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Roman Catholic Theology in Germany Today

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TO WRITE an article on the modern trends in German Catholic theology is not quite as hopeless an undertaking as one might think when looking at the advertising booklet, published in 1958, listing the German theological publications of recent years; the booklet contains titles and brief descriptions of about 900 works.¹ In spite of the tremendous literary output of German Catholic theologians, there is, I believe, a certain unity of direction and movement in all their efforts. Even where there is controversy—and Germans are stubborn arguers—the main tendencies of theological thinking are more or less the same. A great variety of opinions on issues discussed in detail does not necessarily preclude a harmony of effort and a steady growth of thought in one direction. In this article I wish to describe as I understand them the situation of, and the main trend within, Catholic theology in the Germany of our day.

There is, first of all, in German Catholic theology the keen awareness that Catholic thought is always influenced by the thought which it encounters in its own century. This is true of the past, and it is true of the present. The “new” discovery, however, is that our confrontation with non-Catholic thought is creative and fruitful only when it is fully conscious, critical, and profound. This last sentence I now wish to explain.

1. The booklet listing the recent German theological publications is *Eine Auswahl deutscher Bücher: Katholische Theologie*, printed by the Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels, Frankfurt a. M., 1958. Recent German Protestant publications are found in a companion booklet, *Evangelische Theologie*, of almost the same size. These book lists include new editions of older works.

It may be more useful for the Canadian reader if, instead of giving footnotes throughout the article referring to books he cannot easily find, I make a few references to certain major works more likely to be available in larger theological libraries. The excellent volume *Fragen der Theologie Heute*, published by the Benziger Verlag, Zürich/Cologne, 1958, deals with German, and more generally with modern European, Catholic theology. To gain greater insight into contemporary German theology the *Katholische Dogmatik*, in five volumes, by Michael Schmaus (Max Heuber, Munich, various editions and dates) is invaluable—for the viewpoint taken by the author, for the accounts of recent controversies, and for the lengthy bibliographies. The new, revised edition of the *Lexicon für Theologie und Kirche* (Herder, Freiburg, 2nd ed., 1957-), which puts more emphasis on theological articles than did the former editions, is also a reflection of contemporary German theological thought. At present four volumes are out. A set of three volumes, *Schriften zur Theologie* by Karl Rahner (Benziger, Cologne, 3rd ed., Vols. I-II, 1958; 2nd ed., Vol. III, 1957), is most significant for modern German Catholic thought. The style of the author is unfortunately so involved that, despite his clarity of thought, he may offer great difficulty to many readers. Significant for German moral theology is the *Handbuch der katholischen Sittenlehre*, in five volumes, edited by Fritz Tillmann (Patmos-Verlag, Düsseldorf, 1951), and Bernard Häring's *Das Gesetz Christi*, in one volume (Erichewel, Freiburg i. Br., 5th ed., 1959).

From the beginning of its history Christianity has always confronted other religions and other forms of thought, and from the beginning the Christian reaction has never been one of simple and unqualified rejection. The thought of the others had to be understood, analysed, and evaluated. The attempt was often made, if possible, to express Christian teaching in the terms and even the thought-forms of systems which in themselves were incompatible with Christian revelation. This process, I believe, is already visible in the New Testament. The *kerygma* of the Twelve in Jerusalem is given a very different form when the gospel is preached to the pagan populations of Asia Minor. This process of transformation, or assimilation, continued when Christians came in contact with Greek philosophy, with Platonic and Neo-Platonic, Stoic and Aristotelian wisdom. The closed systems were condemned, but the terms and, occasionally, the notions contained in these systems were utilized by Christian thinkers in the explanation of divine revelation. That this method has borne fruit cannot be doubted when we look at patristic literature and the later medieval syntheses. That this method is fraught with dangers cannot be denied either. Is Clement of Alexandria, or Origen, always announcing the message of the gospel in terms of purged Greek philosophy, or is he occasionally conforming Christian wisdom to fit alien forms of thought of pagan origin? Yet, in spite of the dangers, the Catholic Church has always encouraged this kind of creative confrontation with the thought of others. This attitude is, I believe, one of the fundamental Catholic principles. It has led Catholic theology at times to speak in terms far removed from biblical categories, despite the fact that what all theology tries to do is to have some insight into the mysteries revealed in the word of God. The Catholic Church has often been accused by Lutherans of being, in this sense, too broad-minded, of not preserving the authentic forms and phrases of the Scriptures, of adapting her theology too quickly, of compromising. Whatever we may think of individual instances, the fact remains that it is a Catholic principle to confront non-Catholic thought creatively in order to use whatever true insight may be found there for a better understanding of divine revelation.

