



The 'enemy within' the post-Vatican II Roman Catholic Church

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The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) is regarded as one of the most significant processes in the ecumenical church history of the 20th century. At that time, a younger generation of Roman Catholic theologians began to make their mark in the church and within the ecumenical theological scene. Their work provided an ecumenical bridge between the Reforming and the Roman Catholic ecclesiastical traditions, notwithstanding the subsequent negative response of the Roman church hierarchy. Despite important advances, recent pontificates significantly altered the theological landscape and undermined much of the enthusiasm and commitment to unity. Roman Catholic theological dissent provided common ground for theological reflection. Those regarded as the 'enemy within' have become respected colleagues in the search for truth in global ecclesiastical perspective. This article will use the distinction between the history and the narratives of Vatican II.

Introduction

The second Vatican Council (1962–1965) was a theological watershed for the Roman Catholic Church. Despite valiant attempts by the Curial administration to maintain rigid continuity with the past, a new generation of theologians emerged which represented the *aggiornamento* that Pope John XXIII so earnestly desired. This group was at the forefront of providing grounds for a *rapprochement* with Reforming theology. However, from the beginning of the pontificate of John Paul II, Catholic theology based in the Office of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith under Cardinal Josef Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) reasserted its power to control theological reflection through the replacement of history with narratives.

The history and the narratives

Faggioli (2012:4) defines narrative as 'a way to read the text not in the context that produced it, but in the context of the consequences that supposedly created the text.' Hence, narratives, like traditions, are dynamic rather than static entities (Tilley 2000:1). There are a variety of narratives which emerged from Vatican II. They are summarised from an American perspective by Steinfels (2003:32–39) as a critical error (ultra-traditionalist narrative), a process which was misinterpreted and distorted (conservative), the necessary change with a desire to engage in the world (liberal) and a false revolution (ultra-liberal). From this, it is evident that we can only describe the outcome of Vatican II as a plurality of narratives. For instance, it is the ultra-traditionalist narrative which emerged during the council itself, personified by Archbishop Marcel Lefèbre. With him, the concept of the 19th century papal magisterium is identified with the form and content of church teaching. In this narrative, dialogue is the diabolical outcome. Another narrative regards Vatican II as a council which was compromised from within even before it completed its work and whose after-effects were similarly compromised. This view is represented by Hans Küng who became a personal peritus to the Bishop of Rottenburg. His concern was the lack of an exegetical and historical basis for its conclusions. He wrote about his and others' involvement and its outcome:

The bishops present there – advised and prompted by theologians – spoke a lot about the breathing of the Holy Spirit; but under another Pope [*Paul VI*] they returned to their old surroundings and the papal curia tried to correct the mistakes of the new Pope's predecessor and to consolidate afresh its tottering rule over the Roman Empire. (Küng 1978:36)

Ten years later, he was still referring to the 'ecclesiastical bureaucracy fostering a restoration movement' (Küng 1986:1). A third narrative blends elements of the two – the ultra-traditionalist and the ultra-liberal resulting in a neoconservative narrative. Faggioli (2012:12) described the situation as a dialogue between 'two partially conflicting visions of Vatican II: [*these visions were represented by*] John Paul II's fundamentally positive view of the council and Ratzinger's decidedly pessimistic reading of the post-Vatican II period' with the ultra-conservative 'silent majority' narrative achieving control with the accession of Joseph Ratzinger as Benedict XVI. However one views the council and its after effects, the 'continuity/discontinuity' (Faggioli 2012:14) issue looms large, not least because the significant *History of Vatican II* (Alberigo 1996–2006), by emphasising

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the historicity of the council, challenged the neoconservative narrative of the so-called 'silent majority'. Yet, there still exists the remnant of a silenced majority who we describe as 'the enemy within'.

