

KARL ADAM, NATIONAL SOCIALISM, AND CHRISTIAN TRADITION

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[The author sheds light on the progressive theology but conservative politics of Karl Adam (1876–1966), who in 1924 developed a theology of Church as community. However, beginning in 1933, Adam also tried to bridge Catholicism and the National Socialism championed by Adolf Hitler. He reconciled these two positions through a vision of a Germany that would overcome the separation of church and state. He presumed that Catholic tradition could not tolerate a modern concept of human autonomy, which in fact was ultimately embraced by Vatican II.]

THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL brought about a breakthrough for Catholics in understanding the Church's relation to the world.¹ Prior to the council, some ecclesiastical officials and theologians viewed the contemporary emphasis on human autonomy as erroneous and dangerous. Seeing the modern notion of freedom as a form of rebellion against God, they asserted that the Church should stand as the supreme authority over a society and its state.² This reasoning led popes such as Pius IX, Pius X, and Pius XI to oppose both democracy and socialism, claiming that West-

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¹ Hermann J. Pottmeyer, *Towards a Papacy in Communion*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Crossroad, 1998) 110–36; M. Basil Pennington, *Vatican II: We've Only Just Begun* (New York: Crossroad, 1994) 1–14; John McDade, "Catholic Theology in the Post-Conciliar Period," in *Modern Catholicism*, ed. Adrian Hastings (New York: Oxford University, 1991) 422–43; Yves Congar, "Moving Towards a Pilgrim Church," in *Vatican II Revisited*, ed. Alberic Stacpoole (Minneapolis: Winston, 1986) 129–52. I delivered an earlier version of this text at a symposium held in honor of Hermann J. Pottmeyer in Bochum, Germany, on June 1, 1999.

² Paul E. Sigmund, "Catholicism and Liberal Democracy," in *Catholic Social Thought and the New World Order*, ed. Oliver F. Williams and John W. Houck (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1993) 51–72; Walter Kasper, "Autonomy and Theonomy: The Place of Christianity in the Modern World," in *Theology and Church*, trans. Margaret Kohl (New York: Crossroad, 1989) 32–53; J. Bryan Hehir,

ern civilization without the Church's formal guidance was degenerating into chaos. By contrast, Vatican II took a positive view of human independence, including the rights and dignity of all people.³ In *Gaudium et spes* the council endorsed the idea of autonomy, properly understood: "If by the autonomy of earthly affairs is meant the gradual discovery, utilization and ordering of the laws and values of matter and society, then the demand for autonomy is perfectly in order: it is at once the claim of humankind today and the desire of the creator."⁴ This statement expresses Vatican II's dominant understanding of the Church in the world. The council did not accentuate an ecclesiology in which the Church is an institution with legal rights and formal ties to the state; it emphasized rather an ecclesiology in which the Church is first of all a community God uses to offer revelation and grace to the human family on its way to the perfection of God's reign.⁵ In short, Vatican II gave priority to the model of Church as community or *communio* over the model of Church as institution.⁶

The council's adoption of *communio* ecclesiology disclosed the dynamism of the Christian tradition. This emphasis revealed that the handing on of God's revelation is a living process. Tradition is to be understood as more than the repetition of familiar practices and conventional formulations of Christian beliefs. Tradition also entails, through the guidance of

"Church and State: Basic Concepts for Analysis," *Origins* 8 (November 30, 1978) 377–81.

³ David J. O'Brien, "A Century of Catholic Social Teaching," in *One Hundred Years of Catholic Social Thought*, ed. John A. Coleman (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1991) 13–24; John Langan, "Human Rights in Roman Catholicism," in *Readings in Moral Theology No. 5*, ed. Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick (New York: Paulist, 1986) 110–29; Walter Kasper, "The Modern Sense of Freedom and History and the Theological Definition of Human Rights," in *Theology and Church* 54–72.

⁴ *Gaudium et spes* no. 36, in *Vatican Council II*, ed. Austin Flannery (Northport, N.Y.: Costello, 1996) 201. All quotations of the conciliar documents are taken from this edition. See also *Dignitatis humanae* no. 2.

⁵ Michael A. Fahey, "Church," in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, 2 vols. ed. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John Galvin (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 2.3–74; Walter Kasper, "The Church as a Universal Sacrament of Salvation," in *Theology and Church* 111–28.

⁶ Hermann J. Pottmeyer, "A New Phase in the Reception of Vatican II," in *The Reception of Vatican II*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo et al., trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1987) 27–43; Walter Kasper, "The Church as Communion," in *Theology and Church* 148–65; Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, rev. ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1987). On the origins of *communio* ecclesiology, see Dennis M. Doyle, "Möhler, Schleiermacher, and Communion Ecclesiology," *Theological Studies* 57 (1996) 467–80; his "Journet, Congar, and the Roots of Communion Ecclesiology," *TS* 58 (1997) 461–79; and his "Henri de Lubac and the Roots of Communion Ecclesiology," *TS* 60 (1999) 209–27.

the Holy Spirit, relinquishing established forms (without abandoning the truths embodied in them) and adopting new modes that eventually uncover previously hidden or forgotten wisdom.⁷ As *Dei Verbum* stated:

The tradition that comes from the apostles makes progress in the Church, with the help of the holy Spirit. There is a growth in insight into the realities and words that are being passed on. This comes about through the contemplation and study of believers who ponder these things in their hearts (see Luke 2:19 and 51). It comes about from the intimate sense of spiritual realities which they experience. And it comes from the preaching of those who, on succeeding to the office of bishop, have received the sure charism of truth. Thus, as the centuries go by, the Church is always advancing towards the plenitude of divine truth, until eventually the words of God are fulfilled in it.⁸

This statement implicitly recognizes that Christian tradition includes breakthroughs or innovations that may initially seem discontinuous with what preceded them but eventually show themselves to stand in continuity with the past. To put it another way, Christian tradition unfolds in a manner similar to paradigm shifts in the history of science.⁹ As the Church passes on its wisdom, transitions occur in which widely accepted conceptual frameworks become recognized as inadequate. Alternative frameworks emerge, capable of expressing past knowledge, answering unresolved issues of the earlier horizon, and bringing about unforeseen insights. Such a moment occurred when the council affirmed the rightful autonomy of the world.

My article aims to shed light on the significance of Vatican II's dominant ecclesiology by studying the life and thought of Karl Adam (1876–1966), a creative German Catholic theologian in the years between the two world wars, and author of international best-sellers such as *The Spirit of Catholicism* (1924), *Christ Our Brother* (1927), and *The Son of God* (1933).¹⁰ These books together with other writings of Adam contributed to the renewal of Catholic theology and prepared the way for the council.¹¹ Al-

⁷ Avery Dulles, *The Craft of Theology*, rev. ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1995) 87–104; Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Systematic Theology: Tasks and Methods," in *Systematic Theology* 1.1–88, esp. 71–74.

⁸ *Dei Verbum* no. 8.

⁹ John W. O'Malley, *Tradition and Transition* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1989); Dulles, *Models of the Church* 15–33.

¹⁰ Johannes Stelzenberger, "Bibliographie Karl Adam," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 137 (1958) 330–47.

¹¹ Klaus Wittstadt, "Perspektiven einer kirchlichen Erneuerung: Der deutsche Episkopat und die Vorbereitungsphase des II. Vatikanums," in *Vatikanum II und Modernisierung*, ed. Franz-Xaver Kaufmann and Arnold Zingerele (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1996) 85–106, at 87; John E. Thiel, "Karl Adam and the Council," *The Month* 17 (1984) 378–81; T. Mark Schoof, *A Survey of Catholic Theology, 1800–1970*, trans. N. D. Smith (New York: Paulist, 1970) 84–87.

though Adam was perceptive in his theology, he was not insightful in his politics. In 1933, he publicly expressed support for Germany's new chancellor, Adolf Hitler, and tried to build a bridge between Catholicism and National Socialism (Nazism). The contrast between Adam's progressive theology and his conservative politics raises several questions. To what extent, for example, was Adam's political misjudgment the result of his theology? My suggestion is that Adam sought accommodation between the Church and Hitler's government because he held that the Church should be the official cornerstone of society and its state; he judged that the Catholic Church could maintain and even enhance its influence in Germany during the Third Reich.¹² In making this judgment, he assumed that, in light of Pius IX's *Syllabus of Errors* (1864), the idea of the separation between church and the state would never become acceptable in Catholic teaching. Insofar as Karl Adam is representative of other Catholics, outside of Germany as well as within it, who endorsed Hitler, an analysis of his thinking may illumine the merit of the council's progress in ecclesiology.