It is therefore somewhat ironical that in recent centuries, and in some countries even today, Catholic theology is unconcerned about the thought and the philosophies of others, whether Christian or non-Christian. This wholesale and uncritical rejection of non-Catholic thought has been the common attitude of Catholic writers since the sixteenth century. There were of course notable exceptions, especially in the last century. But the reasons for the prevalent negative attitude are not difficult to find. It was an attitude of defence. Catholic unity being threatened from all sides, the great hope of these writers was that, by returning to a happier past and rejecting all new influences, the ancient unity of Christendom could be reconstructed. History, however, has shown that this sort of restoration has not been possible—and never will be. It is somewhat ironical nevertheless

that this utter and unqualified rejection of the modes of thought of others is not only not traditionally Catholic, but even corresponds, it seems to me, much more to a certain Lutheran view which discovers only darkness in nature and in everything that is not the pure gospel.

There was, of course, a good deal of development in post-Tridentine Catholic theology, there were many great writers and countless elaborations of old and new themes, and yet the principal effort was always one of restoration, of returning to the categories of the medieval thinkers who, in their time, had produced a most harmonious, living, creative vision of unity rich in tension. In the hands of the theologians of the baroque age theology became a closed system. The proper task of the theologian was to elaborate this system further and further to answer the new questions that arose in controversy. It was then that Catholic theology began to show the marks of that utter rejection of non-Catholic thought of which I have spoken; it became anti-Protestant and anti-rationalist. Thus, for instance, to counterbalance Protestant teaching the Catholic writers of the baroque age would strongly emphasize the role of the hierarchy when speaking of the mystery of the Church; they would stress the merit of good works in their explanation of grace and its effects; they would discuss at length the causality of the sacraments when dealing with the mystery of Christ's presence in the Church—and so forth. In the same way we find an anti-rationalist emphasis in baroque theology. On the one hand, the separation between nature and grace was stressed, as well as the utter gratuitousness of the supernatural, and on the other hand, the power and competence of reason to come to a knowledge of spiritual reality was emphasized. All these elaborations of Catholic theology are essentially true, at least in their intention, and no Catholic writer of today would claim that the baroque theologians were unorthodox, disloyal to the gospel, or beyond the bounds of authentic Catholic thought. On the contrary, they were most faithful to the teaching of the Church. Their radical opposition to other forms of thought influenced only the *emphasis* of their teaching and determined the areas that remained neglected. Any theologian, however, knows and appreciates how important emphases are for the creation of a particular mentality and the production of an intellectual climate.

There is a note in post-Tridentine Catholic theology of which the theology of our day, especially German theology, is particularly conscious. Even though the theology of the baroque age was anti-Protestant and anti-rationalist, it was nevertheless profoundly influenced by the very forms of thought which it rejected. Whenever we confront another system in debate, a certain influence of the opposition is unavoidable. The opposition determines the questions that are asked and the ways in which the answers are given. The unfortunate fact about baroque theology is that it was unconscious of this influence. The theological writers of that age did not realize what was happening. While they rejected all Protestant thought and emphasized in the Catholic tradition whatever was diametrically

opposed to the Protestant errors, they nevertheless fell into the individualism which characterized Protestantism at the time. Thus, for instance, the sacraments and prayer, uniting us to Christ, were looked upon mainly as means of grace for the individual; their social nature and their role in the body of Christ remained comparatively undeveloped. Along with this individualism, essentially foreign to the Catholic tradition, went an extreme moralism, the unconscious counterpart of certain Calvinistic tendencies. The Christian life began to be described in terms of doing good and avoiding evil. (Perhaps it would be fairer to say that a common *Zeitgeist* influenced both Protestant and Catholic thinkers rather than attributing these tendencies to Protestantism. But even if this is admitted, it remains true that the theology of the baroque age did not reject the individualism and moralism which entered Catholicism from the outside.)

Catholic opposition to all forms of rationalism was a dire necessity in those days, and yet a similar situation arose; there was an influence of rationalist thought in baroque theology of which the theologians were unconscious. Catholic theology was developed as the perfect system. There was an answer for every question. Granted the divine intervention in a supernatural revelation, everything followed neatly and logically from the articles of faith; there was no loophole. Even the *praeambula fidei*, the rational basis of the Christian faith, were systematized in such a rigorous way that the arguments for the Catholic religion seemed to be scientifically demonstrable beyond reasonable doubt, even to a man devoid of faith.