The 'enemy within'

It is unfortunate that a group of Roman Catholic (RC) theologians, who understood their work as promoting the values of Vatican II, have been perceived as sleeping with the theological enemy, namely reforming theologians. This is the heart of the problem for reforming thinkers. It is those who have been perceived as challenging the totalitarian system and who could have contributed so much to bringing churches closer together through offering their fresh theological insights who have consequently been alienated, isolated and even demonised. These are the very theologians whose works are sought out and studied and reflected upon by Protestants, both because their insights are accessible and non-confrontational and because they provide a pathway to ecumenical understanding and progress in addition to sound scripturally based theological discourse. Within this group, we number Leonardo Boff, Charles Curran, Edward Schillebeeckx and Hans Küng.

Leonardo Boff

Leonardo Boff (1986:14), a Brazilian Franciscan priest, makes it clear that the church was constituted by the gospel, the sacraments and the episcopacy. He does, however, go beyond this by declaring that the local (regional and congregational) units which are united with their pastors in community outreach also constitute the church. The Medellin Conference of Roman Catholic bishops in Latin America in 1968 had already declared as follows:

Thus the Christian base community is *the first and fundamental ecclesiastical nucleus*. ... The essential element for the existence of Christian base communities are [*sic*] their leaders or directors. These can be priests, deacons, men or women religious, or laymen. (Boff 1986:15)

Significant in this definition is the absence of bishops and the Eucharist – it represents the 'base' approach. In this ecclesial context, 'Christ's power (*exousia*) resides not only in certain members but in the totality of the people of God as vehicles of Christ's triple ministry of witness, oneness and worship' (Boff 1986:26). The unity of all God's people is recognised through their oneness in Christ (Gl 3:28) and the recognition that all possess charismata of one kind or another (1 Cor 7:7). It was Boff's *Church: Charism and power* (1981) which brought him to the close attention of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF). The central theme in the book is that, today, the practice and structure of the Catholic Church is an obstacle to the pursuit of the Christian task in Latin America. It offers an excellent critique of the Catholic Church in the 1980s. It critiques the church on its failure to follow through honestly on its statements in *Gaudium et Spes* in the post-conciliar decades. Boff (1981:n.p.) claimed that there was a rising tide of enthusiasm amongst the laity that was neither recognised nor accommodated by the hierarchy who

were striving for change in the forms of renewed structures, offices and authority. Furthermore, he argued:

... for this a new vision of the church is necessary. This vision has not yet been developed systematically in a way that responds to the demands of our global reality, but is necessary given what is happening in Latin America and elsewhere in the world. (Boff 1981:n.p.)

Agnew (1985) further suggested:

Boff taught that theology must have two eyes in order to relate the Gospel to today. The first eye deals with the historical and the factual. The second eye is more subjective and relates history to the present. (p. 1)

She went on to describe what she interprets as the:

... common path of ecclesiologies followed by the ecclesial communities. The first is the reality of clericalism and the need for obedience to the laws of the Church. The second ecclesiology is the goal for a communal Church with fraternity, service, and coresponsibility. The third is the reflection of the Church as a community and a People of God. The final ecclesiology is the praxis of open dialogue, equality, participation, and social commitment, all forming a community of love. (Agnew 1985:2)

Despite Boff's teachings being supported by many Christians in desperate situations, they were not well-received amongst Church authorities. The CDF investigated the views expressed by Boff at the instigation of the Archdiocesan Commission for the Doctrine of the Faith at Rio de Janeiro, which criticised his book *Church: Charism and power*. It judged that his teachings 'endanger the sound doctrine of the faith' (Ratzinger 1985:5). Ratzinger's charges against Leonardo Boff's *Church: Charism and power* demonstrate that his offence lay not in rejecting traditional office in the church but in developing 'another style of praxis of church office, a completely different way of translating the idea of church office into reality' (Greinacher 1986:158). Here was the problem of a church which had not existed and witnessed in a pattern of total conformity with Rome for centuries.

