

## THEOLOGICAL RESPONSIBILITY: BEYOND THE CLASSICAL PARADIGM

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**A**MONG MATTERS of concern cited in the *Final Report*<sup>1</sup> of the November 1985 Extraordinary Synod in Rome was the persistence of friction between the magisterium and theologians. The document notes that "theology is specifically necessary to the life of the church today. . ." and appreciatively recognizes "what has been done by theologians to elaborate the documents of Vatican Council II and to help toward their faithful interpretation and fruitful application in the postconciliar period." In quite a different tone, however, the document continues by expressing "regret that the theological discussions of our day have sometimes occasioned confusion among the faithful. . ." and suggests the remedy of "communication and a reciprocal dialogue between the bishops and theologians" in order to insure "the building up of the faith and its deeper comprehension." The concerns raised here focus on the nature of theological responsibility, an issue that continues to preoccupy both the magisterium and theologians, though usually in quite different ways.

Consideration of this issue has been prominent in the years since Vatican II and, unfortunately, has been prompted by actual conflicts between the magisterium and theologians such as Hans Küng, Edward Schillebeeckx, Leonardo Boff, and Charles Curran. One might perceive the occasional tension between the magisterium and theologians as a struggle to define the legitimate boundaries of teaching authority in the Church, an issue which, in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council, has been of special concern to all parties involved. The fact that the Council was in most respects a model of co-operation between the magisterium and theologians brought about the expectation that good relations between these constituencies would flourish in the postconciliar Church. That expectation has not been entirely fulfilled.

In the following pages I will argue that contemporary conflicts between the magisterium and theologians can be better understood, and thereby

<sup>1</sup> The full title of the document, released in Latin on Dec. 9, 1986, is *The Church, in the Word of God, Celebrates the Mystery of Christ for the Salvation of the World*. An English translation appears in *Origins* 15, no. 27 (Dec. 19, 1985) 444-50. Citations from the document are from section II.B.a.3.

perhaps avoided, if viewed in light of a shift in fundamental assumptions about the nature of theological responsibility that has taken place in the last 150 years. By "theological responsibility" I refer to the vocational norms to which the theologian is accountable in his or her intellectual efforts to clarify the truth of an ecclesial tradition. Theological responsibility concerns the issue of authority as it relates to the theological vocation. By what authority does the theologian speak and judge? To whom is the theologian answerable? By what criteria is the legitimacy of the theologian's speaking and judging measurable? The answers one gives to these questions will reflect a particular understanding of the role of the theologian in the Church and thus of the nature of theological responsibility. I will argue that the present conflict centering on this issue is generated by the theologians' full commitment to, and the magisterium's ambivalent acceptance of, a distinctly Romantic model of theological responsibility—a model which has had a relatively short, though turbulent, history in the Catholic tradition.

#### THEOLOGICAL RESPONSIBILITY IN THE CLASSICAL PARADIGM

It is difficult to speak of theology as a discrete discipline prior to the 12th century. At that time schoolmen began to apply the distinct methods of the classical disciplines of grammar, rhetoric, and especially dialectic to the study of the biblical text that had commonly been known as *sacra pagina*. The result was a new academic discipline, gradually identified as *theologia*, preoccupied with the definition of its own theory and content and elaborated by its students in textbooks and commentaries.<sup>2</sup> The notion of responsibility that emerged in this classical understanding of the theological task was shaped largely by the previous history of biblical interpretation. The study of *sacra pagina* involved the exposition of the meaning of the Bible by regular appeal to the established tradition of ecclesiastical authorities. With few exceptions<sup>3</sup> it was assumed throughout the Middle Ages that these authorities, whether Augustine, Boethius, or John Damascene, spoke with a single voice on doctrinal matters, and that the expression of this univocal authority constituted the tradition

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Yves M.-J. Congar, *A History of Theology* (New York: Doubleday, 1968) 50–84; G. R. Evans, *Old Arts and New Theology: The Beginnings of Theology As an Academic Discipline* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980) 19–46. More generally, see Frank Whaling, "The Development of the Word 'Theology,'" *Scottish Journal of Theology* 34 (1981) 289–312.

<sup>3</sup> The most influential exception was Abelard (1079–1142), whose *Sic et Non* illustrated the diversity of patristic opinion on a variety of doctrinal matters. The suspicions against Abelard throughout his career, acted on in his condemnations at the Councils of Soissons and Sens, indicate how challenges to the unity of the tradition, especially by an individual who appealed to personal talent as a theological resource, were received during the period that theology emerged as an academic discipline.

of orthodox teaching. The tradition's recognition of the authority's status was not founded principally on the originality of his interpretations but on the consistency of his insights with those offered by his predecessors and with the received doctrinal tradition.<sup>4</sup> This harmonization of the biblical text and the tradition of its interpretation reflected the Catholic assumption that God's revelation was presented in both Scripture and tradition.

As theology developed toward an academic enterprise in the 12th and 13th centuries, its assumptions about the responsibility incumbent on its practitioners took shape along the lines of this classical notion of authority. The biblical text remained the primary authority to which the academic theologians considered themselves responsible, though, as in the tradition of *sacra pagina*, the individual interpreter sought the truth of the text in the wisdom of the recognized authorities of the past. This is illustrated most clearly in the development of the *quaestio* method in the 12th and 13th centuries which eventually required that not only biblical interpretation but also metaphysical speculation be legitimated by reference to the tradition of authorities. As was the case in the study of *sacra pagina*, the authority of revelation tended to eclipse the value of individual insight, and thus of individual theological judgment.

It is difficult to speak of there being any conception of individual authority in this high-medieval notion of theological responsibility. This is obviously not to say that the work of theologians like Lombard, Aquinas, and Bonaventure possessed no distinctiveness or originality capable of being identified with the intellectual style and creativity of these individuals. In the classical paradigm, however, distinctiveness and originality were not valued traits to be celebrated in the achievements of the theologian by his contemporaries. Soundness, in ecclesiastical terms "orthodoxy," was the true mark of theological achievement, and that quality could only be earned through the passing of time and the favorable judgment of the ages. Ironically, at least in terms of modern sensibilities, theological achievement in the context of the classical paradigm entailed the identification of the individual's theological labors with the tradition of authorities and thus the forsaking of any claim to originality or individual authority. In other words, consummate theological achievement in the High Middle Ages led to the blending of one's individual theological voice into the harmonious chorus of the past authorities, the very object of theological responsibility within which individual author-

<sup>4</sup> See Beryl Smalley, "Ecclesiastical Attitudes to Novelty c. 1100-c. 1250," in *Studies in Medieval Thought and Learning: From Abelard to Wyclif* (London: Hambleton, 1981) 97-115.