From the experience of Catholic theology in the baroque age we conclude: Whenever the confrontation with the thought of others is not fully conscious, critical, and creative, but consists merely of an undiscerning rejection, the rejected system will exert its influence secretly. It may well be that this conclusion is verified also in the history of Protestant theology. There is a vengeance in the realm of ideas. For this reason I have said on the first page of this article that only an honest and profound confrontation with the thought of others will enrich Catholic theology with new and creative insights. Only a critical confrontation can avoid the secret, undesired influences. This is what Germans call "Auseinandersetzung," and they love it. It seems to me, moreover, as I have mentioned above, that this kind of positive confrontation is an ancient Catholic principle.

German Catholic theology of our day is characterized by its openness to other forms of thought. There is a constant confrontation with Kantian idealism, with existentialism, with Marxist ideologies, and with the mixture of romanticism, aesthetical thinking, and humanism which is so typical of the German bourgeoisie. There is one principal encounter of German Catholic theology however: Protestant thought. It is neither an exaggeration nor an unkindness to say that every German Catholic theological author reflecting on Christian revelation writes with a Lutheran, or with Karl Barth, looking over his shoulder, somewhat as St. Thomas elaborating his thought had Aristotle sitting across from him at the desk. The purpose

of constantly facing Lutheran or Barthian thought is not to refute or reject these views at every point. Nor is it, contrariwise, to arrive at some kind of compromise. Whenever Catholic theologians present or elaborate the thought of the Church, they desire to show that whatever they consider genuine and valid in the *Anliegen*, the concern, of Lutherans or Karl Barth is contained in the authentic Catholic tradition. German Catholic authors of today when speaking of the Church will emphasize its organic unity with Christ, its head (without, of course, diminishing the normative role of the hierarchy). They will emphasize the gratuitous nature of salvation and grace (without, of course, minimizing the truth that, united to Christ, man can offer gifts to God worthy of reward). They will emphasize the personal encounter in faith in receiving the sacraments (without, of course, belittling the *ex opere operato* character of the signs which the Lord has bestowed on the Church). At this point it becomes evident to anyone familiar with the writings of St. Thomas how relevant this teacher is to contemporary problems. At the same time German theological authors are very conscious of the deep divergence between the Catholic and the Protestant way of looking at things; and the pitfalls into which Protestant theology has fallen in their eyes serve to warn them what roads must at all costs be avoided. It is precisely this confrontation with the various schools of Protestant thought today which impresses German Catholic writers with the danger of individualism, of despising intellect or rejecting every analogy of being, or again of softening the objective structure of the Christian faith or belittling the Church's divine mission in the world. The kind of sympathetic exchange of thought with Protestant authors that is happening in Germany today is making the Catholic theologians really more Catholic, more Church-conscious, without, I believe, giving them the slightest anti-Protestant bias.

This confrontation with Protestant thought in Germany is not restricted to the level of high theology. It has already entered the theological education of priests. The five-volume *Katholische Dogmatik* by Michael Schmaus, used as a textbook in many seminaries, reflects this open and ecumenical spirit throughout. My own professor of dogmatic theology, a German Dominican at an international university, commenting on the *Summa* of Thomas Aquinas in Latin, would add, after quoting the testimony of the Catholic tradition, "Etiam Carolus Barth dicit. . . ." This attitude is largely the fruit of the ecumenical movement which, in Germany, has created the *Una Sancta* circle bringing together Protestant and Catholic theologians for prayer and discussion. The fruitful and original studies found in periodicals such as *Una Sancta* and *Catholica* testify to the stimulating and creative effect of these encounters. I may mention that I do not know of a single Catholic writer of our day who has deviated from Catholic orthodoxy or has sought the slightest compromise in matters of doctrine. This may have happened occasionally between the two wars. In the present period the movement of creative confrontation with Protes-

tantism, including the *Una Sancta* circle, is encouraged and supported by the German Catholic hierarchy. Many of the sermons and pastoral letters of Bishop Stoehr of Mainz, for instance, or of Cardinal Doepfner of Berlin are truly ecumenical documents. Lest I be misunderstood, however, I must remind Canadian readers that the Protestantism which Catholics encounter in Germany is for the most part dogmatic and theological, and comparatively free of the liberal or evangelical or fundamentalist trends so prevalent in North American Protestantism.