Boff's views were clearly construed as an attack on a monolithic, static institution. Yet, Boff's (1986) attack has had a significant positive impact on especially lay people because it:

... has served as a powerful factor for conscientisation, for consciousness-raising, in the sense of an ever more deeply felt need to get beyond authoritarian forms of relationship within the church to an awareness of the importance of 'human rights for Christians too', and a new courage on the part of the national conferences to defend the legitimacy of a theological thought accompanying a pastoral practice as a right of the local church itself. ... the behaviour of the Roman authorities has served fully to justify the criticism levelled in *Igreja: charisma e poder* against the mechanisms maintained by the central authorities of the church. (p. 233)

This was a direct challenge to the magisterium and its role in alone determining doctrinal probity. Boff was proscribed for a year, and in 1992, he again received threats of silencing from the Vatican. He resigned from the Franciscan order, but his resignation has never been accepted. All of this is very interesting, but Boff's views are significant far beyond the



specific time during which he was writing and the context from within which he was writing. It is clear that Boff and Ratzinger were operating with very different narratives regarding the process of implementing Vatican II. All of this is significant from a Reforming perspective where a fourfold, rather than a threefold, ministry is promoted: that of pastor, doctor, elder and deacon (Calvin *Institutes* IV:ii.2; IV:iii.8–9). The office of doctor follows from the spiritually gifted function of teacher (Calvin *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* 43–47, in Hall & Hall 1994:147; cf. Eph 4:11). Perhaps the rigid adherence to a threefold ministry has created a situation where the value of the academic scholar and teacher has been overlooked and/or undermined.

This indicates an area of dissonance in our understanding of the church, for the:

... church in the New Testament means first and foremost the concrete local community, and that structures and offices that reach beyond the local level are primarily intended to facilitate the life of the primary, local community. ... the Roman curia cannot let go of a notion of the church as something that is highly centralised in its leadership, completely European in appearance and absolutist-monarchical in government. ... this kind of absolutising of a particular social form of church has no legitimate basis in the New Testament. (Greinacher 1986:159)

Van der Water (2005) claimed that:

... sacred and secular texts alike show conclusively that up until the 3rd century, the Early church was characterised by vibrant fellowship amongst believers, by the adoption of a simple and egalitarian lifestyle and by the rapid growth of a dynamic movement. (p. 204)

The political concept which governed the earliest Christian community was democracy as can be seen from references to the action of the whole church: the election of Stephen (Ac 6:5), the sending of Barnabas to Antioch (Ac 11:12), the choice of those to go to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas (Ac 15:22). As Küng (2003) argues, Paul writes not to an individual but to the entire church community at Corinth regarding *inter alia* worship:

It means that the community at Corinth celebrated the eucharist even without the apostle, and even without a bishop or presbyter. ... And Protestant communities with pastors who don't stand in the apostolic succession of ministry can celebrate the eucharist in a quite valid way. (pp. 350–351)

The issue here is who determines who stands in apostolic succession? Further, there are views on apostolic succession other than those which emanate from Rome, for example '[t]rue apostolic succession consists of those in every age who continue the journey of the cross that Jesus first walked' (Resner 2001:235). Within the Reforming tradition, the key to apostolic succession rests on the faithful transmission of the apostolic witness, and this is not reserved solely to bishops. The revised schema on ecumenism failed to address key issues for non-Catholics:

... important truths of the gospel like the justification of the sinner or the freedom of a Christian. ... The criterion of Episcopal succession and church order (and the celebration of the eucharist associated with it) seems arbitrary. It is not in keeping either

with the biblical (Pauline?) evidence or with the problems of the Protestant Reformation. ... there is a need for intellectual humility towards other Christian communities Not a return to the Catholic Church but – as the title of the decree will eventually run – the restoration of unity, 'Unitatis Redintegratio'. (Küng 2003:385–386)

Küng (1971:67) goes further by claiming that every Christian follower stands in apostolic succession by seeking after harmony with apostolic teaching, faith and confession through apostolic service and witness.

The Shepherd of Hermas (27[104]:2) indicates that 'leadership of the Church at Rome as a committee of presbyters. ... [there was] no evidence of monepiscopacy at Rome or anywhere else.' These were communities used to electing their own leaders as we note from several writings of other Apostolic Fathers: Didache (15:1–2), Clement of Rome's letter (1 Clement 44.5) as well as Hippolytus' *Traditio Apostolica* (2.7.8) and Cyprian's *Patrologia Latina* (4.317–318) (Swidler 1986:308–309). This was the tradition up to the 12th century. Even later forms of monepiscopacy did not indicate 'the nearly absolutist authoritarian power centre it later became. It operated more like a limited monarchy, or just as accurately said, a limited democracy' (Swidler 1986:308).