Postconciliar Catholics have become increasingly aware of the challenges they face in seeking to implement Vatican II's vision of the Church in the world.¹³ Pastors, lay ministers, and theologians are generally not optimistic about the Church's ability to make its voice heard and respected by society and the state. The president of the German Bishops' Conference, Bishop Karl Lehmann, has noted that since Christians are experiencing only limited success in their efforts to proclaim the gospel and to bring about a more humane world, they are asking anew the question posed to the prophet Isaiah, "'Watchman, what of the night?'" (Isaiah 21:11).¹⁴ In other words, what is the meaning of these seemingly dark days? A study of the theological basis for Karl Adam's political misjudgment may

¹² Vincent Berning, "Modernismus und Reformkatholizismus in ihrer prospektiven Tendenz," in *Die Zukunft der Glaubensunterweisung*, ed. Franz Pöggeler (Freiburg: Seelsorge, 1971) 9–32. Berning has observed that Karl Adam, Karl Eschweiler, Joseph Lortz, Max Pribilla, and Michael Schmaus "held temporary illusions about National Socialism in which they envisioned it not as the total state but as the contemporary reincarnation of the medieval German empire" (22). See also John Coleman, "Neither Liberal nor Socialist," in *One Hundred Years of Catholic Social Thought* 25–42; Karl-Egon Lönne, "The Origins of Christian Democratic Parties in Germany, Italy and France after 1943–45," in *The Church and Christian Democracy*, ed. Gregory Baum and John Coleman (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1987) 3–13; Ernst Wolfgang Böckenförde, "German Catholicism in 1933," *Cross Currents* 11 (1961) 283–303.

¹³ Giuseppe Alberigo, "The Christian Situation after Vatican II," in *The Reception of Vatican II* 1–26.

¹⁴ Karl Lehmann, "Wächter, wie lange noch dauert die Nacht" (Bonn: Secretariat of the German Bishops Conference, September 22, 1997). While describing the challenges that Christians face today, Lehmann also conveyed a sense of hope:

help to reaffirm Vatican II's desire for the Church to relate to the secular, pluralistic world. Such a study may strengthen the Church's witness to the coming of God's reign, especially by advocating the rights and the dignity of all human beings, a theme close to the heart of Pope John Paul II. I will return to this topic after reviewing Adam's life, highlighting his theological ideas, analyzing his political statements from 1933 to 1945, and providing an overall assessment of his theology.¹⁵

A PROPONENT OF GERMAN CATHOLICISM

In 1910 Karl Adam took a bold step by publishing a critical response to Pope Pius X's *motu proprio* entitled *Sacrorum antistitum*, a document that required priests to take an oath against Modernism. Although only 34 at the time, Adam spoke out because he judged that the Vatican's policy threatened the intellectual integrity of German Catholicism. He argued that this oath would function in Germany as "the official death notice regarding all Catholic scholarship."¹⁶ In expressing this view, the young priest stood in the tradition of his professors Albert Ehrhart and Joseph Schnitzer who earlier had written articles opposing Pius X's encyclical *Pascendi dominici gregis* (1907) with its follow-up decree *Lamentabili sane exitu*. Shortly after Adam's essay was published, he learned that the Holy Office was investigating his writings. He worried that ecclesiastical authorities might prevent him from teaching theology.¹⁷ Eventually he learned that the Holy Office had halted proceedings against him because of interventions on his behalf by Bavaria's Crown Prince Rupprecht. The Vatican subsequently exempted priests who were professors at German universities from the oath against Modernism. This incident manifests Adam's life-long commitment and advocacy for the unity of Catholicism and German life.

Karl Adam's world was one that united Catholicism and Bavarian culture. Born near Regensburg in the village of Pursruck (Oberpfalz) on October 22, 1876, he later attended a gymnasium in Amberg. He then

"Perhaps we must initially undergo the darkness of the night. But because of Good Friday, there is no night which the morning light cannot penetrate" (21).

¹⁵ Recent German literature on Karl Adam includes Otto Weiss, *Der Modernismus in Deutschland* (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1995) esp. 492–502; Thomas Ruster, *Die verlorene Nützlichkeit der Religion* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1994) esp. 197–207; Hans Kreidler, *Eine Theologie des Lebens* (Mainz: Matthias Grünewald, 1988); Walter Kasper, "Karl Adam," *TQ* 156 (1976) 251–58. I am grateful to Bishop Walter Kasper and Auxiliary Bishop Hans Kreidler for their helpful conversations with me while I was in the process of writing *Karl Adam* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1993).

¹⁶ Karl Adam, "Der Antimodernisteneid und die theologische Fakultäten," *Katholische Kirchenzeitung für Deutschland* 1 (1910) 83–85, at 84.

¹⁷ Friedrich Heiler, "Zum Tod von Karl Adam," *TQ* 146 (1966) 257–60.

entered the diocesan seminary at Regensburg and was ordained to the priesthood in 1900. Soon thereafter he studied historical and systematic theology at the University of Munich where he was awarded the doctorate in 1904 and obtained the Habilitation in 1908. From 1908 to 1917, Adam taught at Munich's Wilhelm Gymnasium, tutored the sons of Crown Prince Rupprecht of the Wittelsbach royal family, and lectured at the Bavarian Cadet Corps. In his later years, he delighted in recounting humorous anecdotes from his years in Munich.

Throughout his scholarly life, Adam dedicated himself to the renewal of Catholic theology, pursuing this goal in two stages.¹⁸ During the first phase of his academic career (1900–1918), he concentrated on historical theology. At the University of Munich he specialized in the Latin Fathers, publishing *Der Kirchenbegriff Tertullians* (1907) and *Die Eucharistielehre des heiligen Augustin* (1908). As a Privatdozent he wrote *Das sogenannte Busseedikt des Papstes Kalixtus* (1917) and *Die kirchliche Sündervergebung nach dem heiligen Augustin* (1917). In 1917 he accepted an invitation to become a professor at the University of Strasbourg. In the following year, however, he was forced to leave Strasbourg because the Treaty of Versailles excluded German citizens from Alsace. He returned to Regensburg to teach at its seminary.

During the second phase of his academic career (1919–1954), Adam concentrated on systematic theology. In 1919 he became professor of dogmatic theology at the University of Tübingen after Wilhelm Koch was forced to resign his position because of his alleged Modernism.¹⁹ Adam labored to recast church teachings in contemporary categories. In his essay "Glaube und Glaubenswissenschaft im Katholizismus," he used Max Scheler's phenomenological method to describe the experience of Christian belief and God as its objective referent.²⁰ Turning to ecclesiology, he built on the work of the Catholic Tübingen theologians such as Johann Sebastian Drey, Johann Adam Möhler, and Johann Evangelist Kuhn. He drew upon two works of Möhler, *Die Einheit in der Kirche* (1825) and *Symbolik* (1832), in describing in *The Spirit of Catholicism* that the Church is primarily a community.²¹ Adam deliberately presented an alternative to Vat-

¹⁸ Weiss, *Der Modernismus in Deutschland*; Anton Rauscher, ed., *Religiös-kulturelle Bewegungen im deutschen Katholizismus seit 1800* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1986); Thomas Looze, *Liberal Catholicism, Reform Catholicism, Modernism* (Mainz: Matthias Grünewald, 1979).

¹⁹ Max Seckler, *Theologie vor Gericht* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1972).

²⁰ Karl Adam, "Glaube und Glaubenswissenschaft im Katholizismus," *TQ* 101 (1920) 131–55; reprinted as "Theologischer Glaube und Theologie," in his *Glaube und Glaubenswissenschaft im Katholizismus* (Rottenburg: Bader'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1923) 2–43.