While confrontation with non-Catholic thought is characteristic of modern Catholic theology in Germany, this merely indicates a method of procedure. So far we have said very little about the content and the direction of German Catholic theology. Is it possible to find a common orientation or aspiration in the enormous bulk of theological literature? It may be said that the great effort of Catholic theologians is to make Catholic theology ever more Bible-conscious. But this would be true of modern Catholic theologians in any country. Is there a peculiar trend characteristic of Catholic theology in Germany? I shall venture a generalization, which makes no claim, however, to be the last word on the matter. It seems to me that the element characterizing most contemporary German theology is its concern for history. By this I do *not* mean that attention is paid simply in positive studies, to the history of Christian thought, to accurate accounts of the growth and development of the Catholic Church. I do *not* mean, moreover, that there is a tendency to relativize objective truth and the dogmas of religion by stressing the changes through which the development of the centuries has taken them. What I wish to say is that contemporary German theology tends to regard reality, in whatever area it may be working, in the light of history, that is, in its relation to God's creation and man's fall, to Christ's redemption on the cross, and to the ultimate fulfilment at the end of time. German theology avoids simply considering pure natures, or man as such, or the ontology of grace; for man is always in a particular salvific situation before God. While considerations "as such" are valid and useful abstractions, the decisive value of human beings comes to them from their place in history—whether and how they are linked to Christ's reconciliation, directly or remotely, in fact or in hope, by way of inchoation or of fulfilment.

We may put the matter differently. God did not reveal abstract essences in his word; he revealed himself by intervening in the life of a people and of humanity. Even when Christ proclaimed the secret wisdom of the Father, his teaching and his doing transformed the world and initiated men into a new age. History, according to the biblical vision, is not the succession of days and years like the beads on an endless string. History is the *locus* of God's creative word. It is the created duration, with a beginning and an end, where God reveals himself and in revealing himself is forever transforming it. One is the time of Adam, another that of Abraham, another the time of Christ, another again that of the Church. Whatever

we discover, therefore, in the light of faith, about the essential make-up of man or any part of the universe will be profoundly qualified, if not determined, by its place in the history of divine redemption.

From what source did this emphasis on the historical perspective enter Catholic theology in Germany (and indeed in other countries)? This perspective is, first of all, biblical. The increasing attention given to biblical studies in contemporary Catholic theology has here borne one of its fruits. It must be noted, moreover, that this historical viewpoint is thoroughly at home in the classical Catholic theology of the Fathers and the medieval writers. In St. Thomas, for instance, we find the constant concern to trace the theological themes, such as faith, or grace, or the sacraments, through the different ages of humanity, from the days of innocence, through the period of waiting for Christ and the time of Christ's presence in the Church, to the age of his final return. And yet the main effort of medieval theologians, a tendency further developed in the baroque age, was to obtain an insight into the essential, metaphysical constitution of the elements of religion. They were mainly interested in the static structures of the newness Christ had brought, rather than in the dynamism which is associated with these structures and for the sake of which they had been revealed. There was an inadequate appreciation of Thomas' doctrine that God has revealed all the mysteries of our faith *ad salutem*, for our salvation.

It may be said, moreover, that Germans have always been dissatisfied with static conceptions. The German idealists of the last century believed that their overthrow of substance and of the permanence of things, and their vision of being as unfolding in history, were faithful to an ancient German tradition. Be that as it may, what is certain is that German theological thought has been led to a greater appreciation of history through its encounter with the stepchild of German idealism, the dialectical materialism of Marx. If for Marx history gives meaning to things, and not things to history, this is more true, supremely true, in the biblical vision where history is the *locus* of divine redemption, and of divine judgment subordinated to this redemption, so that whatever happens on this stage receives its value from its relationship to the divine interventions.

It may be added that the philosophy of existentialism, drawing attention to the uniqueness of any situation, and to the decisive influence of this situation on the constitution of the subject, has also heightened the sense of history among Catholic theologians. Protestant theologians of our day are, of course, also concerned with the historical perspective. In the past they often, though not always, have been more concerned with it than Catholic theologians. In some writers today, however, this concern for history goes so far that the existence of permanent natures is altogether denied. In some of these writers, and not only in Bultmann and his followers, the weight of the present moment is so great that history itself as a theological category is lost; creation, the fall of man, Christ's ascension

and his ultimate return are considered as supratemporal myths describing and revealing man's present situation before God. In such a surrounding the Catholic theologian often feels like a defender of the *Heilsgeschichte*.

