among churches must be a union in the faith and in a clear and clearly-formulated confession of faith. Hence reunion can rest solidly only on a more genuine and vital faith, not on a lukewarm and indifferent relativism in matters of faith-differences."<sup>98</sup> True this exhortation may well be. Nevertheless, it does not, in and by itself, describe this clear and clearly formulated faith which we are to profess. In any case, clarity, whether of Cartesian distinctness or not, is hardly the ultimate good. Nor is it readily available, as Balthasar himself might well concede. In any case, clarity as such would establish neither the truth nor relative value of those faith-doctrines which had been clearly formulated.<sup>99</sup>

Finally, my suggestion is not inspired by lukewarm indifference or superficial syncretism in regard to my own tradition. I am Roman Catholic and do not want to be anything else. I have seen the grass on the other side of many fences. As I do not find it to be weeds, so do I also not find it to be greener. On the other hand, it is not immediately evident to me that the fences are unsurmountable, substantially divisive. Do other Christians, individuals and churches, really *believe* all that differently than I? Of course, they do and say many things which I sometimes find not appealing, sometimes appalling. But therein they hardly differ from my own Roman Catholic brothers and sisters. So I must ask myself a simple, almost brutish question: Is what I, as a Catholic Christian, believe absolutely and unconditionally so different from what Protestant Christians believe absolutely and unconditionally? Can we not, then, however diverse our theologies and spiritualities, discern sufficient *vestigia ecclesiae* among one another so that we can perceive ourselves to be the One Church of Christ and truth-fully conclude that we are no longer

<sup>97</sup> It is here that the various bilateral discussions play their indispensable role. My proposal for a threefold articulation and distribution of the Christian tradition is not intended to bypass or undervalue these discussions; indeed, it presupposes them. But even when they are, as Congar has judged the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogues in the United States, "models of theological investigation," they are still not apt to evoke Church unity on their own. He also narrates the disillusionment of an unidentified American with the ecumenical movement's lack of movement: "It's as if he and she were to meet every year to celebrate their engagement, but they never moved on to the marriage itself" (*Eglise catholique et France moderne* [Paris: Hachette, 1978] 193, 143).

<sup>98</sup> Cited by J. Frey, "Der Fall Küng," *Rheinischer Merkur* 4 (Jan. 25, 1980) 23.

<sup>99</sup> Furthermore, as Rahner used to say frequently in his lectures at Innsbruck, partly but not only in self-defense, "Das Klarere ist nicht immer das Wahrere." See Robert Kress, *A Rahner Handbook* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982) 7.

divided and separated Christians but One Church of unity in diversity and diversity in unity?<sup>100</sup>

I am encouraged and persuaded that we can by the statement of someone who would now be described as a higher authority in the Church. In a 1976 prognosis about ecumenism he said:

The claim of truth may not be made where it is not compelling, indeed, irrefutably valid. Truth may not be claimed and imposed as such for that which is in reality a historically developed form and which has a greater or lesser connection with the truth. Precisely when it is a question of the truth which cannot be surrendered or relinquished (*Unverzichtbarkeit*), then there must also be a sincere honesty which counters claims of truth made all too quickly, and which is also prepared to search out the inner breadth of the truth with the eyes of love.<sup>101</sup>

By reflecting on the entire Christian tradition sincerely and lovingly, the churches may indeed see sufficient *vestigia* of this Christ's Church in one another so that they can honestly and truthfully conclude to unity in faith-creed, diversity in theology and spirituality. Ratzinger's exhortation is an excellent version of the irenic hermeneutic, desired and symbolized by the "Leise treten."

I am also encouraged by the statement of an even higher authority (whose position my proposal is intended to promote). His response to someone who, if we can judge from his nickname, had also to learn that the proper Christian hermeneutic is not "laut trampeln" but "leise treten," is most instructive: "Just before they began their journey up to Jerusalem, John [Boanerges: one of the Sons of Thunder, Mk 3:14] spoke up. 'Master,' he said, 'we saw a man casting out devils in your name, and because he is not with us we tried to stop him.' But Jesus said to him, 'You must not stop him: anyone who is not against you is for you'" (Lk 9:49-50).

<sup>100</sup> And then we could get on with theology's proper ecumenical task, the dialogue of the remaining Christian population with an increasingly secularist, empiricist, one world. See Karl Rahner, *Schriften* 14 (1980) 287-318, 382-404; 9 (1970) 34-78, esp. 70-78; "A Basic Interpretation of Vatican II," *TS* 40 (1979) 716-27.

<sup>101</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, "Prognosen für die Zukunft des Ökumenismus," *Bausteine* 17 (1976) 10.