²¹ Karl Adam, *The Spirit of Catholicism*, trans. Dom Justin McCann (New York: Crossroad, 1997) 31.

ican I's understanding of the Church as a juridical institution; he also offered an alternative to the view of religious liberals (e.g. Friedrich Heiler) for whom Catholicism was "a complex of opposites" held together chiefly by papal authority. Adam's ecclesiology led him to reflect upon the Church's divine head, Jesus Christ. Since he found unsatisfactory both the abstract, deductive Christology of neo-Scholasticism and also the "liberal quest" for the historical Jesus advocated by Adolf von Harnack, he developed a kerygmatic Christology of the sort envisioned by Johann Evangelist Kuhn in *Das Leben Jesu* (1838).²² In *Christ Our Brother* and *The Son of God*, Adam stressed gospel accounts of Jesus' life and teachings in order to communicate that Jesus Christ was fully human, indeed "our brother." This emphasis as well as Adam's writing in German instead of the Latin of the neo-Scholastic manuals troubled the Vatican. In response to directives from the Holy Office, Adam revised his books during the early 1930s, thereby preventing their being included in the *Index librorum prohibitorum*.

Adam's fresh synthesis of Catholicism and German life can be seen in two further ways. First, he publicly supported Germany's new chancellor, Adolf Hitler, after the Vatican had concluded a concordat with his government. He pointed out that Hitler seemingly espoused certain values consonant with Catholicism. Second, Adam also became one of the first Catholic theologians in Germany to contribute to ecumenism after World War II. Speaking in churches filled to capacity, he explained that Protestants and Catholics agree on the same basic Christian truths. These talks culminated in *One and Holy* (1948). One of the reasons why Adam promoted Christian unity was that he held that Christian belief must provide the basis of German society and government.

Adam became a professor emeritus at the University of Tübingen in 1949 and devoted himself to fashioning his christological lectures of three decades into *The Christ of Faith* (1954). He also published a sharp critique of Rudolf Bultmann's demythologizing of the New Testament.²³ During his last years, he was publicly praised for his creative contributions to theology by scholars such as Heinrich Fries, Bernhard Häring, Friedrich Heiler, Karl Rahner, and Michael Schmaus.²⁴ Adam's writings also received positive

²² Karl Adam's theological method influenced Walter Kasper's Christology; see Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, trans. V. Green (New York: Paulist, 1976) 9.

²³ Karl Adam, "Das Problem der Entmythologisierung und die Auferstehung des Christus," *TQ* 132 (1952) 385-410.

²⁴ Heinrich Fries, *Wegbereiter und Wege* (Olten-Freiburg: Walter, 1968) 25-37; Bernhard Häring, "In Memory of Karl Adam," *Ave Maria* 103 (June 11, 1966) 6; Friedrich Heiler, "Zum Tod von Karl Adam"; and Karl Rahner, "Theologie in der Welt," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 246 (October 20, 1956) 10; Michael Schmaus, review of *Der Christus des Glaubens*, in *Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift* 6 (1955) 67.

reviews from Thomas Merton, Flannery O'Connor, George Orwell, Alec R. Vidler and Evelyn Underhill.²⁵ In 1959 Adam was nominated to serve on a preparatory commission for Vatican II, but he declined because of failing health. He died in Tübingen on April 1, 1966. The Bishop of Rotenburg-Stuttgart, Dr. Carl Josef Leiprecht, presided at his funeral mass, and the auxiliary bishop, Dr. Wilhelm Sedlmeier, gave the homily. Among the hundreds of people who filled Tübingen's St. Johann Church were Hugo Lang, former abbot of Munich's St. Boniface Abbey, and Damascus Zähringer, Benedictine abbot of Beuron.²⁶

THE MEDIATION OF JESUS CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

As Hans Kreidler has shown, Karl Adam developed "a theology of life" that highlighted God's grace at work within human experience.²⁷ Uniting the various aspects of this thought was the conviction that Jesus Christ is the one mediator between God and creation, and that the Church as the body of Christ shares in this mediation. Adam summed up his theology in these words: "I find God through Jesus Christ in his Church."²⁸ This statement touches on four key ideas in Adam's theology: Jesus Christ, the Church, Christian faith, and Western history.²⁹

First, Adam stressed that Jesus Christ is the one mediator between God and creation, the New Adam who has reconstituted the entire human family in its relationship with God (Romans 5). Christ is the one mediator because he is God's word made flesh, the one person in history who has fully united the divine word and human nature. Therefore, the central event in the drama of creation and history is the Incarnation. Although Adam did not offer a conceptually precise account of the hypostatic union, he did emphasize an often neglected dimension of the Incarnation, the salvific importance of the humanity of Jesus Christ.³⁰ He perceived that neo-Scholasticism had lost sight of the human figure of Jesus and, as a

²⁵ Thomas Merton, *The Road to Joy*, ed. Robert Daggy (New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1989) 229; Flannery O'Connor, *The Presence of Grace*, ed. Leo J. Zuber (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia, 1983) 51–52, 54–55; Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, eds., *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968) 1.79–80; Alec R. Vidler, *The Modernist Movement in the Roman Catholic Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1934) 229–33; Evelyn Underhill, "The Swiss Project," *The Spectator* 147 (August 1, 1931) 163.

²⁶ *Schwäbisches Tagblatt* (April 7, 1966).

²⁷ Kreidler, *Eine Theologie des Lebens* 34–41; Kasper, "Karl Adam" 254–56.

²⁸ Adam, *The Spirit of Catholicism* 30. See also Karl Adam, *Christ Our Brother*, trans. Dom Justin McCann (New York: Macmillan, 1931) 199.

²⁹ Kreidler, *Eine Theologie des Lebens* 27.

³⁰ Aloys Grillmeier, "Zum Christusbild der heutigen katholischen Theologie," in

result, overlooked God's descent into human reality "The Christian gospel announces primarily not an ascent of humanity to the heights of the divine in a transfiguration, an apotheosis, a deification of human nature, but a descent of the Godhead, of the divine word, to the state of bondage of the purely human"³¹ Vivid, neo-Romantic depictions of Jesus' activities often mark Adam's books In *The Son of God* he writes "Again and again Mark notes the fact that they had not time to eat (cf Mark 3 20, 6 31) Till late in the evening the sick kept coming and going (Mark 3 8) And with the sick there came the malevolent enemies, the Pharisees and Sadducees"³² By means of biblically inspired statements such as this, Adam conveyed the insight that Jesus Christ, the one mediator between God and creation, was human and "our brother" Implicit here is the conviction that Christ meets men and women in their humanity, in their deep-seated yearnings, daily work, interpersonal relationships, history, and culture

Second, in continuity with his Christology, Adam produced an incarnational ecclesiology³³ Pope Leo XIII declared in his encyclical *Immortale Dei* (1885) that the Church is a *societas perfecta*, a self-sufficient organization with its own laws and offices However, following Mohler's *Symbolik*, Adam retrieved Paul's metaphor of the Church as the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 10 17–18, 12 27, Romans 12 5) and presented the Church as the community of Jesus Christ This community's *raison d'être* is to make the living Christ present in the world so that all people might become united with the one true head of the human family To express this another way, one influenced by Mohler, Adam stated that the Church is the ongoing Incarnation of Christ in history "the divine is incarnated in the community, and precisely and only in so far as it is a community"³⁴ He also wrote "The Incarnation is for Christians the foundation and planting of that new communion which we call the Church The body of Christ and the reign of God came into being as objective reality at the moment when the word was made flesh"³⁵ In sum, the Church is God's community in time and space, called to unite all people in Christ Since the Church is the body of Christ, it shares in the mediation that its head, Jesus Christ, has accomplished between God and creation "The Church as a whole, as a community, as an organic unity is a divine creation In the last resort it is nothing else than the

Fragen der Theologie heute, ed J Feiner, J Trutsch, F Bockle (Einsiedeln Johannes, 1957) 265–99, at 275

³¹ Karl Adam, *The Son of God*, trans Philip Hereford (Garden City Doubleday, 1964) 9

³² *Ibid* 77

³³ Ruster, *Die verlorene Nutzlichkeit der Religion* 197–207, 395–97

³⁴ Adam, *The Spirit of Catholicism* 31

³⁵ *Ibid* 36

unity of fallen humanity accomplished by the sacred humanity of Jesus, the cosmos of people, mankind as a whole, the many as one."³⁶