In terms of decision-making, Swidler (1986:310) cites Eusebius (*Patrologia Graeca*, 20.468) who states that the 'faithful ... examined the new doctrines and condemned the heresy'; and Cyprian (Epistle, liv) '[t]his business should be examined in all its parts in your presence and with your counsel', as examples of scholars who regularly consulted the laity. This practice was lost at Vatican I, but a reversion to the apostolic practice of shared ministry was inaugurated at Vatican II:

... and in fact was followed up in this regard by the 1971 Synod of Bishops when it stated 'The members of the Church should have some share in the drawing up of decisions, in accordance with the rules given by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and the Holy See, for instance, with regard to the setting up of councils at all levels. (Swidler 1986:312–313).

In characteristically forthright manner, Küng (2003) states:

It would be a magnificent manifestation of freedom to take those repressive institutions which the church got on very well with out for 1500 years, and which are unquestionably out of date today, and boldly and confidently abolish them: the Index of Prohibited Books; advance censorship of religious books and Roman inquisitorial proceedings ... (p. 307)

Such a move would also be a demonstration of a commitment to ecumenism. Greinacher (1986) draws our attention to a matter which is close to Küng's and Boff's position:

But it is not just a matter of the church; it is also a question of the human future. The theology of liberation is undoubtedly an important force within the comprehensive process of liberation of the people and peoples in the Third World, who hope at last to become the subject of their own history. So what is at stake is not simply the future of the church, but also the future of human persons. For people do not exist for the church. The church exists for people. (p. 161)

Charles Curran

The tension between theology and Catholic practice on the one hand and official teaching of the church on the other hand has been discernible in the United States and elsewhere in the area of moral theology (Curran 1986:273). For Curran (1986):

... the ultimate problem seems to come from the fact that the hierarchical magisterium has claimed a greater certitude for this teaching than should have actually been claimed. Nonfallible teaching by definition is reformable. All must recognise that the primary forger in the Christian community is the Holy Spirit. (p. 276)

The action of the Holy Spirit was the basic premise on which Pope John XXIII convoked the Second Vatican Council – to update the way in which the Church expressed its teaching. Curran's case introduced another dynamic to dissent. Curran is an American moral theologian who questioned the morality of making absolute demands regarding the total prohibition of artificial methods of contraception. He came to be known in 1968 as spokesman for theologians who dissented from the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* that artificial contraception is always evil. Cardinal Ratzinger of the CDF disallowed that dissent as well as certain other of Father Curran's positions which he says denied the church's authoritative, non-infallible teaching on homosexuality, masturbation, premarital sex, abortion and euthanasia:

The Cardinal cites Vatican II's *Constitution on the Church* (No. 25), which calls for 'submission of mind and will' to teaching of this sort, and also Canon 752 of the new Code, which incorporates the thought of Vatican II on the matter. But to see how inconclusive citations can be, one has only to read the commentary of the Canon Law Society of America on c. 752: 'Dissent is possible because the teachers mentioned in the canon [*Supreme Pontiff and College of Bishops*] can be and *de facto* have been mistaken. (America Magazine 1986:1)

This qualification also raises questions relating to infallibility which will be discussed below. So, Häring (1986) indicates, a:

specially appointed committee [*of the CDF*] concluded that not dissent as such but only improperly expressed dissent with respect to a noninfallible teaching of the ecclesiastical magisterium would constitute such a violation of the theologian's responsibility. ... In this long process of investigation Curran has continually asked the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to clarify whether it considers dissent, whether from infallible or nonfallible teaching, to be a punishable offence in itself or if the congregation considers as punishable only improperly expressed dissent. (pp. 237, 239)

No clarification was offered. Curran claimed that, by dissenting from noninfallible teachings, he had adhered to the United States' bishops' explicit criteria for such dissent, as argued by Pasinski (2011):

... if the reasons are serious and well-founded, if the manner of the dissent does not question or impugn the teaching authority of the church and is such as not to give scandal – as set forth in No. 51 of the pastoral letter 'Human Life in Our Day,' issued on 15 November 1968, soon after *Humanae Vitae*. (p. 1)

Curran stated that he accepted these criteria of the United States bishops but wondered whether the Vatican did

because they were extending their own authority in an arbitrary manner.