There is then a convergence of influences which have drawn the attention of Catholic theologians to the historical dimensions in the Christian faith. Lest I remain too vague, especially for readers not well acquainted with Catholic thought, I wish to show, by some examples, how this historical emphasis alters the perspective in which the various areas or branches of theology are being approached by modern Catholic writers in Germany. I may mention, and even insist on it, that there is no note of resentment among these writers against the theology of the baroque age, let alone against the magnificent medieval visions of Christian theology. There is the realization that the wisdom of faith which began with Christ is developed and adapted to meet the Church's problem of the day—at certain times, it is true, more successfully than at others. Theology is always in a situation. Hence even the most original German writers, such as Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar, bear witness to a faithful and reasoned reverence for the past, and attempt to show at every point how the new insights of contemporary thought fit into the core of what is called the classical tradition of Catholic theology.

Every theologian knows how central the problem of nature and grace is in the elaboration of a theology. There was a tendency in baroque thought, which we have already referred to, to separate the realms of nature and grace in such a systematic fashion that the result was the frequently spurned *Stockwerktheologie*, that is, the two-storey theology in which to an understructure of pure nature was added the superstructure of grace. In such a view Christian grace almost appears as something extrinsically joined to man, who is already complete without it. This, of course, had never been the vision of the Middle Ages. For St. Thomas human nature is *capax Dei*. For him the life of man remains radically frustrated without the gracious and unmerited intervention of God in Jesus Christ. The historical perspective of modern writers leads to an even closer relationship of creation and redemption, without in any way endangering the gratuitousness of divine mercy. God desired to join the human family to himself in two separated steps, creation and redemption; the latter is as freely given as the former, and is not a necessary consequence of the former; and yet they are steps envisaged by the one God in their correlation. Hence the creation of the universe remained open to the completion from above in a higher reconciliation in Christ. In this sense we may call creation, with Karl Barth, a *Voraus-Setzung* of God's redemptive design. Historically, taking into consideration the fall of man, we see that man is never devoid of a relationship to Christ, be this positive or negative, and hence it becomes a central insight of Catholic theology, and not just an afterthought, that there is no state of pure nature. Pure nature

is a legitimate and useful abstraction. But it should not give rise to a two-storey theology, and in the historical perspective of contemporary thought it will not do so.

The famous "saubere Horizontale," which according to Emil Brunner is supposed to separate the realm of creation from that of grace in Catholic theology, is even more completely dissolved when we consider that the unique and once-for-all sacrifice of Christ on the cross was accepted by God for the whole of the human family, and that consequently something has changed in the relationship of men, of all men, to their God. This is true, obviously and especially and supremely, of believers in Christ; but the change has taken place in all men even when they do not consciously acknowledge it in faith. Through Christ's victory on the cross there is an ordering of humanity to grace in his body. For this reason we find that the Christological way of regarding the universe leads modern German theologians to a Christian optimism in regard to creation and men outside the visible bounds of the Catholic Church, optimism which I feel is characteristically Catholic. Wherever there is selflessness in the heart of a man; wherever man seeks God; wherever man is led to die to egotism and to live for the sake of love; Christ is already at work in him preparing and drawing a new member into his mystical body.

There is another aspect of grace that has been reconsidered in modern German Catholic theology. Since the gift of grace is above nature and hence beyond the realm of experience, it can easily be considered so far away from human life that it really does not make any difference to the form which this life actually takes. Grace then becomes simply a principle of explanation. This tendency to see in grace the deep ground of whatever is good in a man's life is of course very useful in the Church's fight against all forms of Pelagianism, a fight in which Thomas was no less a champion than Augustine. But if grace is so completely beyond experience, we are tempted, while *believing that* everything depends on God, to *act as if* everything depended on ourselves. This sort of separation became more pronounced when the sectarian doctrine of "assurance of salvation" was condemned by the Council of Trent. According to the Catholic tradition, we cannot know with certainty whether we are in a state of grace. *Kyrie eleison* expresses man's attitude towards God in any situation on this earth. And yet it would be unfortunate for grace to become so far removed from the world of experience that we conceived of man's natural life as such a closed psychological unity that the point of insertion (*der Ansatzpunkt*) of grace could not be found in it, that grace simply stood in and behind every good action.