Third, according to Adam, Christian faith is an act of personal assent undertaken within the believing community, within the "we" of the Church. Whereas Scholastic thought highlighted the intellectual or notional aspect of faith, Adam accentuated faith's self-involving, communal character. Christian belief is said to engage one's heart as well as one's mind, and it does so within the community of the faithful. It springs out of an encounter with the living Christ, an experience that occurs within the Church. Against the Enlightenment's emphasis on the autonomous self, Adam highlighted the "organic" or interconnected essence of personal existence. Although the act of faith requires an individual decision, it happens only within the body of Christ. In his essay "Glauben und Glaubenswissenschaft im Katholizismus," Adam wrote: "The early Christian community of faith was the result of an elementary experience of the Spirit. And the community itself expressed the early Christian community of faith. It was the visible embodiment of the effect of the Spirit, the body, in which the Spirit revealed itself. . . . Not the 'I,' but the 'we' is the bearer of the Spirit."³⁷ He reiterated this idea in *The Spirit of Catholicism*: "The Catholic does not come to Christ mediately and by literary channels, as by scriptural records, but immediately through personal contact with Christ living in his community."³⁸ Moreover, in making the act of faith, believers enter into a tradition that is not static but dynamic. While the content of God's revelation remains the same in every age, it has changed its form over the centuries as the Church has come to fresh consciousness of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. Thus, when people believe in Jesus Christ, they participate in a community that possesses a living tradition.

Fourth, although Adam had a positive outlook on the incarnational process of grace in human life, he took a pessimistic view of the recent history of Western civilization. Influenced by Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* (1918, 1922), Adam held that the West was experiencing a spiritual and cultural decline that began in the late Middle Ages, took root during the Reformation, and grew into its second stage with the Enlightenment.³⁹ In the 20th century, this degeneration was manifest in the rise of atheism, individualism, liberalism, moral relativism, and secularism—trends that erode the interpersonal life nurtured by the Church. As the result of original sin, people have turned against Christ as they have ques-

³⁶ Ibid. 32.

³⁷ Adam, "Glauben und Glaubenswissenschaft im Katholizismus," in the revised text, "Theologischer Glaube und Theologie" 32.

³⁸ Adam, *The Spirit of Catholicism* 49.

³⁹ Karl Adam, *Christ and the Western Mind*, trans. E. Bullough (New York: Macmillan, 1932) 32.

tioned the Church's longstanding roles in society. Having distanced itself from Catholicism, the West has moved toward a total breakdown and hence urgently faces a choice. According to *The Spirit of Catholicism*, "Just as the Church by the compact unity and strength of its Christian faith gave the Middle Ages their inward unity and their strength of soul, . . . so it alone is able in our modern day to introduce again amid the conflicting currents, the solvent forces and growing exhaustion of the West, a single lofty purpose, a constructive and effective religious power, a positive moral energy and a vitalizing enthusiasm."⁴⁰ Guided by this perception, Adam stated in 1924 that he endorsed Pius X's condemnation of Modernism in *Pascendi dominici gregis*, even though he had argued in 1910 that the Vatican should exempt German theologians from the oath against Modernism.⁴¹ He summed up his view of the Church's potential to reverse the perceived decline of the West when in 1928 he declared: "In the midst of our western civilization there is still an authority, older than all the states, firmer than all the thrones, more powerful than all dictatorships, more sacred than the law of nations. But this authority in our midst lives by the eternal will of Christ, spirit of his spirit, power of his power. It will forever proclaim this authority of Christ, forever be ready as our guide, in order to help us find our way out of chaos. And on this rock rests the western Church."⁴²

Karl Adam gained international recognition with his clear, engaging articulation of these four ideas: Jesus Christ as our brother, the Church as the ongoing Incarnation of Christ, faith as a person's self-involving act within the Church, and the West's unraveling because of the modern idea of freedom. At the same time, Adam's vision of a new amalgamation of Catholicism and "the German spirit" prompted him to look for common ground with Hitler's Nazism. However, his understanding of Christ as the one mediator between God and creation and his notion of faith as an act within the Church did not direct him into conversations with non-Christians, in particular, with Jews. Also, his incarnational ecclesiology along with his pessimistic view of modernity fueled his idealist, even triumphalistic vision of the Church's formal role in German society. Finally, his nationalism responded to the claimed rebirth of a form of the Holy Roman Empire, a *Reich* which brought together throne and altar in anticipation of God's coming reign, God's *Reich*. In sum, some of the ideas and words that guided Adam's creativity in theology also contributed to his political conservatism.

⁴⁰ Adam, *The Spirit of Catholicism* 95.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 156.

⁴² Adam, *Christ and the Western Mind* 38.

THE DREAM OF A NEW GERMANY

Karl Adam published an essay in support of Adolf Hitler in late July 1933.⁴³ In doing so, he joined a few other Catholic theologians such as Karl Eschweiler, Joseph Lortz, and Michael Schmaus in giving a theological rationale for the concordat that the Vatican had worked out with the German government, a concordat which Pius XI had unsuccessfully sought with the Weimar Republic.⁴⁴ Along with other advocates of an accommodation between Catholicism and Nazism, Adam envisioned the Church influencing the new regime in order to bring about a form of governance in Germany that would differ from both the socialism of the Soviet Union and also the democracies of the Weimar Republic, Great Britain, and the U.S.A.⁴⁵ What kind of polity did he have in mind? A society similar to Bavaria under the Wittelsbachs, when the Catholic Church and the royal family worked for a synthesis of faith and culture? Or a polity reminiscent of the Holy Roman Empire?⁴⁶ To be sure, he wanted a communitarian or corporatist society in which the Catholic Church would play a formal role in relation to the German state, and for this reason he was attracted to Hitler's rhetoric concerning the common good.⁴⁷ But Adam did not join the Nazi Party.⁴⁸ Nor did he foresee that Hitler would attain tyrannical power within the year, that he would persecute the Church, that he would rule for 12 years, and that he would exterminate Jews, "political dissidents," and other "enemies" of the state. Moreover, residing in idyllic

⁴³ My analysis builds on Hans Kreidler, "Karl Adam und der Nationalsozialismus," in *Rottenburger Jahrbuch für Kirchengeschichte*, vol. 2, ed. History Association of the Diocese of Rottenburg-Stuttgart (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke, 1983) 129–40.

⁴⁴ Heinz Hürten, *Deutsche Katholiken* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1992) 214–30; Klaus Scholder, *Die Kirchen und das Dritte Reich 1: Vorgeschichte und Zeit der Illusionen 1918–1934* (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1986) 525–59.

⁴⁵ Paul Misner implicitly described Karl Adam's political stance in "Christian Democratic Social Policy: Precedents for Third-Way Thinking," a talk given at the Conference on Christian Democracy in Europe and Latin America at the University of Notre Dame on April 10, 1999. See also Martin Conway, *Catholic Politics in Europe 1918–1945* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Tom Buchanan and Martin Conway, ed., *Political Catholicism in Europe, 1918–1965* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996).

⁴⁶ Mary Fulbrook, *A Concise History of Germany*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1994) 95–104.

⁴⁷ On the notion of a corporatist society, see John Coleman, "Neither Liberal nor Socialist"; Alois Baumgartner, *Sehnsucht nach Gemeinschaft* (Munich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1977).

⁴⁸ Adam expressed his negative view of Nazism in his refusal to say "Heil Hitler"; see Bernhard Hannsler, *Bischof Johannes Baptista Sproll* (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1984) 94–95.

Tübingen, he was distanced from the horrors of Hitler's dictatorship.⁴⁹ A review of Adam's political statements reveals his naïveté as well as concrete aspects of his dream for Germany.