It is a truism that, in the American church, as in other places:

... there is widespread teaching, not to mention pastoral practice, that does not adhere strictly to all the official teachings mentioned in Cardineil [*sic*] Ratzinger's letter – for example, with respect to contraception. Is it just to single out Father Curran [*sic*]? Is it sensible? After all, several of his opinions are typical rather than exceptional, especially among the church's middle managers (chancery personnel, pastors in their 40's and 50's, religious women and men in service and education posts) who keep the ecclesiastical apparatus running. Surely such facts and questions must be taken into account by those wishing to provide the church with intelligent and pastoral leadership. (America Magazine 1986)

This being the case, it is extremely unfortunate that the church hierarchy single out individuals for special unfavourable treatment when they appear to be simply representative of the rank and file of many theologians and church members. As we will see in the case of Hans Küng (below), this does not in any sense detract from their strong sense of loyalty to the church. Curran is clear that he will continue to love and serve the Catholic Church. He affirms that his views are both catholic and reasonable. Pasinski (2011) has described Curran as a 'martyr' for theological inquiry and integrity within faith.

From a Protestant perspective, the issue of process becomes paramount: '... [E]ducated Protestants ... are not much moved, to put it mildly, by a claim to authority when patient dialogue has been refused' (Häring 1986:241). However, it is worse than that when it comes to matters of morality where there is a lack of freedom for theological discussion: 'It is not a climate of openness, but one of fear; it is not a climate of communion but one of claims to positions of power' (Mieth 1986:142).

In late 2010, Curran was still trying to validate his credentials in a lecture entitled 'The U.S. Catholic bishops and abortion legislation: A critique from within the Church'. Fox (2010) argued that Curran's presentation did not dispute the Catholic teaching that direct abortion is always wrong. Instead, Curran argued that Catholicism's moral teaching can simply lead to different legal conclusions. Curran stated 'God has given human beings our free will. All of us will use free will at times to commit sin. ... But God does not advocate sinning.' The Rev. Thomas Reese, a senior fellow at Woodstock Theological Centre in Washington DC, had a chance to read Curran's paper and commented:

His argument is within the mainstream of current thought by Catholic moral theologians. ... He makes a sophisticated and complex argument that Catholics can disagree over the prudence of various legal approaches to abortion while still holding that abortion is immoral. (Fox 2010: n.p.)

Curran's is another example of an ultra-conservative narrative being imposed on the outcomes of Vatican II.

Edward Schillebeeckx

Belgian theologian, Edward Schillebeeckx, who had been a *peritus* (expert consulting theologian) at Vatican II, came



under scrutiny as a result of the publication of his *Jesus – An experiment in Christology* (1979) and, in particular, his departure from the use of the language of the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE). Schillebeeckx explained his position:

I tried to help people to realise how Jesus was experienced by his contemporaries. Jesus shows us what God will be for us and what man must be for God. I do not deny that Jesus is God, but want to assert that he is also man, something that has been overlooked. It is precisely as man that he is important for us. But when you say that you are suspect. They (Roman theologians) always want you to go on repeating the Chalcedonian formulas. But unless you set the Chalcedonian formulas in the context of Greek philosophy, you will misunderstand them. In my book I tried to make these formulations come alive for the people of today. When you do that, you discover a Christ who puts down the mighty and gives the poor a first place. Yes, that can be revolutionary. (Interview, Richard Auwerda, *de Volkskrant*, 18 October 1979 in Hebblethwaite 1980:13–14)