ship was indistinguishable.<sup>5</sup>

The classical paradigm is not limited to the Catholic tradition of the Middle Ages, but is also characteristic of classical Protestantism, albeit in a somewhat altered form. In many respects the denominational splintering of Christianity in the 16th century can be understood in terms of the issue of theological responsibility. The rise of the doctrine of papal infallibility in the late Middle Ages<sup>6</sup> slightly varied the high-medieval conception of theological authority and yielded a conception of theological responsibility against which the Reformers rebelled. By the early 16th century, Catholicism understood theologians to be responsible to the tradition of authorities, finally expressed in the authority of the present Roman pontiff as the most authentic interpreter of God's revelation in Scripture and tradition. Classical Protestantism rejected this conception of theological responsibility and understood theological speaking and judging to be responsible to the Word of God alone. Both Luther and Calvin judged the magisterial commitment of Roman Catholic theology to be a false allegiance worthy only of rejection. When the Reformers did appeal to the authority of the tradition, they tended to be selective, refusing to accept the medieval assumption that the authorities of the tradition spoke univocally on doctrinal matters. Like medieval theologians before them, they considered Augustine to be the pre-eminent traditional authority, though principally because he expounded a doctrine of sin and grace biblically supportable in Paul and amenable to Reformation spirituality.<sup>7</sup> For the Reformers, individual acts of theological thinking and judging gained their legitimacy through their faithful exposition of the scriptural text, whose proper author was God.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> In response to his own rhetorical question, "Could theologians individually or at least corporately, be acknowledged as possessing true doctrinal or magisterial authority?", Avery Dulles asserts that the "notion that theologians have authority is well-founded in the tradition" ("The Magisterium in History: A Theological Reflection," *Chicago Studies* 17 [1978] 273). His examples, however, demonstrate our thesis that in the classical paradigm theologians have no *individual* authority. The Council of Vienne (1312), he notes, "invoked the testimonies of the Fathers and the opinions of 'the modern doctors of theology' as grounds for endorsing certain positions. . . . To contradict the unanimous opinion of theologians on a question of faith or morals [contends the 16th-century theologian Melchior Cano], is heresy or close to heresy. . ." (ibid.).

<sup>6</sup> See Brian Tierney, *Origins of Papal Infallibility 1150-1350* (Leiden: Brill, 1972).

<sup>7</sup> See Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition 4: Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300-1700)* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1984) 138-41.

<sup>8</sup> See B. A. Gerrish, "The Word of God and the Words of Scripture: Luther and Calvin on Biblical Authority," in *The Old Protestantism and the New: Essays on the Reformation Heritage* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982) 51-68. More specifically, cf. Scott H. Hendrix, "Luther against the Background of the History of Biblical Interpretation," *Interpretation* 37 (1983) 229.

Even though these 16th-century conceptions of theological responsibility differ significantly, they do share a common presupposition that is noteworthy and justifies their being ranked under a single rubric. Both assume that legitimate theology is responsible to an objective authority, whether Scripture traditionally expounded in the case of Roman Catholicism or Scripture alone in the case of Protestantism, and that this responsibility assumes to a great extent, if not completely, the theologian's sacrificing of individual creativity or originality. In the context of medieval and Tridentine Catholicism, the authorities of the tradition, as expounders of a single divine truth available to the Church through their writings, were understood to be speaking with a single voice from which the theologian could dissent only at the risk of heresy. Although the Reformers rejected the theological normativeness of Catholic tradition, they affirmed the tradition's presupposition that truth was not to be found in the novelty of individual or collective acts of theologizing. If Luther's hermeneutical principle of *scriptura sui interpres*, and its expectation that the shared faith of a plurality of interpreters will produce a single interpretation, appears naive to the modern inheritor of Christian pluralism, it is because its noetic presuppositions are entirely medieval.

If the preceding, and admittedly sweeping, analysis is defensible, then one might suggest that throughout the medieval period, as well as in the 16th and 17th centuries, there was no conception of individual theological authorship in any modern sense. In the classical paradigm, God is the sole author of the truth of salvation in Scripture or tradition or both. Theologians were not seen to be functioning as authors in the sense that their vocation entailed the creative presentation of divine truth through individual experience or original insight. Since theologians were not authors, they did not possess authority. Theological responsibility in the classical paradigm is seen as the theologian's *representative* faithfulness to divine revelation. In the classical Roman Catholic tradition, theological representation took the form of speculative commentary or commentary-based speculation; in the classical Protestant tradition, theological representation took the form of exegesis. This essentially singular assumption about the nature of theological responsibility remained undisturbed until challenged by the Enlightenment's attack on its authoritative foundations.

#### THEOLOGICAL RESPONSIBILITY IN THE ROMANTIC PARADIGM

Although the Reformers accepted the medieval identification of authority and divine revelation, the tenor of their theologies did much to supplant the classical paradigm of theological responsibility. The Reformers had, after all, focused on the centrality of the individual's

experience of faith, maintained the individual believer's access to the literal sense of Scripture, and fostered a view of the Church as a community within which the believer could find relationship to God apart from the mediating offices of the priest. In addition to the subjective emphases in these theological themes, the manner in which remarkable historical change occurred in the 16th century contributed to the formation of a different understanding of the theological vocation. The virtual transformation of late-medieval European society by the personal efforts, criticism, and courage of the great Reformers—Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin—did much to cultivate the modern identification of authority and autonomy, and its assumption that truth is established through the genius of individual creativity. The fact that the Reformers were first and foremost theologians encouraged the application of this modern notion of authority to the sphere of theological reflection.

This notion of individual authority blossomed fully in the 18th and 19th centuries in the intellectual movements of the Enlightenment and Romanticism. The Enlightenment understanding of autonomy entailed only impatient disdain for what were considered to be the heteronomous truth-claims of Christian Scripture and tradition. The rigorous attack on these revelational mainstays of classical theology that resulted from this disdain provided the impetus for a paradigm-shift in conceptions of the theological task. In the early 19th century the Christian churches sought a means to defend the integrity of their theological vision against the criticism of Enlightenment rationalism, and found their most valuable resource in the growing movement of Romanticism.

It would be impossible in the limits of the present study to give account of the various types and theories of Romanticism. For the sake of brevity, we can say that the Romantic movement, especially as it was theologically appropriated, was generally concerned with the subjective reconciliation of truth and history. Truth, the Romantics claimed, was not accessible in an objective metaphysical referent but could only be found in its historical development. The appropriation of this Romantic understanding of history enabled theologians to argue that rationalism, with its static rather than evolutionary model of truth, appreciated neither the depth nor the dynamism of divine revelation, now conceived as a process. Since this development was primarily accessible through and in experience, the role of individual creativity in theological reflection was remarkably enhanced. The theologian was no longer seen as mimetically *representing* an objective revelation but as imaginatively *constructing*<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Theological construction in the modern period has taken three principal forms, of which there are variations or hybridic combinations: description, speculation, and criticism.

the immediate, though historical, experience of salvation. This shift in conceptions about the very nature of the theological enterprise was one that highlighted the role of theological talent and gave rise to what I shall call the Romantic paradigm of theological responsibility.

This conception of theological responsibility took shape in the first theologies of tradition, expressed in the modern notion of doctrinal development. The first theories of doctrinal development were formulated in the early decades of the 19th century by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) and Johann Sebastian Drey (1777–1853) in their respective contributions to the literary genre of theological encyclopedia.<sup>10</sup> I choose the work of these individuals to illustrate the Romantic paradigm because of their significance for the subsequent history of Catholic theology. This seems an odder statement to make of Schleiermacher, the father of liberal

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(1) Description is best represented in the work of the two most influential Protestant theologians of the modern period, Friedrich Schleiermacher and Karl Barth. As Hans Frei has noted in his unpublished Shaffer Lectures at Yale (1983), Barth's hostility to Schleiermacher's theological point of departure should not disguise the degree to which he follows Schleiermacher methodologically in a most important respect. Although Barth excoriates Schleiermacher's inattention to scriptural revelation and devotion to exclusively experiential foundations for the theological edifice of Christian dogmatics, he, like Schleiermacher, understands the enterprise of dogmatics to comprise the description of the faith of the Church. Their expository approach to dogmatics exhibits a shared antipathy toward philosophical speculation as a dimension of theological reflection. (2) The speculative approach has been pursued by those who have appropriated the main philosophical currents of this period—idealism, existentialism, hermeneutics, and process thought—as methodological bases for various approaches to the theological task. While there are numerous Protestant examples of this style, the Catholic tradition has found this approach to be most in keeping with its classical understanding of the theological enterprise. It is illustrated in the work of the Catholic Tübingen School, the transcendental theologies of Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan, and the hermeneutical theology of David Tracy. (3) Criticism as a modern form of theological construction is the most recent of the three and can be dated from the beginnings of political theology in the late 1960s. It continues to be represented by different forms of liberation theology that articulate the perspective on the gospel message offered by Third World Christians and minority groups. These three forms of modern theology share the common assumptions that human experience in history is an essential constituent of theological reflection, that the theologian possesses a creative authorial role of service to the Church as the articulator of that experience, and that the exercise of the theological vocation is accomplished in the constant reformulation or construction of Christian doctrine. On this last point, see Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., "Theology As the Construction of Doctrine," in *The Vocation of the Theologian*, ed. Jennings (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 67–86.