At the end of July 1933, Adam argued in an article entitled "Deutsches Volkstum und katholisches Christentum" that a working relationship between the Catholic Church and Hitler's government would realize the Thomist axiom that "grace presupposes nature."⁵⁰ Hitler promised to uphold such traditional values as the permanence of marriage, the integrity of the family, and the "Volk" tradition. He was also intent upon rebuilding the nation's economic, political, and social structures. Given these goals, the new chancellor would provide the natural basis on which the Church could undertake its mission of celebrating the sacraments, educating Catholics in their faith, and strengthening society's ethical norms. In the Catholic view, Adam argued, the Church must work with the state to ensure the moral and spiritual development of all citizens. Adam wrote: "The Church does not intentionally disregard something in the state's natural work of education in order to pursue its own singular ecclesial ideals among the faithful. It is much more the case that there are the natural values in education ensured by the influence of the government, which the Church affirms in their full content and directs toward their supernatural goals."⁵¹ As envisioned by Adam, the Nazi government and the Church would work together, the former overseeing the natural realm and the latter caring for the supernatural order.

Where would Jews stand in this collaboration of the state and the Church? Adam reasoned that since the state had the duty to preserve the German culture, a culture that was the fruit of German "blood," it would be understandable that the government would limit the legal rights of Jews. As a result of the large influx of Jews into Germany from Eastern Europe after World War I, "the specifically Jewish spirit penetrated not only into our businesses but also into our newspapers and literature, into scholarship and the arts, indeed into our entire public life and loosened to a great extent our inherited national and religious ties."⁵² Implicitly referring to the Nazi boycott of Jewish businesses on April 1 and the exclusion of Jews from the civil service on April 7, Adam noted that German self-preservation called for restricting Jews' activities and influence within the Reich. At the same time, Germany's Christians should implement the new laws with "justice and love." "As an international community that includes

⁴⁹ Walter Jens, *Eine deutsche Universität: 500 Jahre Tübinger Gelehrtenrepublik* (Munich: Kindler, 1977) 327.

⁵⁰ Karl Adam, "Deutsches Volkstum und katholisches Christentum," *TQ* 114 (1933) 40–63, at 48.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 55.

⁵² *Ibid.* 62.

all nationalities and ethnic groups, the Catholic Church has an obligation no less to the *natura individua* of the Jewish people than to the individuality of the other peoples.⁵³ Adam gave no examples of how German Catholics and Protestants should treat their Jewish neighbors, nor did he point out specific violations of "justice and love." This dimension was secondary to him. The primary message was clear: Germany should not be a secular, pluralistic society, but a nation primarily for Christians of German heritage.

Soon after publishing this essay, Adam became alarmed by Nazi leaders' support of the association known as the German Faith Movement that was dedicated to the recovery of pagan beliefs and practices. He was troubled by the efforts of Alfred Rosenberg, General Erich Ludendorff, Count Ernst Reventlow, and Professor Jakob Wilhelm Hauer of Tübingen to have the Third Reich give formal recognition to the worship of Wotan and the other gods of Teutonic mythology.⁵⁴ Responding to Rosenberg's propaganda, Adam used the occasion of a Catholic youth assembly in Stuttgart on January 21, 1934 to criticize the German Faith Movement in his address "Vom gottmenschlichen Erlöser."⁵⁵ Speaking after Bishop Johannes Sproll,⁵⁶ Adam argued that if Germans wanted their nation to grow strong, they must maintain Christian belief as their national religion. In Adam's judgment, Germans would resolve their economic, political, and social difficulties only as they renewed their Christian faith. The proponents of neopaganism erred in asserting that Germany must recover its Aryan rituals, symbols, and myths. Such a claim denied Christianity's positive influence upon the German people since St. Boniface evangelized the Germanic tribes in the 800s. Similar to a noble oak tree, Germany would thrive again as a mighty nation when its roots drew on the spirit of Jesus Christ. Upholding Christianity's origins in Judaism, Adam asserted that the true God

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Scholder, *Die Kirche und das Dritte Reich* 1.100–5.

⁵⁵ Karl Adam, "Vom gottmenschlichen Erlöser," in *Glaubenstage und Glaubenswallfahrten*, ed. Central Committee of German Catholics (Paderborn: Bonfacius, 1934) 11–24. For the unabridged text, see K. Adam, "Christus und das deutsche Volk," *Deutsches Volksblatt* (Stuttgart) 18 (January 23, 1934) 5, and "Die Erlösungstat Jesu Christi," *Deutsches Volksblatt* 19 (January 24, 1934) 5–6. Adam's address is also available in BArch Berlin R53 198, 90–91. I am indebted to Kevin Spicer, C.S.C., for locating this text and making it available to me. An abridged, English translation appeared as K. Adam, "In the Jubilee Year," *Commonweal* 19 (August 10, 1934) 361–63.

⁵⁶ In 1938, Bishop Sproll would be forced to flee the Diocese of Rottenburg–Stuttgart after he refused to vote in the referendum on Germany's annexation of Austria; see Hannsler, *Bischof Johannes Baptista Sproll*; Paul Kopf, "Johannes Baptista Sproll (1870–1949)," in *Zeitgeschichte in Lebensbildern*, vol. 5, ed. Jürgen Aretz et al. (Mainz: Matthias Grünewald, 1982) 104–117.

is known only in Jesus Christ, who was both son of David and son of God. In conclusion he criticized the new paganism:

If the German Faith Movement basically denies the divine revelation revealed in Jesus Christ in its particularity and uniqueness, it does so only because its god is a god enslaved to this world, a truncated god, not that living, personal, infinite God who created heaven and earth. . . . We would all like to search for and to find again that one and singular, who—since he is the cornerstone for the whole world—determines the world's destiny and thus will remain for us Germans the only ground of life, from which blossoms the true German life.⁵⁷

Immediately after this address, the Nazi Party and the government took steps to silence Karl Adam.⁵⁸ The Party denounced him in its newspaper the *N. S. Kurier*, accusing him of provoking political unrest. Nazi Brown Shirts came to Adam's lecture at the University of Tübingen on January 23 and jeered as Adam spoke. As a consequence, he ended his lecture after a few minutes. Later that day and into the night, Brown Shirts walked through Adam's neighborhood and shot their pistols at his house. Further, the State of Württemberg revoked his license to teach, restoring it on January 26 on the condition that he not make any further public statements about the Nazi Party and the state.

Adam kept his promise for the next six years. He indirectly touched on politics when on February 5, 1935, he gave a lecture, "Jesus Christus und der Geist unserer Zeit," to Tübingen's St. Boniface Society. Aware that the Nazis stressed heroism inspired by Teutonic mythology, Adam declared that true heroism is faithful to the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.⁵⁹ His words seemingly went unnoticed by Nazi officials; in any case, he kept a low profile until after German troops invaded Poland. Believing that the Treaty of Versailles was unjust, Adam probably saw the Wehrmacht's action as the nation's effort to correct the wrongs it suffered at the end of the First World War.⁶⁰ He conveyed this view in a lecture, "Die geistige Lage des deutschen Katholizismus," which he delivered before more than a thousand Catholics in Aachen on December 10, 1939.⁶¹ His theme was that German Catholics should take steps to bring about a closer integration

⁵⁷ Adam, "Vom gottmenschlichen Erlöser" 24.

⁵⁸ Kreidler, "Karl Adam und Nationalsozialismus" 132–36; Klaus Scholder, *Die Kirche und das Dritte Reich 2: Das Jahr der Ernüchterung: 1934, Barmen und Rom* (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1988) 140–42.

⁵⁹ Karl Adam, "Jesus Christ and the Spirit of the Age," in *Germany's New Religion*, ed. Wilhelm Hauer et al., trans. T. S. K. Scott-Craig and R. E. Davies (New York: Abingdon, 1937) 117–68.

⁶⁰ In 1933 Adam spoke of "the poison of Versailles"; see his "Deutsches Volkstum und katholisches Christentum" 41.