German Catholic theologians of our day prefer to look at grace, not simply in ontological terms, but also in a historical perspective as the gracious call of God eliciting a human response. If grace is regarded as the encounter of man with his God in faith, then it is at one and the same time an elevation above man's fallen situation and an experience. Grace

then does make a difference in the pattern of a man's life. Man's person-to-person relationship to God, which is wrought by grace, or rather, is his grace, is the centre from which he understands his entire existence. Grace then changes man's situation experimentally. Certainly, grace as such cannot be the object of human experience, but it does manifest itself in the psychological life of the believer. This is a traditional doctrine. St. Thomas speaks of the conjectural knowledge we have of the state of grace. The reason why the new emphasis of German Catholic theology is so invigorating is that there was a tendency in baroque theology to regard grace as an impersonal divine power poured into the human soul.

We see here how the pronounced historical perspective of contemporary Catholic theology has led to an attitude that may best be described as a personalism. There is a new appreciation of the uniqueness of the human person and of the particular role of this uniqueness in the eyes of God. This has nothing to do with individualism. For the person who responds to God's call in faith and love assumes, by his surrender, the responsibility for all his brethren. The love which God bestows on one man must be returned to him, handed on from man to man, each one returning it to God and passing it on to others, building a living pattern of God-connectedness. Whoever interrupts the connection at one point, writes Romano Guardini, shatters the whole; and whoever fashions it at one place, makes room for the whole.

Guardini, one of the most influential German writers, whose works are now being translated into English, has done much to foster this kind of Catholic personalism. Through his profound understanding of the individual in the light of divine revelation, over and above all modern psychologizing, Guardini has been able to grasp the Christian significance of art, literature, and other human phenomena. His deeply sensitive and poetic style has made him a widely read theological interpreter of human culture and of the humanity of Jesus, appreciated far beyond the Christian community.

But this personalism is fruitful even in technical theological works. Thus, for instance, the theology of the sacraments is accented differently in modern German writers. One look at the opening pages of Schmaus's volume on the sacraments, belonging to his large *Katholische Dogmatik* already mentioned, reveals that the emphasis, side by side with a statement of the *ex opere operato* efficacy of the sacraments, is on the personal encounter of God in faith mediated by the sacraments. The sacraments are not conceived as taps of divine grace where impersonal holiness is poured into the the faithful—this is the impression given by superficial presentations of baroque theology—but they are the sacred signs, instituted and ordained by the Lord, conforming to Christ, *ex opere operato*, the (adult) person responding to him in faith. This conformation takes place in Christ's body; at this point the personalistic concern is imbued with a truly communal and churchly significance.

The personalistic concern is also evident in the writings on moral theology which are being published in Germany. The attempt is made to avoid an ethics conceived as an obedience to impersonal laws. Under the key word of the following of Christ, many writers, such as Tillmann, even before the war, and above all Häring, after the war, have composed a moral theology on the basis of man's personal response to the call of Christ. In addition to the major works of these two authors, there are many smaller monographs and studies written in the same spirit. If in more popular books addressed to a wider audience in Germany the occasional attempt was made to baptize the modern *Situations-Ethik* and to remove fixed moral norms from the gospel of Jesus, this tendency has never been apparent in the serious theological writers, even though they too have tried to make Christian ethics more existential. French Thomists have fruitfully elaborated Thomas' doctrine on Christian prudence (practical moral intelligence), yet this approach has not, I believe, found the echo it deserves in German theological literature. Karl Rahner, however, has done much, independently of the Thomist tradition, to deepen the understanding of the "human act," a central notion in Catholic moral theology, in order to render a better account of the personalistic structure of man's choosing and acting. It is interesting to note that, while in Germany several Protestant authors are returning to a notion of the natural law, there is a tendency among Catholic writers to look upon the natural law in the light of man's changing social and salvific situation, thus discovering a dynamism in this natural law which the strong emphasis on "essences" had overlooked in recent centuries.