<sup>10</sup> For discussions of Schleiermacher's and Drey's theories of doctrinal development, see John E. Thiel, "Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in Schleiermacher's Theological Encyclopedia: Doctrinal Development and Theological Creativity," *Heythrop Journal* 25 (1984) 142–47; "J. S. Drey on Doctrinal Development: The Context of Theological Encyclopedia," *ibid.* 27 (1986) 290–305. The following analysis of the role of theological authorship in the work of these thinkers is based on these studies.

Protestantism, than of Drey, the founder of the Catholic Tübingen School. But both were among the first theologians to wrestle with the implications of historical consciousness for Christian faith. Their theories of doctrinal development not only illustrate the modern notion of theological responsibility but were the matrices from which it was born. Although there are distinguishable features in their respective theories, the fact that Drey was strongly influenced by Schleiermacher explains the similarity of their views on development and theological responsibility, and justifies our attention to Schleiermacher in an article primarily concerned with the issue of theological responsibility in a Catholic context.

These Romantic theologians, in their apologetical efforts to address the rationalists, resisted the more traditional notion of theological responsibility as faithfulness to the scriptural text, the normative creeds of the Christian past, or the present judgments of an ecclesiastical hierarchy. The alternative notion they formulated presumed a historical understanding of religious truth that was not as easily susceptible to Enlightenment criticism. Both Schleiermacher and Drey understood Christian tradition as a fluid movement in which the established doctrine of the past was creatively joined to the current moment in the development of Christian faith. For Schleiermacher, the theological construction, in this case description, of the present faith of the Christian community yielded what he termed "heterodox" doctrine, which was distinguished from the "orthodoxy" of established doctrine not by its falsity or ecclesiastical unacceptability but by its relevance to the most recent state of Christian belief. Schleiermacher expresses this position in his *Kurze Darstellung des theologischen Studiums* (1811) by asserting that

[e]ach element of doctrine construed with the intention of adhering to what is already generally recognized, together with the natural consequences of the same, is orthodox; each element of doctrine construed in the tendency of keeping doctrine mobile (*beweglich*) and of making room for other modes of comprehension is heterodox.<sup>11</sup>

The development of doctrine occurs in the dialectical interplay between its orthodox and heterodox elements, these together constituting the integrity of Christian tradition.

Drey appropriated this model of development in his own theological

<sup>11</sup> Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher, *Kurze Darstellung des theologischen Studiums zum Behuf einleitender Vorlesungen*, critical edition by Heinrich Scholz (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1910; rpt., Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1973) 77-78. Hereafter abbreviated *KD*.



encyclopedia, *Kurze Einleitung in das Studium der Theologie* (1819), with only minor terminological changes:

a complete system of [doctrinal] concepts which is thought of not as dead tradition from a time gone by but as the development of a living tradition, necessarily bears within it a twofold element: a *fixed* aspect and a *mobile* aspect.<sup>12</sup>

Doctrinal development occurs as the fixed orthodoxy of the past guides and at the same time is enlivened by the fruitfully heterodox movement of faith in the present moment. For Schleiermacher and Drey, legitimate doctrine possesses at once these traits of stability and relevance. In Schleiermacher's terms, the orthodox element of doctrine without its heterodox counterpart remains ossified and detached from contemporary appreciation.<sup>13</sup> In Drey's terms, the mobile aspect of doctrine without its fixed counterpart is sheer and fanciful innovation devoid of relation to the stable tradition of the past.<sup>14</sup>

In this shared theory of doctrinal development it is incumbent on the theologian to construct the present form that the faith experience has assumed in the community of Christian believers. This present faith is the basis of the heterodox or mobile aspect of doctrine and so is the vital impetus for the development of Christian tradition. To what or whom, though, is the theologian responsible to assure the legitimate doctrinal expression of the present, and ever-transient, moment in the development of Christian tradition through history? On what or whom does the theologian rely to assure the accuracy of the theological construction of belief? Schleiermacher and Drey assumed that the theologian's primary responsibility was to the ecclesiastical community to which his vocational efforts were devoted. In the shared experience of the community the theologian encounters the unfolding truth of revelation—for Schleiermacher, pious feeling; for Drey, the idea of the kingdom of God—against which the validity of individual efforts at theological construction must be measured. But though responsible to the communal experience of faith, the theologian necessarily relies on his own sensibilities and talent in attempting to articulate validly the current experience of the Church. The theologian may make use of a variety of auxiliary methods and tools—indeed, the encyclopedias of Schleiermacher and Drey devote many pages to their analysis and insist upon their mastery—but it is the

<sup>12</sup> Johann Sebastian Drey, *Kurze Einleitung in das Studium der Theologie mit Rücksicht auf den wissenschaftlichen Standpunkt und das katholische System* (Tübingen: Heinrich Laupp, 1819; rpt., ed. Franz Schupp, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1971) 170. Hereafter abbreviated *KE*.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *KD* 78, 79.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *KE* 173.

theologian's insight into and sensitivity towards revelational immediacy and truth within the communal experience of faith that is the source of theological originality.

Thus the Romantic paradigm understands the theologian to be primarily responsible to the developing experience of the Church at large, but ascribes a remarkable degree of power to the talent, discretion, and authority of the individual theologian. Within this Romantic paradigm, unlike the classical paradigm, theological originality is valued; indeed, it is an indispensable quality of theological construction attuned to the "heterodox" or "mobile" aspect of the tradition in its most recent development. Schleiermacher underscores this Romantic insistence on originality when he describes the most insightful and lasting expressions of contemporary faith as "divinatory heterodoxy,"<sup>15</sup> implying in this phrase that such theological discernment is a process of divination and the theologian an ecclesial diviner. Schleiermacher did not attach claims of inspiration or supernaturalism of any sort to this process. By divination Schleiermacher means something akin to artistic sensibility, a talent which cannot be instilled or manufactured where absent, though capable of cultivation and refinement where it exists. The process of divination in this setting rests on the sensitivity of the individual theologian, whose vocational claims are only justified by the personal ability to fathom the present shape of faith and to articulate it accurately and perhaps even elegantly in the language of doctrine. For Schleiermacher, the theologian is in possession of a sort of ecclesial genius on the exercise of which the appreciation of Christian truth is utterly dependent.