⁶¹ Karl Adam, "Die geistige Lage des deutschen Katholizismus" (December 10, 1939), in Bundesarchiv NS 43 20, 230–41 (again I am grateful to Kevin Spicer for

of the German *Weltanschauung*, namely Nazism, and Catholicism, since this synthesis would nurture Christian belief on German soil and simultaneously strengthen German society. Toward this goal, Adam proposed three specific actions. First, the German bishops should permit the government to conscript Catholic seminarians into the Wehrmacht. Why? "It can be only a rich experiential success for our seminarians—for their personal development as well as for their future effectiveness among the German people, if they are accepted into this school of manliness after the hot house atmosphere of their seminary years."⁶² Second, the Vatican should allow the use of German instead of Latin in the celebration of the Mass among German-speaking people. Third, the Church should canonize more of Germany's holy men and women. Actions such as these, he judged, would bring about a greater blending of Catholicism and German life. Adam concluded: "We must be Catholic to the last fiber of our hearts, however we must also be German to our very marrow, thereby being Catholic. Only then will our Christian faith blossom in this particular soil."⁶³

Although Adam's lecture pleased the Führer's supporters, it disturbed many Catholics, including Cologne's lay leader Josef Joos and Berlin's Domprobst Bernhard Lichtenberg.⁶⁴ Adam's lecture also displeased the German bishops.⁶⁵ For this reason, Augsburg's Bishop Josef Krumpfmüller, who was administering the Diocese of Rottenburg-Stuttgart in Bishop Sproll's absence, called Adam to his office and told him that his words had harmed the Catholic Church in Germany. Also, he instructed Adam not to speak in public concerning the war. Subsequently, the dioceses of Aachen, Augsburg, and Cologne forbade their seminarians at the University of Tübingen to take Adam's courses.

The last of Adam's pertinent statements occurred in 1943 in an essay on Jesus Christ. According to Adam, Nazi critics of Christian belief made three allegations: that Christian faith is a mythology, that it is essentially a

locating this text and making it available to me); see Kreidler, "Karl Adam und der Nationalsozialismus" 136–38.

⁶² Adam, "Die geistige Lage des deutschen Katholizismus" 240.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 241.

⁶⁴ Josef Joos, *Am Räderwerk der Zeit* (Augsburg: Winifried Werk, 1951) 155–57; Erich Kock, *Er widerstand—Bernhard Lichtenberg* (Berlin: Morus, 1996). On the correspondence between Adam and Lichtenberg, see Kevin Spicer, "The Propst from St. Hedwig: Bernhard Lichtenberg as a Paradigm for Resistance" (not yet published). Lichtenberg's courageous sermons in St. Hedwig's Church on behalf of Jews led to his arrest by the Gestapo in 1941; after two years of imprisonment, his health gave out and he died while being transported in a truck with other prisoners from Berlin to Dachau's concentration camp.

⁶⁵ Kreidler, "Karl Adam und der Nationalsozialismus" 138.

Jewish cult, and that it fosters passivity among its adherents. Responding to these claims, Adam argued first that since Christian belief is tied to the singular history of an actual person, it is not a mythology. Second, he pointed out that Houston Stuart Chamberlain erred when he asserted in *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* (1899) that Jesus was not Jewish. Christian faith surely originated with a Jew and in Jewish belief. However, Jesus was likely not a pure Jew, because he came from Galilee, a region with a history of interracial marriages. Further, Jesus did not possess Jewish traits because of his mother's Immaculate Conception. It is evident, Adam wrote, "that Jesus' mother Mary had no physical or moral connection with those ugly dispositions and forces that we condemn in full-blooded Jews. Through the miracle of the grace of God she is beyond these Jewish hereditary traits, a figure who transcends Judaism. And, what had occurred in Mary took place too in the human nature of her son."⁶⁶ Finally, since Jesus fulfilled the Jewish law and moved beyond it, he separated his followers from their Judaism. Turning to his third point, Adam argued that belief in Jesus Christ as the redeemer should lead to a love of life: "Christian faith is not an escape from the world but an illumination of the world."⁶⁷ When rightly understood, it generates "energy and courage." Summing up his response to the critics of Christian belief, Adam concluded: "No, no, the Christian spirit and the German spirit are not essentially foreign to each other. They are not essentially opposed to each other, as the anti-Christian movement would like to say to us. Rather they are essentially related to each other. Thus they must always search for and fulfill themselves. The Christian realm is broad and bright enough so that the German genius can again be at home there."⁶⁸

This article was Karl Adam's last effort to link Catholicism and Nazism. It indicates the extent to which he accommodated the Christian faith with the Nazi worldview. Adam did not spell out his vision of Germany's ideal government. Nevertheless, he dreamed of a Germany united in race, ethnicity, and the Christian faith. Rejecting the idea of the separation of church and state, he imagined the Catholic Church playing an extensive, formal role in German society and government. Hence, he likely envisioned a polity similar to Bavaria under the Wittelsbachs, the Bavaria where he was born and reached maturity. However, after the war, Adam did not comment on how the Third Reich had failed to live up to his

⁶⁶ Karl Adam, "Jesus, der Christus und wir Deutsche," *Wissenschaft und Weisheit* 10 (1943) 73–103, at 91; See Hans Küng, *Judaism*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Continuum, 1996) 678 n. 29.

⁶⁷ Karl Adam, "Jesus, der Christus und wir Deutsche," *Wissenschaft und Weisheit* 11 (1944) 10–23, at 21.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 23.

expectations. Hence, he never spelled out the specifics of his dream for a new Germany.

THEOLOGY AND THE LIVING TRADITION

Something went wrong with Karl Adam's theology and politics. In principle, nothing is amiss with Adam's assertion, "I find God, through Christ, in his Church."⁶⁹ Nor is there anything theologically wrong with three of Adam's four key ideas: that Jesus Christ is the mediator between God and creation, that the Church is the community in which Christ still lives on earth, and that Christian faith is an act within the Church. However, what is flawed is Adam's simplistic conviction that the West has degenerated over the last five centuries because of the modern understanding of human freedom. Adam's work required a more discriminating analysis of modernity, an analysis that would have relied on data from the social sciences and on a self-critical theology of history.⁷⁰ But he did not undertake such a study. Instead, trusting his own impressions and Spengler's "theory" of history, he opposed the notion of human autonomy. In particular, he could not endorse a relationship between church and state other than one resembling the altar and the throne. His inability to consider a new way for the Church to relate to the world failed to appreciate the Church's potential and necessity for change. In other words, although a proponent of living tradition, Adam underestimated tradition's dynamic character.

Since the early 1800s, Tübingen's Catholic theologians have stressed the vitality of the Christian tradition.⁷¹ Influenced by the rise of historical consciousness, they have distinguished between tradition's content and its human expressions, that is, between God's word within history and its human forms. They have seen that tradition possesses an objective and a subjective element. While tradition's inner reality or essence is timeless, its modes change because of history, culture, and other human factors. The theologians at the University of Tübingen were among the earliest Catholic scholars to discern tradition's "living" character and examine it in system-

⁶⁹ Adam, *The Spirit of Catholicism* 46.

⁷⁰ Walter Dirks has noted that Catholic officials failed in their assessment of Nazism because they viewed the national situation solely in theological and moral terms and made no use of political categories (Dirks "Reflections from Germany," in *The Church and Christian Democracy* 55–61, at 58). In support of this view, see Donald J. Dietrich, *Catholic Citizens in the Third Reich* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transactions Books, 1988); and his "Catholic Theologians in Hitler's Reich," *Journal of Church and State* 29 (1987) 19–45.