As a result of an attack by the CDF, who interpret Vatican II restrictively, Schillebeeckx was supported by Dutch Reformed theologians who complained of the 'harm to ecumenism and the "serious consequences" for the study of dogmatic theology generally.' On Schillebeeckx's influence on Reformed theology, Hebblethwaite (1980) commented:

... if one sometimes heard in the Vatican that Schillebeeckx had been unduly influenced by Reformed theology, here were Reformed theologians saying that, on the contrary, they had been influenced by him. (p. 16)

Theologians at several European catholic universities also expressed support for Schillebeeckx. The Missionary Council of the Dutch Church wrote to the Papal Nuncio in the Hague: '... our greatest concern is that this [judicial] process will harm the credibility of the Church, do harm to evangelisation and to missionary dedication' (Hebblethwaite 1980:19). British theologians, writing in *The Times* of 03 December 1979, commented that the approach adopted by the CDF violated theologians' human rights, threatened freedom of academic research which is a vital component in the search for meaning and truth, brought the authority which used such procedures into disrepute and undermined the delicate atmosphere of mutual trust which had been developing over several decades (Hebblethwaite 1980:23–24). Such attitudes as those displayed by the RC church are a denial of the freedom and integrity that is fundamental to academic study. Cardinal Basil Hume's comment is apposite in that he was not considered to be one of the church's more radical thinkers:

How do we reconcile the right and duty of the theologian to pursue his researches in academic freedom with the limitations of the human mind to discover truths about God which always lie beyond its [RC Church] competence? (*The Times* 03 January 1980 in Hebblethwaite 1980:100)

At issue here was the attempt to give Vatican II an interpretation that was 'narrow, restrictive and, in the end, thoroughly distorting' (Hebblethwaite 1980:104). On 05 October 1980, John Paul II quoted John XXIII (Opening of Vatican II, 11 October 1961 in Abbott 1966:715) regarding the real issue at stake at the Council which was to take:

A step forwards towards a doctrinal penetration and a formation of the consciousness of the faithful in perfect conformity to the authentic doctrine which, however, should be studied and expounded through the methods of research and the literary forms of modern thought. The substance of the ancient deposit of the faith is one thing, and the way it is presented is another. ... if the premise of the pontificate is that theologians have got out of hand, then it follows logically that they should be brought back to order and sound discipline. But there is always a price to be paid for repressive actions in the Church. They may check supposedly erroneous developments, they may reassure those who want to be told that nothing has changed or will change, they may bring comfort to the impenitent (and there are well founded rumours of a reconciliation with Archbishop Marcel Lefèbre), but they also alienate Christians within and without the Church. The Church is always in a state of tension between its 'ideal image' and its actual life. Ideally it is the home of truth-seeking love, light, mutual encouragement, growth in the Spirit, prayer, harmony, reconciled diversity. In practice it can become, for a time, a place of fear, anxiety, denunciations, neurosis. When that happens, the well-meaning defence of orthodoxy becomes a counter-witness to the gospel. (Hebblethwaite 1980:123)

Jack Dominian (1975), a leading Roman Catholic pastoral theologian, took a similar view:

If I were asked to point to one psychological reason why the hopes of Vatican II are so slow to develop, I would suggest that the retardation occurs at all levels when authority has been challenged legitimately and validly but has not had the psychological resources or insight to cope, and has retreated either in evasion, postponement or repression. (p. 157)

On the subject of a critique of the subject of ministry, Willems (1986) documents that the following was said in defence of Schillebeeckx:

... there arises the danger, from the Roman perspective that the entire hierarchical edifice will begin to totter. Viewed from these established positions, everything depends on being able to demonstrate that the presently existing organisation of ordained ministries in the church goes back to the Lord and his apostles. That is why the structures – like the doctrines guaranteed by the proper authority – are 'eternal and unchangeable'. That is why therefore, no ordained ministers (elected) 'from below', no laymen or laywomen as pastoral assistants, no room for women in ordained ministry, no experiments with married priests, since none of them could be fully loyal to the vicar of Christ on earth. (p. 219)

Willems (1986) further argues that, for Schillebeeckx:

[a] faith community that perseveres in the teaching of the apostles and, like the apostles, desires to live as Jesus' disciples, is certainly also apostolic, even if sometimes, because of certain circumstances, no validly ordained priest is present. (p. 220)

This also applied to the celebration of the eucharist by a non-ordained person. There is not a great deal of distance between these and Boff's views. In response, Ratzinger again applied his ultra-traditionalist narrative.