Although Drey's regard for the teaching authority of the Church leads him to qualify somewhat the immense power accorded by Schleiermacher to individual theological talent,<sup>16</sup> he largely follows the lead of his Protestant contemporary on the role of personal creativity within the theological task. For Drey, the theologian must discern the historical movement of the "master idea" (*Grundidee*) of Christianity, the kingdom of God, and through historically-grounded speculation raise the common experience of faith in the kingdom to the noetic precision of theological conceptualization. Drey understands the development of doctrine as an ongoing event in which the entire Church participates but in which the theologian, by virtue of special talent and skills, plays an orchestrating

<sup>15</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Ueber seine Glaubenslehre, an Herrn. Dr. Lücke*, in *Friedrich Schleiermacher's Sämmtliche Werke* 1/2 (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1836) 603. In his theological encyclopedia Schleiermacher states that a "dogmatic presentation is more perfect to the extent that it is divinatory as well as assertory" (*KD* 77), i.e., to the extent that it combines heterodox insight in the present with the received orthodox tradition of the past.

<sup>16</sup> See Thiel, "Drey on Doctrinal Development" 305, n. 23.

role.

From the assumption that the truth of tradition develops follows the need for a means of probing meaningful but often subtle modifications in the communal experience of faith—a means the Romantics located not in the classical foundations of theology but in the special vocational quality of theological insight. In many respects the theologian as author is born in this notion of responsibility to evolving doctrinal truth, which it is incumbent on the theologian to articulate constantly so that the life of the tradition will be preserved and even promoted. This last theological task is of particular importance for Schleiermacher and Drey, since they envisioned the theologian as a facilitator of doctrinal truth rather than simply as its articulator. This is expressed most dramatically by Schleiermacher in Proposition 199 of the *Kurze Darstellung*:

In each distinguishable [historical] moment, that in doctrine which originates from the immediately preceding epoch emerges as something most determined by the Church; but that in doctrine through which the following course [of doctrinal development] is established issues from the work of individuals.<sup>17</sup>

As ever making qualifications necessitated by his tradition's magisterial commitments, Drey follows Schleiermacher closely in this regard. Theological judgment is finally validated by the spirit of Christianity found in the entire Church,<sup>18</sup> but the further development of that spirit and the clearer determination of its doctrinal tradition "can only proceed from individuals."<sup>19</sup> In one of the most interesting entries in his theological encyclopedia, Drey defines one form of theological irresponsibility as "hyperorthodoxy," a torpid complacency satisfied with the replication of the doctrinal past and ignorant of the tradition's present mobility.<sup>20</sup> In a related passage illuminated by his idea of hyperorthodoxy, Drey warns the aspiring theologian of the vocational hazard of "inertia" (*Trägheit*), "lagging behind" ([d]as *Zurückbleiben*) the progressive movement of Christian truth through history.<sup>21</sup>

Viewing the reflections of Schleiermacher and Drey against their broader cultural setting suggests that they patterned, consciously or unconsciously, their vocational self-understanding on the current notion of the Romantic hero. In his study of the Romantic hero in 19th-century fiction, Walter L. Reed distinguishes three traits of this idealized indi-

<sup>17</sup> KD 76.

<sup>18</sup> KE 131.

<sup>19</sup> KE 172.

<sup>20</sup> KE 173.

<sup>21</sup> KE 162.

vidual that elucidate the self-understanding of the modern theologian. "The Romantic hero," Reed asserts, "is not a simple being, but one involved in a set of relationships both dialectical and dynamic." First, though neither divine nor immortal, the Romantic hero stands "in a privileged relation with the supernatural . . . or, as is more usual in Romanticism, the natural supernaturalism of the created world." Second, the hero is "related as an actor is to an audience, as an extraordinary person is to the ordinary members of society." Third, in addition to the "gods" and to society, the Romantic hero is related to his own heroic identity. He must "live up to, or decline from, an inherited heroic ideal." Finding his existence in historical formation, the Romantic hero's identity "is never completely fixed but is in a process of evolution or devolution."<sup>22</sup> These traits are readily apparent in the vocational definition of the theologian set out by Schleiermacher and, to a lesser extent, Drey. Within the Romantic paradigm the theologian stands in a privileged relationship to the evolving immediacy of divine revelation in ecclesial experience. His divinatory sensibilities, expressive talent, and heuristic abilities distinguish him from the Church at large before which his extraordinary vocational offices are discharged. Without the effective application of these abilities the historical development of the tradition would languish or wander aimlessly. This last unhappy possibility is the challenge which the theologian as Romantic hero must face constantly and which constitutes his ongoing struggle to remain in pursuit of his vocational ideal. It is this third characteristic, that of self-identity, which helps to focus the tension between theologians and the magisterium in the modern period.

In the Romantic paradigm theological responsibility is not defined with respect to the classical authorities of Scripture and tradition but with respect to the relationship between the theologian and the ecclesiastical community as a whole. It is from this relationship, weighted necessarily and dependently on the side of the theologian's talent, that the truth of Christian tradition emerges. As the theologian is conceived along the lines of the Romantic hero, the theological vocation assumes the shape of an ongoing quest, relatively achieved in the application of individual talent to the task of the divination, construction, and direction of revelational history. Within this paradigm theological authorship, and

<sup>22</sup> Walter L. Reed, *Meditations on the Hero: A Study of the Romantic Hero in Nineteenth Century Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University, 1974) 10. Cf. Victor Brombert, "The Idea of the Hero," in *The Hero in Literature*, ed. Victor Brombert (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett, 1969) 12-13; Frederick Garber, "Self, Society, Value, and the Romantic Hero," *Comparative Literature* 19 (1967) 321-33.

with it the situation of authority in individual genius and creativity, is first entertained as a viable possibility, indeed as an indispensable presupposition for the originality constantly demanded of theological reflection within the context of thoroughly historical consciousness.<sup>23</sup> Ironically, the ever-obtrusive obstacle to the realization of this quest came to be seen as the authoritative foundations of the classical paradigm whose theological vision, if not legitimation, the Romantics sought to guard from Enlightenment criticism. By casting the theologian in the role of a hero, the Romantic paradigm inverted the classical notion of theological responsibility. Schleiermacher's encyclopedia, and to a slightly lesser extent Drey's, conceives the theologian as a defender of the freedom of religious imagination from those who would conform Christian tradition to the definitions of an objective, normative authority resistant to historical, and therefore truthful, development. While Schleiermacher regarded this obstacle as biblical authority and the tradition of Protestant scholasticism, Drey regarded the obstacle to theological authorship as an uncritical and complacent regard on the part of the theologian for the teaching authority of the Church.<sup>24</sup>

#### THE ROMANTIC PARADIGM AND THE MAGISTERIUM: FROM REJECTION TO QUALIFIED ACCEPTANCE

I would like to suggest that the history of tension between the magisterium and theologians in the Roman Catholic tradition of the 19th and 20th centuries might best be understood in terms of the paradigm-shift I have outlined.<sup>25</sup> This explicitly Romantic paradigm of theological re-

<sup>23</sup> For an examination of the role of talent as the power of creativity in theologies of the 19th and early 20th centuries, see Stephen Sykes, *The Identity of Christianity: Theologians and the Essence of Christianity from Schleiermacher to Barth* (London: SPCK, 1984).

<sup>24</sup> Edward Farley refers to this approach to theological validation as the "house of authority" (*Ecclesial Reflection: An Anatomy of Theological Method* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982] 107-27). In another work Farley characterizes the goal of classical theological reflection as the cultivation of an intellectual *habitus*, a sapiential understanding of God and of God's relationship to creation (*Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983] 33-39). Farley argues that this quality of theological reflection, and therefore theological reflection itself, was lost in the post-Enlightenment concern that theological education devote itself to the mastery of ministerial skills. It might be interesting to consider if this modern preoccupation with the cultivation of individual expertise at the expense of a theological method of "thinking with the Church" helps to shed light on our thesis regarding the rise of theological authorship.