⁷¹ Thomas F. O'Meara, *Church and Culture: German Catholic Theology, 1860–1914* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1991); and his *Romantic Idealism and Roman Catholicism* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1982).

atic theology. In 1832 Johann Adam Möhler wrote in his *Symbolik*: "This complete understanding, this ecclesial consciousness is the tradition in the subjective sense of the word. . . . Tradition is the living word which unfolds in the hearts of the faithful. . . . Tradition in the objective sense is the entire faith of the Church over all of the centuries, coming forth in outer historical testimonies."⁷² Elaborating on Möhler's insight in 1859, Johann Evangelist Kuhn observed "that Christ is the truth, that all truth is given once and for all in his words through the words of his apostles, that this truth must undergo a development if it is to reach all people and convey its energy to all people—a development in which it unfolds ever richer in its various aspects and thus becomes everything to everyone."⁷³ Bringing Möhler's and Kuhn's notion of tradition into the 20th century, Karl Adam observed in *The Spirit of Catholicism* that the diverse testimonies of the Bible and the early Church "have all sprung in their fundamental forms from the living tradition, from that abundance and variety of life which is our inheritance in scripture and tradition."⁷⁴ This activity, however, is not haphazard. The vitality of the Holy Spirit, working within the Church, guarantees "that acting as a living power it lays hold of the revelation enshrined in scripture and passive tradition, and discloses as it advances the fruitful energies that they contain. . . . So there is a constant movement in the exposition of the faith, and, a continual dispensation of the store of revelation for the benefit of hungry souls. The revelation does not grow old, but remains ever new and full of life."⁷⁵

Karl Adam not only spoke about the dynamism of the Christian tradition, he also demonstrated it in his theology by presenting an alternative to neo-Scholasticism. Breaking from the Scholastic hegemony, he enthusiastically employed the neo-Romanticism, phenomenology, and *Lebensphilosophie* of his day, and he successfully illuminated for his contemporaries what neo-Scholasticism had neglected: the humanity of Jesus Christ, the communal character of the Church, and the experiential dimension of Christian faith. As a result of Adam's ability to reexpress the content of tradition in relevant language, he communicated a fresh theology to an

⁷² Johann Adam Möhler, *Symbolik*, 11th and 12th ed. (Regensburg: G. J. Manz, 1924) 356–58. See Josef Rupert Geiselmann, *Die Heilige Schrift und die Tradition* (Freiburg: Herder, 1962); Michael J. Himes, *Ongoing Incarnation* (New York: Crossroad, 1997).

⁷³ Johannes Evangelist Kuhn, *Katholische Dogmatik*, 12th ed. (Frankfurt: Minerva, 1968) 1.134; see Josef Rupert Geiselmann, *Die lebendige Überlieferung als Norm des christlichen Glaubens* (Freiburg: Herder, 1959).

⁷⁴ Adam, *The Spirit of Catholicism* 149; Adam deliberately built on the work of his predecessors in the Catholic Tübingen School (Adam, "Die katholische Tübingener Schule," *Hochland* 24/2 [1926–1927] 581–601).

⁷⁵ Adam, *The Spirit of Catholicism* 152.

entire generation of Catholics in Germany and beyond.⁷⁶ Among them were Pope Paul VI and Edward Schillebeeckx.⁷⁷ In light of Adam's accomplishment, Walter Kasper of the Tübingen School has acknowledged that between the wars Adam produced "a theology for its time."⁷⁸

Unfortunately, despite Adam's contributions to the renewal of theology, he regarded political independence, secularization, and social pluralism as threats to the Church. As Kasper has pointed out, Adam must be included among those creative Catholic theologians of the early 20th century who, although they made significant contributions to the updating of theology, saw little or no value in the contemporary appreciation for freedom. In Kasper's words, "The first half of our century saw a movement for renewal in the Church; but even this was unable to win through to a positive view of the modern notion of autonomy." Further, Kasper has noted that Adam joined other Catholic scholars in regarding "the modern awareness of freedom and history as an apostasy, a defection from Christianity, a repudiation of the order of being based on theonomy, an alienation, an uprooting and a road to chaos. They were blind to the Christian roots of autonomy, and blinder still to the Christian potentialities of the modern era."⁷⁹

By contrast, some of Adam's Catholic contemporaries recognized the value of the modern concept of autonomy and worked to promote a change in the Church's stance toward modernity. Among these theologians were two Jesuits, Gustav Gundlach and Oswald Nell-Breuning at Sankt Georgen Theologische Hochschule in Frankfurt, Engelbert Krebs at the University of Freiburg, as well as Josef Mausbach and Georg Schreiber at the University of Münster. Outside of Germany, Jacques Maritain in France, John Courtney Murray and John LaFarge in the U.S. perceived that the Church could engage in a constructive dialogue with 20th-century thought on freedom, for this thought had in fact originated out of the Christian tradition. As is well known, this view gained validity after 1945 and helped to set the

⁷⁶ Kasper, "Karl Adam" 256.

⁷⁷ Giovanni Battista Montini, who became Pope Paul VI, read the Italian translation of Adam's *The Spirit of Catholicism* in 1930 and immediately gave copies of it to his friends. Paul VI reiterated ideas from Adam's book in his first encyclical, *Ecclesiam Suam* (August 6, 1964); see Peter Hebblethwaite, "The Need for Reform," *Tablet* 241 (August 15, 1987) 863-64; and his "Understanding German Catholics," *New Blackfriars* 68 (April 1987) 179-91. Paul VI mentioned to Hans Küng in December 1965 that he associated Küng's work for ecumenism with Adam's ecumenical efforts (Küng, *Dialog mit Hans Küng* [Munich: Piper, 1996] 102-3). Adam's work also influenced Edward Schillebeeckx who has recalled that Adam's books ignited his love of theology (Schillebeeckx, *God Is New Each Moment*, trans. David Smith [New York: Seabury, 1983] 11-12).

⁷⁸ Kasper, "Karl Adam" 251.

⁷⁹ Kasper, "The Modern Sense of Freedom and History and the Theological Definition of Human Rights," *Theology and Church* 55.

stage for Vatican II's teachings in *Gaudium et spes*, *Nostra aetate*, and *Dignitatis humanae*.⁸⁰

Yves Congar, who himself drew heavily on the work of the Catholic Tübingen School, especially Möhler's writings, noted a weakness in Karl Adam's theology. Congar commented in the 1946 on the contributions of the Catholic Tübingen School to the history of theology. He praised the Tübingen theologians for their creativity in stating the wisdom of the past in contemporary terms, and simultaneously he criticized them for being so attentive to the subjective aspect of revelation that they occasionally lost sight of tradition's objective aspect. Referring to the Tübingen School's work, Congar stated that it "appears too concretely concerned with faith as lived in the Church" and not sufficiently attentive to God's word, and also on occasion it sees theology as "too much a science of faith and not enough a science of revelation."⁸¹ Congar did not then cite an example of this mistake, but he likely had in mind Adam's efforts to draw together Catholicism and Nazism, a point he later made after World War II.

Congar reiterated this evaluation in 1979. Concerned about pneumatology, he argued that Adam had neglected the Holy Spirit's work in the Church and in the world. Congar wrote: "The Holy Spirit has sometimes been forgotten. It is not difficult to find examples of this. Karl Adam's *The Spirit of Catholicism* (1924) was rightly held in high esteem during the first half of this century. Yet we find in it: 'The structure of Catholic faith may be summarized in a single sentence: I come to a living faith in the triune God through Christ in his Church. I experience the action of the living God through Christ realizing himself in his Church. So we see the certitude of the Catholic faith rests on the sacred triad: God, Christ, Church.'"⁸²

This comment may initially seem inaccurate since discussions on the Holy Spirit are found in Adam's writings, especially in *The Spirit of Catholicism*. But scrutiny discloses that Adam did not adequately consider the Holy Spirit's freedom. Three examples show this lacuna. First, when speaking of the activity of the Holy Spirit in the Church, Adam stressed that the Spirit moves from the top down within the ecclesiastical hierarchy: from the pope, through the bishops, to the priests and finally to the laity.⁸³ He failed to consider that the Spirit also works initially through the laity who then pass on their wisdom to their pastors. In fact, he criticized the possibility of consensus-forming processes within the body of Christ. In his

⁸⁰ O'Brien, "A Century of Catholic Social Teaching."

⁸¹ Yves M.-J. Congar, "Théologie," in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* 15/1 (Paris: Letouzey & Ané, 1946) 341–502, at 436.

⁸² Yves M.-J. Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, trans. David Smith (New York: Crossroad, 1997) 1.159.

⁸³ Adam, *The Spirit of Catholicism* 6–10, 81–96.

words, "The whole constitution of the Church is completely aristocratic and not democratic, her authority coming from above, from Christ, and not from below, from the community. The new powers come from Christ, the Incarnate God, and from him flow through the apostles to the Church. The government of the Church is, so to say, in the vertical and not in the horizontal line."⁸⁴ Second, Adam claimed that change in the Christian tradition always occurs smoothly and in obvious continuity with the past. "In the Catholic Church alone," he wrote, "may we discern an organic growth in the consciousness of the faith. There is no petrification here; yet there is on the one hand nothing erratic or abrupt, but an organic development."⁸⁵ Adam failed to see that the tradition's "organic" character can include changes that may initially seem abrupt and disconnected. A shift in tradition that at first may appear to break with the past can eventually show itself to be the recovery of an ancient truth. Third, Adam gave virtually no attention to the Holy Spirit's activity outside the Church in history, societies, other religions, and the human family.⁸⁶ Having judged that Western civilization has been declining for 500 years, he conveyed the view that modernity has totally rejected the Holy Spirit. Yet, this evaluation of history and society makes too little of the Spirit's influence in the world, even through seemingly secular trends, events, and people. Congar was correct that Adam's statement "I find God, through Christ, in his Church" manifests an inadequate pneumatology.