While the historical approach to theology, of which I speak, has led German theology to a new appreciation of the human person, it has also led, in seeming contradiction to this, to a more universalistic view of things. A part will no longer be considered independently of its context; it will always be considered as a part, that is, in the light of the whole to which it belongs. Germans love to speak of a "ganzheitliche Schau." This tendency has made theology prophetic and visionary again. Modern theologians tend to regard the single elements of Christian doctrine in the light of the unity of that divine disposition which begins on the first day of creation and ends on the last day of history. Eschatology has become one of the major concerns of German Catholic theology. By this I do not mean that special attention is paid to the future age at the expense of this world's importance, but rather that the realities of this age of ours are understood in the light of their fulfilment promised for the day of Christ's return. Needless to say, in Catholic theology this return of Christ is taken as a historical event, as much as creation itself. This has always been so. And yet in former centuries such eschatological realities as the Church and the sacraments were usually regarded, not in the light of the age to which they are pointing and which they anticipate, but as quantities of our time. Otto Semmelroth and, following him, many others have tried to regard

the whole Church as a sacrament of the kingdom, the *Ursakrament*, the type and pattern of all sacramentality in the Christian dispensation. This has thrown much light on the visibility of the Church as well as on the invisibility of the effect mediated by it; it has explained how a historical structure which is necessarily imperfect can nonetheless be the zone in which is present Christ's full and final victory. These are only attempts groping for a larger theological synthesis. At this time there is in the whole realm of eschatology and the meaning of history a wide variety of opinion and much fruitful, and sometimes heated, discussion. There is no agreement whether the fulfilment of Christ will come wholly from above, or whether it may be possible to conceive of a divine intervention in the evolution of this cosmos, initiating the kingdom of the last day in continuity with history. Is the magnificent vision of Teilhard de Chardin, in which the *eschaton* is the completion of, and not the judgment on, the world's history, reconcilable with the biblical data? On this there is as wide disagreement in German Catholic theology as in that of other countries.

The above paragraphs give a few illustrations to show how the historical viewpoint adopted by German Catholic theology has given a new impetus to research and a new direction to ancient thoughts. The realization that human life is facing, and is evaluated by, the fulfilment at the end of time, rather than some timeless eternity, has cast some doubts on the traditional way of regarding the nature of theology itself. Is there room in the Church for a theology seeking knowledge and insight for their own sake? Should not rather the sole function of theology be to serve the *kerygma*, the proclamation of the gospel, and the initiation of the last days? There were, at one time, extreme advocates of such a *Verkündigungstheologie*. But the controversy has cooled down in recent years. All theological movements in Germany agree that theology must be vital and have a "Sitz im Leben." All writers agree that theology must make a contribution to the preaching of the gospel and the practical life of the Church, though very few will limit theology to this function. Theology seeks insight. Man is not the only one who is waiting for the end; God has entered the world as man to make us more human, and this includes the growth of understanding. *Credo ut intelligam*. Theology serves the Church by seeking wisdom. It must be said that all tendencies of Catholic theology in Germany shun what has contemptfully been called "Konklusionstheologie." Even the most faithful Thomists who defend the scientific character of theology (science here being taken in the Aristotelian-Thomistic sense) will emphasize more than ever before the sapiential function of theology, which makes it, according to Thomas, eminently practical and affective, even while eminently speculative. The conclusions drawn from premises contained in revelation are not regarded as leading away from the word of God, but rather as manifesting the full implications, and hence leading to a greater understanding of the very content, of divine revelation. All schools of German Catholic theology seek to understand reality in the light of God's

word and to correct forever a purely human logic by a greater conformity to Holy Scripture.

It would be interesting to discuss how this emphasis on *Heilsgeschichte* prevalent in contemporary German Catholic theology has found expression in the life of the faithful, how it has influenced the prayer-books, the devotions, the church services. This outlook has, of course, always been proper to the liturgy of the Church. The liturgical renewal which has affected the faithful of all areas in Germany, in city and in village alike, has no doubt in turn influenced theologians to put more stress on the historical perspective. Since this article is not on German Catholicism but only on Catholic theology in Germany, these matters do not properly belong here. To give but one example of how far these modern tendencies have penetrated to the people, I wish to refer to the saying of the rosary, the most popular Catholic devotion below the level of the liturgy. The rosary announces the gospel: the first movement includes the joyful mysteries of Christ's coming, the second the sorrowful mysteries of Christ's saving passion, and the third movement the glorious mysteries of Christ's victory and its consequence. Feeling that this third movement is not eschatological enough, many diocesan prayer-books in Germany now include a fourth set of mysteries dealing specifically with the present action of the glorified Christ and his return at the end of time. The historical emphasis in present-day Catholic thought moves both theologians and the people to a Christocentric vision of reality.