<sup>25</sup> Our discussion in the following sections must take note of the history of the conception of the magisterium which has been elucidated by Yves Congar. According to his research, conceptions of magisterial authority in the Church have been fluid, though a watershed in the definition of such authority occurred in the early 19th century. Congar states that in "the Fathers, in the Middle Ages and up until the 1820's and 1830's, *magisterium* means

sponsibility found itself in conflict with its classical predecessor as adopted at Trent, affirmed at Vatican I, and promulgated throughout the Modernist controversy and its aftermath until Vatican II. In spite of recent evidence that the magisterium has recognized the main features of the Romantic paradigm, its suspicion of the paradigm's heroic understanding of the theological vocation has often negatively affected its relationship to the theological community at large.

The period between the Vatican Councils witnessed the magisterium's outright rejection of the Romantic paradigm of theological responsibility. One can find this rejection made directly in a great variety of ecclesiastical documents, but nowhere as clearly and forcefully as in the encyclical of Pius X *Pascendi dominici gregis* (1907).<sup>26</sup> This text caricatures and condemns the Romantic insistence on theological authorship and creativity in the historical theology of the Modernists at the turn of the 20th century. No ecclesiastical document focuses so explicitly on what is considered to be the misappropriation of theological responsibility and attacks so vigorously the modern conception of the historical theologian. There is, of course, reason for this. The Modernists found themselves attempting the same Romantic reconciliation of truth and history ventured by Drey and the Catholic Tübingen School in the first half of the 19th century. Their situation was rendered far more precarious, however, by the conciliar definition of the prerogative of infallibility (1870), the required adoption of a scholastic model of theological education at the insistence of *Aeterni Patris* (1879), and the generally conservative atmosphere of the post-Vatican I Church.

What amounts to the encyclical's outright horror in the face of the Modernist's commitment to a developmental understanding of religious truth is the source of its passionate condemnation. Modernism, *Pascendi*

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simply the situation, the function or the activity of someone who is in the position of *magister*, that is, of authority in a particular area" ("A Brief History of the Forms of the Magisterium," in *Readings in Moral Theology No. 3: The Magisterium and Morality* [hereafter abbreviated *MM*], ed. Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick, S.J. [New York: Paulist, 1982] 318). In another article Congar specifies that "[t]he expression 'the magisterium' in its current usage was introduced by eighteenth-century theology but especially by German canonists at the beginning of the nineteenth century" ("A Semantic History of the Term 'Magisterium,'" in *MM* 306). Cf. Michael D. Place, "Magisterium and Theologians: Historical Perspectives. Trent to the First Vatican Council," *Chicago Studies* 17 (1978) 225-41. We should take note of the fact that the emergence of the modern connotation of *the* magisterium as a discrete and authoritative hierarchical body is directly contemporaneous with the emergence of the Romantic paradigm of theological responsibility. Like the Romantic paradigm, its origins are best understood as a reaction to the crisis of traditional religious authority stirred by the criticism of Enlightenment rationalism.

<sup>26</sup> The translation followed here appears in *The Papal Encyclicals 1903-1939*, ed. Claudia Carlen (Wilmington, N.C.: McGrath, 1981) 71-98; *Acta sanctae sedis* 40, 593-650. References to the encyclical's numbered paragraphs are given in parentheses in the text.

claims, is "the synthesis of all heresies . . . , the sap and substance of them all. . ." (39). Its challenge to the steadfast truths of the scholastic tradition and its repudiation of patristic wisdom have resulted in a pseudo theology destructive of the one, true faith. Modernism's affirmation of an experiential revelation, and its assumption that this subjective truth and its dogmatic expression are in a constant process of evolution, have vitiated the normative safeguards for theological reflection that are in the possession of the ecclesiastical magisterium (8–15, 23, 25) and eroded the stability expected of genuine theological science (45, 46).

We should recall that the dialectical model of doctrinal development first advocated by Schleiermacher and Drey, and later by the Modernists, proved to be the matrix of the modern notion of theological creativity. One is struck by the fact that *Pascendi* specifically rejects this conceptualization of development:

Hence, studying more closely the ideas of the Modernists, evolution is described as resulting from the conflict of two forces, one of them tending towards progress, the other towards conservation. The conserving force in the Church is tradition, and tradition is represented by religious authority, and this both by right and in fact; for by right it is in the very nature of authority to protect tradition, and in fact, for authority, raised as it is above the contingencies of life, feels hardly, or not at all, the spurs of progress. The progressive force, on the contrary, which responds to the inner needs lies in the individual consciences and ferments there—especially in such of them as are in most intimate contact with life (27).

This "pernicious doctrine, which would make of the laity the factor of progress in the Church," is condemnable not only because of its deficient notion of truth and populist understanding of authority but also because of the directive power it accords to theological sensibility. The progress of the tradition, the encyclical chidingly observes, supposedly occurs as the "individual consciences of some of them act on the collective conscience, which brings pressure to bear on the depositaries of authority, until the latter consent to a compromise. . ." (27).

In a manner departing from the customary style of ecclesiastical condemnations, *Pascendi* devotes its zealous criticism to a psychological analysis of the Modernist "personality" considered in its many aberrations—as philosopher, believer, historian, critic, apologist, and reformer—though it is in the caricatured portrait of the Modernist as theologian that we discover the magisterium's explicit rejection of the Romantic paradigm of theological responsibility. In the following lengthy passage *Pascendi* identifies and rejects the heroic understanding of the theological genius, authorized by its own talent and engaged in a quest for the ongoing truth of tradition that it alone is capable of accomplishing:

What is imputed to them as a fault they [Modernist theologians] regard as a sacred duty. Being in intimate contact with consciences, they know better than anyone else, and certainly better than the ecclesiastical authority, what needs exist—nay, they embody them, so to speak, in themselves. Having a voice and a pen, they use both publicly, for this is their duty. Let authority rebuke them as much as it pleases—they have their own conscience on their side and an intimate experience which tells them with certainty that what they deserve is not blame but praise. Then they reflect that, after all, there is no progress without a battle and no battle without its victim, and victims they are willing to be like the prophets and Christ himself. They have not bitterness in their hearts against the authority which uses them roughly, for, after all, it is only doing its duty as authority. Their sole grief is that it remains deaf to their warnings, because delay multiplies the obstacles which impede the progress of souls, but the hour will most surely come when there will be no further chance for tergiversation, for if the laws of evolution may be checked for a while, they cannot be ultimately destroyed (27).

As any authentic quest necessarily entails the overcoming of obstacles, the heroic conception of the theological task does not seek the final demise of the magisterium's authority, and thus "it is part of their [the Modernists'] system that authority is to be stimulated but not dethroned . . ." (27). Such a view of theological authorship masks "an incredible audacity" (27), the reflection of "pride which fills Modernists with that confidence in themselves and leads them to hold themselves up as the rule for all" (40). It is this same pride which leads them to the presumptuous judgment that "*We are not as the rest of men*, and which, to make them really not as other men, leads them to embrace all kinds of the most absurd novelties . . ." (40).