Congar's two criticisms of Adam's theology coincide with Kasper's comments and also with my own analysis. Adam judged that the rise of the contemporary notion of autonomy had brought about modernity's rejection of God and the decay of the West. Influenced by this appraisal, he did not rethink the Church's relation to the world and hence overlooked the transcendent content of tradition on this matter. He did not imagine that the living tradition could generate a relationship between the Church and the state other than the one realized in the Holy Roman Empire and in Bavaria under the Wittelsbachs. With one model of governance in mind, he could not see the possibilities for common ground between the Christian tradition and 20th-century thought on freedom. Hence he regarded the concordat between the Vatican and Hitler's government as the first step in the formation of a new Germany which would formally unite the Christian faith and German culture.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 21; and his *Christ and the Western Mind* 18.

⁸⁵ Adam, *The Spirit of Catholicism* 152.

⁸⁶ Ibid. 50–57. The inadequacy of Adam's pneumatology also showed itself in his criticism of Mannes Dominikus Koster's proposal in 1940 to develop an ecclesiology of the people of God (Adam, "Ekklesiologie im Werden?" *TQ* 122 [1941] 145–66).

REAFFIRMING THE LIVING TRADITION

The postconciliar Catholic Church lives within a theological horizon that differs markedly from the one Karl Adam and many of his contemporaries took for granted. Whereas Vatican I held that the modern notion of autonomy necessarily stands in opposition to belief in God and the Church, Vatican II recognized that human life and society possess a valid freedom that is a prerequisite for faith. Highlighting this shift in outlooks, Hermann Pottmeyer has pointed out that the council's "radical change" expressed itself in the conviction "that for the Church it is essential to be in the world. The Church sees itself closely joined with other human beings and their history (*Gaudium et spes* no. 1) and participating in this history (*Gaudium et spes* no. 3)."⁸⁷ Vatican I saw the emergence of the modern world "as a story of apostasy and degeneration," but Vatican II recognized positive aspects in the West's recent history, including the contemporary notion of freedom. In Pottmeyer's words,

The personal development of human beings and their claim to freedom—which for the First Vatican Council was the root of all of the evils of modernity—were seen in a positive light by the Second Vatican Council (*Gaudium et spes* no. 17). They correspond to the worth of human beings and to the will of God (*Gaudium et spes* nos. 16, 26, 41; *Dignitatis humanae* on religious freedom). In this vein, the council recognized the reality of a pluralistic society in which the Church can claim no privileges (*Gaudium et spes* no. 76).⁸⁸

Vatican II's stance toward the world would surely have troubled Karl Adam, who would not have agreed with the following statement in *Gaudium et spes*: "The fact that it is the same God who is at once savior and creator, Lord of human history and of the history of salvation, does not mean that this divine order deprives creation, and humanity in particular of their rightful autonomy; on the contrary, it restores and strengthens its dignity."⁸⁹ This statement clashes with Adam's writings. If the Tübingen theologian could have anticipated Vatican II's positive regard for the world's rightful independence, he might have maintained a critical distance from the Third Reich. If his ecclesiology had embraced the idea of the separation between church and state, he might not have tried to build a bridge between Catholicism and Nazism. But such was not the case. Although Adam contributed to the theological renewal that led to Vatican II by stressing the humanity of Jesus Christ, the Church as a community, and the experiential dimension of Christian faith, he stood within the ecclesiological horizon of Vatican I when he rejected the modern idea of freedom.

⁸⁷ Hermann J. Pottmeyer, "Modernisierung in der katholischen Kirche am Beispiel der Kirchenkonzeption des I. und II. Vatikanischen Konzils," in *Vatikanum II und Modernisierung* 131–46, at 139–40.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 140.

⁸⁹ *Gaudium et spes* no. 41.

The postconciliar Catholic Church can learn from Karl Adam's failure in the face of Nazism. It can recognize that no one can turn back the clock in order to restore the relationship that existed between the Church and the state in an earlier epoch. Acknowledging the values of a secular, multicultural world, Catholics must find new ways to enter into the public realm, thereby influencing their societies. Christian faith need not become a private matter.⁹⁰ In other words, postconciliar Catholics must remain committed to Vatican II's dominant ecclesiology.⁹¹ In particular, they can make this affirmation in two areas. First, ecclesial leaders should defend human rights, especially in unjust situations that are fueled by ethnic, racial, and religious differences as in Indonesia, Rwanda, the Sudan, and the former Yugoslavia.⁹² Second, they should work for inclusion within canon law of regulations that ensure the dignity of all people in the Church, especially women and marginal groups such as racial and ethnic minorities, divorced-and-remarried couples, and homosexuals.⁹³ In this same vein, as Archbishop John R. Quinn has noted, the Church must give greater recognition to the appropriate autonomy of bishops and the national conferences of bishops.⁹⁴ Concrete steps such as these would not only make the Church more faithful to Vatican II's *communio* ecclesiology, they would also increase the Church's credibility in the secular world and, as a consequence, dispose people to take more seriously the Church's evangelization.

In conclusion, as the Catholic Church moves into the third millennium it needs to reaffirm Vatican II's recognition that the Christian tradition is not static but dynamic. If the Church is to remain true to its mission of evangelization, it needs continually to search for new ways of expressing God's revelation. In this effort, it can again learn from Karl Adam, but now from

⁹⁰ Hermann J. Pottmeyer, "Kingdom of God—Church—Society," in *The Legacy of the Tübingen School*, ed. Donald J. Dietrich and Michael J. Himes (New York: Crossroad, 1997) 144–55; Charles E. Curran, *The Church and Morality* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 65–92; Michael J. Himes and Kenneth R. Himes, *The Fullness of Faith* (New York: Paulist, 1993).

⁹¹ Hermann J. Pottmeyer, "The Traditionalist Temptation of the Contemporary Church," *America* 168 (September 5, 1992) 100–4.

⁹² John P. Langan, "Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict, and Religion," *TS* 56 (1995) 122–35; J. Bryan Hehir, "The Social Role of the Church," in *Catholic Social Thought and the New World Order* 29–50.

⁹³ Hermann J. Pottmeyer, "The Reform of the Papacy," *Tablet* 250 (September 14, 1996) 1188–90; and his "Refining the Question About Women's Ordination," *America* 177 (October 26, 1996) 16–18; Richard P. McBrien, "An Ecclesiological Analysis of Catholic Social Teachings," in *Catholic Social Thought and the New World Order* 147–78; Bishop Raymond A. Lucker, "Justice in the Church," in *One Hundred Years of Catholic Social Thought* 88–102.

⁹⁴ Phyllis Zagano and Terrence W. Tilley, ed., *The Exercise of the Primacy* (New York: Crossroad, 1999); Thomas J. Reese, ed., *Episcopal Conferences* (Washington: Georgetown University, 1989).

the theologian at his best. As early as 1924, he intuited that the Christian faith would eventually need to adapt to non-European cultures. Affirming the living tradition, Adam declared:

We Catholics acknowledge readily, without any shame, nay with pride, that Catholicism cannot be identified simply and wholly with primitive Christianity, nor even with the Gospel of Christ, in the same way that the great oak cannot be identified with the tiny acorn. There is no mechanical identity but an organic identity. And we go further and say that thousands of years hence Catholicism will probably be even richer, more luxuriant, more manifold in dogma, morals, law and worship than the Catholicism of the present day. Religious historians of the fifth millennium A.D. will without difficulty discover in Catholicism conceptions and forms and practices which derive from India, China and Japan, and they will have to recognize a far more obvious "complex of opposites." It is quite true Catholicism is a union of contraries.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Adam, *The Spirit of Catholicism 2*.