Hans Küng

Hans Küng, a Swiss theologian, who has taught at Tübingen for many years was also a *periti* at Vatican II and was deeply involved in the preparation of a number of Vatican II documents. He made a substantial study of the question



of papal infallibility (Küng 1971). Küng does not accept that 'infallibility' has a high priority in the agenda of Catholic theological questions. The Second Vatican Council declared that 'in Catholic teaching there exists an order or hierarchy of truths, since they vary in their relationship to the foundation of Christian faith' (*Unitatis Redintegratio* §11 in Abbott 1966:354). This subject cannot be at the top of the list because why wait until 1870 to define a doctrine not universally held by the church as such?

However, Küng touched one of the raw nerves of the Catholic church which touches on the issue of authority, claiming the following: 'With good reason the churches of the Reformation and the Orthodox churches of the East have rejected the doctrine of infallibility from the start' (Küng 2008:479). The matter is, however, not as straightforward as it may appear, as Küng (2008) points out:

... the infallibility debate is ... followed with excitement in Protestant circles ... There is no question that the Reformation churches, too, could accept the doctrine understood in this sense: an indefectibility, indestructibility of the church as the overall community of faith, whose faith will never perish despite the error of individuals holding office. (p. 170)

At another occasion, Küng (1971) argues:

If, as against the infallibility of the bishops or the Pope in particular, we lay emphasis on the infallibility or rather indefectibility or perpetuity of the Church in the truth, all that we are really doing is returning to a good and ancient and fortunately never extinguished tradition. (p. 152)

Küng (1971:160) does point out that the Reformed churches do accept the latter.

This is an issue of serious ecumenical concern and a hindrance to progress for Küng (2008), who argues as follows:

I have proposed ecumenical solutions. For the churches of Eastern Orthodoxy this is the question of the infallibility of ecumenical councils, but for churches of the Protestant Reformation it is the question of the infallibility (inerrancy) of the Bible. (p. 171)

He does acknowledge that the infallibility is a question to which there are various responses in Protestantism. In any rapprochement with the Reforming tradition, Küng (1971:163), following the thinking of Bishop Francis Simons, states that '(1) that the infallibility of the teaching office requires to be substantiated from Scripture, but that (2) such substantiation cannot be provided.' Küng (1971) calls on Kasper's support that Vatican II supercedes the Vatican I notion of infallibility and comments that this:

... means the confidence of faith that, in spite of many errors in detail, intrinsically the Church is maintained in the truth of the gospel by the Spirit of God. Infallibility would then be regarded dynamically instead of statically. (p. 163)

Küng (1971:164–171) correctly alerts us to the fact that other churches struggle with the concept of infallibility. According to this definition, my own Uniting Presbyterian Church in SA's (2007) understanding is helpful:

The Uniting Church affirms its right to formulate, adopt, modify and interpret its doctrinal statements, always subject to the Word of God, under the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit and in

accord with the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith Of this accord this Church itself shall be the sole judge. The Church recognises liberty of opinion on all points of doctrine that are not fundamental to the faith. But it retains the right in every case to judge what falls within this description and to guard against any abuse of this liberty that may injure its witness, unity or peace. (p. 2.1)

Here, the Church always refers to the church meeting in council though it is important to remember that councils can also err. They can and also have corrected one another and have amended decisions of previous councils (Küng 1971:168).