For our purposes, the question of the encyclical's truthful portrayal of the Modernist position is not at issue. As in all caricatures, truth and falsity become strange partners in *Pascendi* and only meet in a context of exaggeration and distortion. What is at issue in the present analysis is the perception of theological responsibility exhibited in the text and how that perception has contributed to relations between the magisterium and theologians in the 20th century. In reaffirming the classical paradigm of theological responsibility, the encyclical fails to recognize the rationalistic assault on traditional theological authority and so sees no need for the Romantic paradigm's situation of authority in the developing experience of the ecclesiastical community, especially in the personal sensitivity and constructive abilities of the community's theologically talented members. In the view of *Pascendi*, the Modernists' celebration of theological talent is indistinguishable from the centuries-old portrayal of the heretic as an apostate who brazenly asserts solitary



speculations in opposition to the universal faith.

The polemical excesses of *Pascendi* are tempered in Pius XII's encyclical *Humani generis* (1950),<sup>27</sup> though it essentially reiterates *Pascendi*'s condemnation of theological creativity. Any doubt that the disdain expressed early in the letter for the evils of "evolution," "immanentism," and "historicism" (5-7) extends to the theological appropriation of these ideas is quickly dispelled by its denial of the modern notion of theological authorship. The encyclical recognizes only the value of "positive" theology, the attempt "to show how a doctrine defined by the Church is contained in the sources of revelation," not in a general way but, quoting Pius IX, "in that sense in which it has been defined by the Church" (21). This assertion of the classical paradigm of theological responsibility denies not only the value of theological creativity but also the legitimate right to exercise such talent within the Church. The deposit of faith, the letter maintains, "our divine Redeemer has given for authentic interpretation not to each of the faithful, not even to theologians, but only to the Teaching Authority of the Church" (21). Of special concern in *Humani generis* is what we have called the heroic dimension of the Romantic paradigm, from the perspective of which the magisterium appears as a stumbling block along the way of the theological quest:

Unfortunately, these advocates of [theological] novelty easily pass from despising scholastic theology to the neglect of, and even contempt for, the Teaching Authority of the Church itself, which gives such authoritative approval to scholastic theology. This Teaching Authority is represented by them as a hindrance to progress and an obstacle in the way of science (18).

These critical judgments show how little change there was in the magisterium's regard for the Romantic paradigm in the 43 years separating the encyclicals of Pius X and Pius XII. Both letters regard the Romantic paradigm as a pretender to legitimate ecclesiastical authority for two reasons. First, it affirms a developmental understanding of truth necessarily complemented by the authority of individual theological insight by virtue of which such truth is constantly grasped and reformulated. Second, it is judged inherently to embellish this individual authority to the point of insisting on a heroic notion of the theologian as a creative genius responsible to God, society, and self and necessarily at odds with institutional authority. Both encyclicals offer the magisterium's defensive position in a perceived conflict for teaching authority in

<sup>27</sup> The translation followed here appears in *The Papal Encyclicals 1939-1958* (cf. n. 26 above) 175-84; *Acta apostolicae sedis* [hereafter abbreviated AAS] 42 (1950) 561-78. References to the encyclical's numbered paragraphs are given in parentheses in the text.

the Church, a conflict disjunctively conceived as a struggle between theological creativity and faithfulness to the traditional teaching offices of the magisterium.

This understanding of the theological vocation as necessarily relinquishing all individual authority to the magisterium was virtually ignored in the documents of the Second Vatican Council. In his opening address to the Council on October 11, 1962, John XXIII set a new tone for relations between the magisterium and theologians that provided at least implicit authorization of the Romantic paradigm of theological responsibility. "Our sacred duty," he stated, "is not only to guard this precious treasure [of the faith], as if we were concerned only with antiquity, but to dedicate ourselves with an earnest will and without fear to that work which our era demands of us. . . ."<sup>28</sup> Theology must not merely seek the terminological updating of traditional teaching but must investigate the significance of faith in changing historical circumstances. For, in the words of the opening address, "the substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another."<sup>29</sup> The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et spes*) repeats this sentiment almost verbatim,<sup>30</sup> offering the clarification that "while adhering to the methods and requirements proper to theology, theologians are invited to seek continually for more suitable ways of communicating doctrine to the men of their times."<sup>31</sup>

These words constitute the first formal acknowledgment on the part of the magisterium of a division of labor, shared with theologians, in the teaching responsibilities of the Church, an acknowledgment which assumes that the theological enterprise is a creative pursuit whose resources lie at least partially in the abilities of its practitioners and thereby sanctions the Romantic notion of theological authorship. *Gaudium et spes* refers to the context necessary for the exercise of this creativity by recognizing the demand for new theological investigations generated by recent developments in science, history, and philosophy, and by calling for "a lawful freedom of inquiry and of thought" among all the faithful, a freedom "to express their minds humbly and courageously about those

<sup>28</sup> *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott, S.J. (New York: America, 1966) 715. Hereafter abbreviated *DVII*.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> "For the deposit of faith or revealed truths are one thing; the manner in which they are formulated without violence to their meaning and significance is another" (*Gaudium et spes*, no. 62 [*DVII* 269–70]).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* (*DVII* 268).

matters in which they enjoy competence."<sup>32</sup> If we take note of the fact that *Gaudium et spes* was prepared in draft by a commission advised by *periti* such as Congar, de Lubac, and Daniélou, exponents of the "nouvelle théologie" of the 1940s against which the proscriptive statements of *Humani generis* were directed,<sup>33</sup> there can be little doubt that these words were written in quite explicit consideration of the issue of theological responsibility.

It should be pointed out that the Council's ground-breaking recognition of theological creativity was related to two conciliar positions that pressed beyond the heritage of Trent and Vatican I: a positive regard for historical development, especially the development of doctrine,<sup>34</sup> and the consideration of the magisterium's infallibility in the broader context of its relationship to the *sensus fidelium* of the entire Church.<sup>35</sup> As we have seen in our examination of its 19th-century origins, the Romantic paradigm understood the theologian to be primarily responsible to the developing experience of the entire ecclesial community. In this experience, the Romantic paradigm assumes, lie the significant and enduring moments in the progress of tradition which theological talent must discern and articulate if the doctrinal present is to be bound meaningfully to the past and promoted into the future. By embracing a more historical view of tradition unfolding in the whole Church now understood as the "People of God" and as invested with the spirit of truth, Vatican II implicitly adopted a Romantic understanding of tradition and ecclesiology that could only be served by an equally Romantic understanding of theological responsibility.

Although the idealistic spirit of theological *aggiornamento* was realistically tempered in the years soon after the Council, analysis of magisterial pronouncements on theological responsibility during this period document the magisterium's gradual acceptance of the Romantic paradigm, qualified, of course, by proper regard for the role of the magisterium and all that this implies for a Catholic understanding of legitimate theological creativity. If only from a historical perspective, it is remarkable that the shift in the Roman Catholic tradition from the classical to

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. (DVII 270).

<sup>33</sup> DVII 269–70, n. 203.

<sup>34</sup> *Dei verbum*, no. 8 (DVII 116).

<sup>35</sup> *Lumen gentium*, no. 12 (DVII 29–30). For a discussion of the theological implications of the notion of *sensus fidei*, see Wolfgang Beinert, "Bedeutung und Begründung des Glaubenssinnes (Sensus fidei) als dogmatischen Erkenntniskriteriums," *Catholica* 25 (1971) 271–303; Luigi Sartori, "What Is the Criterion for the *Sensus fidelium*?" in *Who Has Say in the Church?* (Concilium 148), ed. Jürgen Moltmann and Hans Küng (New York: Seabury, 1981) 56–59.

the Romantic paradigm of theological responsibility occurred within a single pontificate. At the close of the Council, Paul VI conceived theology to be "delegated" to the magisterium in the mold determined for it by *Humani generis*.<sup>36</sup> His rejection of what he finds most reprehensible in the Romantic paradigm is expressed in his address to the International Congress on the Theology of Vatican II, *Libentissimo sane animo* (Oct. 1, 1966):

... there is a growing tendency right now to belittle or deny the relationship of theology to the Church's magisterium. When we try to analyze the mentality and outlook of educated men of our day, we find it has this distinctive cast: they put excessive reliance on their own capabilities; they are of the opinion that authority in any form must be rejected; and they are convinced that a person can manage to acquire all types of knowledge on his own initiative and shape his life accordingly.

Regrettably, this liberty—or rather, license—is sometimes extended, to a greater or lesser degree, to knowledge of the faith and to the field of theology. According to this view, no external or transcendent guiding norm is to be accepted. It is as if the whole realm of truth could be circumscribed within the bounds of human reason, or even created by it; or as if nothing could be established so absolutely and so definitively that it does not allow for further progress or subsequent refutation; or as if a system would be of even more value if it corresponded more fully to subjective instincts and emotions. Hence an authoritative magisterium is rejected, or at best, its function is restricted to vigilance against errors.<sup>37</sup>

In rejecting the heroic dimension of the Romantic paradigm, Paul VI tended as well to reject both the integrity of theological authorship and the exercise of creativity, denying thereby the legitimacy of private theological judgment.

Within a short time Paul VI departed from the automatic identification of theological creativity and heroic disdain for the magisterium made by his preconiliar predecessors, and began to articulate in occasional writings and speeches the heritage of the Council on this issue. This is particularly evident in his address to the inaugural session of the International Theological Commission, the founding of which at the recommendation of the 1967 Synod of Bishops is perhaps the best institutional evidence of the magisterium's recognition of the legitimacy of theological authorship. Rather than simply reaffirming the importance of theological responsibility to the magisterium, the address, *Gratia Domini nostri* (Oct.

<sup>36</sup> See Max Seckler, "Die Theologie als kirchliche Wissenschaft nach Pius XII. und Paul VI.," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 149 (1969) 220 f.

<sup>37</sup> *The Pope Speaks* [hereafter abbreviated *TPS*] 11 (1966) 350; *AAS* 58 (1966) 890.

6, 1969), solidifies the division of labor in teaching authority sanctioned by Vatican II. Speaking to the theologians, Paul VI expresses his intention "to recognize the laws and exigencies that are part and parcel of your studies . . . , to respect the freedom of expression rightfully belonging to theological science, and the need for research inherent to its progress . . . ." <sup>38</sup> Describing the nature of theological responsibility as a synthesis of freedom and fidelity, the address calls on theologians to be "faithful to the object of your studies, the faith, even as you are confident about the possibility of carrying on these studies in accord with their own principles and your personal talents." <sup>39</sup>

This later position of Paul VI has remained the view of the magisterium on its relationship to theological reflection, and thus on the nature of theological responsibility. <sup>40</sup> According to it, theologians enjoy freedom of authorship and therefore possess teaching authority in the Church. This authority, however, does not stand on an equal footing with that of the magisterium. <sup>41</sup> Creativity and insight are affirmed as necessary ingredients of the theological enterprise, though these talents are not understood to be free from normative measure. They flourish meaningfully within the context of faithfulness to the magisterium which the theologian serves, though not at the expense of private judgment, which, when professionally discharged, possesses relative authority.

One finds an even more direct assertion of theological authority in the "Theses on the Relationship between the Ecclesiastical Magisterium and Theology" (1975), produced and approved by the International Theolog-

<sup>38</sup> *TPS* 14 (1969) 202; *AAS* 61 (1969) 715.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* Cf. "Quinque iam anni" (Dec. 8, 1970), *TPS* 15 (1971) 330; *AAS* 63 (1971) 103. See also Juan Alfaro, "Theology and the Magisterium," in *Problems and Perspectives of Fundamental Theology*, ed. René Latourelle and Gerald O'Collins (New York: Paulist, 1982) 354.

<sup>40</sup> Max Seckler does not recognize this shift in the thought of Paul VI on the issue of theological responsibility. Defining the modern conception of theology in terms of its scientific status rather than in terms of the integrity of authorship, Seckler sees the appearance of a "new style" of magisterial regard for postconciliar theology in the addresses of John Paul II to academic audiences at Cologne Cathedral (Nov. 15, 1980; *AAS* 73 [1981] 49-58) and St. Konrad in Alttötting (Nov. 18, 1980; *AAS* 73 [1981] 49-58). See his "Kirchliches Lehramt und theologische Wissenschaft: Geschichtliche Aspekte, Probleme und Lösungselemente," in *Die Theologie und das Lehramt* (Quaestiones disputatae 91), ed. Walter Kern (Freiburg: Herder, 1982) 54.

<sup>41</sup> This specific assumption of the Roman Catholic acceptance of the Romantic paradigm militates, though only formally, against Avery Dulles' attempt to speak of two magisteria in the Church: one hierarchical, the other theological. Speaking in these terms can easily give the impression that the magisteria are equal in ecclesial authority. See his "Two Magisteria: An Interim Reflection," in *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 35 (1980) 155-69.

ical Commission,<sup>42</sup> undoubtedly with the support of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.<sup>43</sup> The theses make reference to the shared teaching authority of the Church, which "should be put into practice in a co-responsible, cooperative, and collegial association of the members of the magisterium and of individual theologians."<sup>44</sup> The text continues by noting that theologians "derive their specifically theological authority from their scientific qualifications. . .," at the same time stating the concern that these abilities "cannot be separated from the proper character of this discipline as the science of faith . . ."<sup>45</sup> Most striking in the theses is the affirmation of the Romantic paradigm's connection between theological talent and development. It is incumbent on the magisterium, the fourth thesis states, to "preserve the personal and indispensable responsibility of individual theologians, without which the science of faith would make no progress."<sup>46</sup> This same sentiment was expressed by John Paul II in an address to an assembly of Spanish theologians at the Pontifical University of Salamanca (Nov. 1, 1982). Calling on theologians to achieve renewal "as creative as it is faithful," the Pope continues by presenting the challenge of theological creativity in a manner that recalls our earlier discussion of Schleiermacher and Drey:

The theologian cannot limit himself to preserving the doctrinal treasure inherited from the past; rather he must seek an understanding and an expression of the faith which make possible its acceptance in the manner of thinking and speaking in our time. The criterion which ought to guide theological reflection is the search for a renewed understanding of the Christian message in the dialectic of continuity in renewal and vice versa.<sup>47</sup>

This brief sketch prompts the observation that the recognition of the Romantic paradigm of theological responsibility in the Roman Catholic tradition is quite recent and of short duration if compared to the millen-

<sup>42</sup> A translation of the text, along with a commentary by its authors, Otto Semmelroth, S. J., and Karl Lehmann, appears in *MM* 151-70.

<sup>43</sup> See Francis A. Sullivan, S. J., *Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church* (New York: Paulist, 1983) 174.

<sup>44</sup> *MM* 154.

<sup>45</sup> *MM* 156.

<sup>46</sup> *MM* 154.

<sup>47</sup> "Como en mi," *TPS* 28 (1983) 119-20; *AAS* 75 (1983) 260-61. The value of theological discernment in this process is noted in a homily delivered a year earlier: "The task of a mature theology is, finally, that of reading the present in light of Tradition, of which the Church is the depository. Tradition is life. In it the riches of the Christian mystery are expressed, gradually manifesting, in contact with the changing events of history, the virtualities implicit in the perennial values of revelation" ("Con queste" [Oct. 23, 1981], *TPS* 27 [1982] 102).

nium its predecessor, the classical paradigm, flourished. It is also important to note that while the main features of the Romantic paradigm have been accepted by the magisterium—especially the affirmation of theological authorship in the context of the tradition of developing doctrine—the magisterium's actions in theological disputes during the past two decades often exhibit suspicion toward the paradigm as a whole. It is to this last point that we turn.

#### THEOLOGICAL TALENT AS AN ECCLESIAL CHARISM

The acceptance of the Romantic paradigm of theological responsibility in the Roman Catholic tradition has taken place both gradually and ambivalently. Shifts in paradigmatic understandings of any sort can only occur gradually as new world views and values slowly achieve greater credibility than those already established. Formal observations, however, cannot account for the hostility and ambivalence, in turn, with which the Romantic paradigm has been regarded by the magisterium since its appearance. The Second Vatican Council was a watershed in the paradigm's tumultuous history in the Catholic tradition. The paradigm's outright rejection in the encyclicals of Pius X and Pius XII was eclipsed by its qualified acceptance as Vatican II emphasized the themes of the historicity of faith and its development in tradition, thereby paving the way for the recognition of the special talents of theological discernment and construction in the life of the Church. While the Council's recognition of the Romantic paradigm has dispelled the magisterium's hostility toward the modern notion of theological responsibility, the magisterium remains ambivalent about the ecclesiastical role of theological creativity.

This ambivalence is stirred by the assumption that theological teaching authority issues from an ecclesial charism, that of the discernment of the movement of the tradition and the theological construction of this development.<sup>48</sup> As Karl Rahner has observed, a characteristic of ecclesiology under what has here been called the classical paradigm is a tendency to institutionalize the charismatic factor in the Church by locating the spiritual vitality of the Church in its hierarchical offices

<sup>48</sup> Max Seckler has suggested a much more elaborate paradigmatic division of theological history based not on the emergence of authorial creativity but on various sorts of relationship between the ecclesiastical teaching office and theological science. The fourth of the seven paradigms Seckler proposes centers on "die Idee eines *charismatischen theologischen Wahrheitszeugnisses*, das quer zu aller Verwaltung und Bezeugung der Wahrheit durch Ämter und Institutionen steht" ("Kirchliches Lehramt" 38). Seckler identifies this approach, however, with the reform movements of the Late Middle Ages and the Reformation and sees this theological charism as popular witness and proclamation rather than as the individual talent of theological discernment.

alone. The ecclesiology of Vatican II required that "over and above these official charismata there must also be non-institutional charismata . . ." which "official functionaries of the Church must not merely tolerate . . . but actually examine . . . and cultivate. . ."<sup>49</sup> From a historical perspective this situation is understandably an awkward one. Claims for the charism, or in secular terms talent, of theological creativity are only as old as the Romantic paradigm; the paradigm's legitimacy has been recognized in the Catholic tradition for only the past 25 years. In a relatively short period of time teaching authority in the Church has been extended beyond the hierarchical offices in which it traditionally resided. This need not be a cause of concern for the magisterium if the proper boundaries of teaching authority in the Church are clearly defined. Though the magisterium and theologians both share teaching authority in the Church, that authority is defined by the different tasks of their ministries. The teaching authority of the magisterium is defined by the responsibility of proclamation, the teaching authority of theologians by the responsibility of research and study.<sup>50</sup> Both are in service to the truth of the gospel and the living witness to it in tradition, and, as such, both share the charism of ecclesial discernment.

Aside from the fact that the Church's encounter with *new* charisms is itself a function of the post-Romantic period and like all new developments a source of consternation to a classically-minded institution, the magisterium remains suspicious, and I believe justifiably so, of the paradigm's original, and occasionally recurring, tendency to conceive of the theological vocation along the Romantic lines of a heroic quest for veridical innovation. The rejection of this particular dimension of the Romantic paradigm has consistently and, I believe, correctly been made from the time of *Pascendi* to the present, though at some cost to productive relations between the magisterium and theologians. As the Romantic paradigm ascribes to individual talent the responsibility of ecclesial discernment, the magisterium fears the distancing of its own ecclesial office from the Church at large, or worse, the conceptualization of its own authority as being out of touch, or even at odds, with the *sensus fidelium*. As the Romantic paradigm ascribes to theological discernment the vocational power of the promotion of the tradition, the magisterium fears its legitimate efforts to judge innovation in light of

<sup>49</sup> Karl Rahner, "Observations on the Factor of the Charismatic in the Church," in *Theological Investigations* 12 (New York: Seabury, 1974) 86-87.

<sup>50</sup> Helmut Pfeiffer, "Theologie und Lehramt: Fundamental-theologische Überlegungen zur Rolle und Funktion der theologischen Forschung und Lehre in der Kirche," *Trierer theologische Zeitschrift* 90 (1981) 213 f.



the time-honored tradition of the past will be portrayed by the theologian as an obstacle to doctrinal development.

These legitimate concerns, unfortunately, have often led the magisterium to identify the charism of theological discernment and construction with the heroic embellishment and, I would say, perversion of this charism. The magisterium remains wary of a charism potentially, but not at all necessarily, in the service of individual aggrandizement. The result of this ambivalence is twofold: a tendency on the part of the magisterium to stifle theological authorship as a valuable resource of ecclesial vitality, and a tendency to regard even legitimate criticism of its pronouncements as narcissistic symptoms of a heroic mentality set on conflict with the Church.

The avoidance of unfruitful relations between the magisterium and theologians, however, cannot simply be the responsibility of the magisterium. Members of the theological community must be aware of what is perhaps an ever-present temptation to extend the theological charism to heroic proportions, and thus to subvert its authority. Although the Romantic paradigm ideally understands the theologian to be responsible to the experience of the Church, the creative and scholarly demands of an academic career easily lead to circumstances in which the theologian understands the object of his or her vocational responsibility to be the more primary community in which he or she flourishes, the university. This situation encourages the theologian to conceive responsibility *primarily* as faithfulness to the critical principles of the academy as embodied in the individual's scholarly work rather than as a faithfulness to the developing tradition of the Church. Such a heroic understanding of the role of theological talent accords undue authority to the individual theologian and has no legitimate role in a tradition which ranks the sacramental power of the Church as a whole higher than the charismatic gifts of its individual members.

Perhaps the present tension between the magisterium and theologians cited as a source of concern in the *Final Report* of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod in Rome has been rendered more intelligible by the paradigmatic analysis of theological responsibility attempted here. Our conclusion—that the heroic understanding of the theological vocation often attending the Romantic paradigm has, both legitimately and illegitimately, been the source of conflict between the magisterium and theologians—suggests a focus for further consideration of relations between these groups. There is, of course, a variety of perspectives from which the subject matter considered here might be understood. Our analysis of shifting paradigms has intended to draw attention to the important issue of theological creativity and its responsible ecclesial limits in the Catholic tradition's

encounter with modernity. Although the heritage of the Romantic paradigm has been a source of ambivalence for the Church, I believe that the value of theological creativity as a modern ecclesial charism far outweighs the possibility of its heroic distortion. Co-operation between the magisterium and the theological community in the service of the gospel and tradition can best be achieved if theologians responsibly exercise their charism of authorship and the magisterium assesses this charism without prejudice.