St Augustine confronted this issue:

Who would not know that the holy canonical Scriptures both of the Old and New Testament have a priority over all subsequent writings of bishops ... but that the writings of bishops after the settlement of the canon may be refuted both by the perhaps wiser words of anyone more experienced in the matter and by the weightier authority and more scholarly prudence of other bishops and also by councils. (*De baptismo contra Donatistas*, 3.ii in Küng 1971:169)

Then Küng (1971:171) takes on the Protestants regarding the infallibility of Scripture, and here we are confronted with the multifarious views of the Reforming traditions regarding *sola scriptura*, particularly with regard to the theories of literal inspiration and literal inerrancy (Küng 1971:171–175) (which are rejected by and held as untenable by many Protestants!):

Deviation from the truth on historical or scientific matters in no way endangered the authority of the Scripture at the present time. Theologically, it rather provided evidence of the divine condescension. God took the human author with all his weaknesses and fallibility and still achieved his aim of teaching man the 'truth' of revelation. (Küng 1971:175)

Ultimately for Küng (1971) and many Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants:

The truth is rather that the whole process, the origin, collection and transmission of the word, the acceptance in faith and further proclamation of the message, is under the guidance and control of the Spirit. (p. 177)

In fact, the ultimate issue seems to be what constitutes truth:

Truth in the biblical sense means faithfulness, constancy, reliability, the faithfulness of God to his words and his promises as they have been shown anew in Jesus Christ, and to this degree is also the truth of Jesus Christ ... divine truth, the truth of the one infallible God, indeed God as the truth. ... The church remains in the truth wherever Jesus himself remains 'the truth' (= the Christ) for the individual or the community. But Jesus does not remain the truth simply by being confessed as the truth. As 'the truth' he is also 'the way' and 'the life'. That means that one lives out the truth that he is, so that this Jesus – his message, his conduct, his fate, his spirit – remains ultimately decisive in the life of the individual and the community of faith for relations both with fellow men and women and with God himself. 'For there is only one God, and there is only one mediator between God and humanity, himself a human being, Christ Jesus' (I Timothy 2:5). (Küng 2008:522–523)

It is a truism that the '... maintenance of the identity of the Catholic Church ... is a condition for real ecumenical



dialogue and the fulfilment of the Church's tasks in society' (Hebblethwaite 1980:162), and Hebblethwaite (1980) points out that no one would deny this, particularly Küng's appeal statement:

As a Catholic theologian I had and have a special concern for the 'Catholic Church', that is the 'general, the all embracing, the universal Church'. For that reason I have tried and try to teach Christian truth in all its Catholic breadth and depth. So all my life I have been concerned with the unbroken continuity – through whatever ruptures of faith and the community of faith: that is 'catholic' in time. Likewise I have stressed the universality of faith and of the believing community which unites different groups: that is 'catholicity' in space. ... In my previous writings on infallibility I have never questioned the following points: there are certain Church statements that are true and recognisably true: their meaning remains the same despite the historical changes in modes of thought, and they require an unambiguous yes or no. ... Likewise I acknowledge that the Church has the duty and the task of preaching the Christian message in relation to the Gospel and of expressing it clearly and bindingly. Of course at the same time one has to take seriously the Declaration *Mysterium Ecclesiae* (1973) on the historical conditioning of all historical documents. (pp. 163, 165).

This appeal was a direct challenge to Ratzinger's narrative approach. From this, it should be clear that Küng had no desire to become a Protestant (Hebblethwaite 1980:98). 'I am truly Catholic and will remain so' (Küng 2003:397). It was the fact that he was committed to catholic theology and the Catholic Church that he felt bound to express his concerns regarding the negative interpretation of Vatican II which was being promoted (Küng 1971:22). In the sense that he believed that Vatican II has been distorted and misrepresented, Küng emerged as a follower of a conservative narrative. Together with those discussed above, he represents a narrative which seeks out a base in historical studies by establishing an institutional memory in opposition to the ultra-traditionalist narrative which has come to dominate the RC Church.

The 'Fourth Men' of the church

Hebblethwaite (1975:227–241) prefers to describe the 'enemy within', theologians such as Boff, Curran, Schillebeeckx and Küng, as the 'Fourth Men' of the Church (the First Men were the 'progressives', the Second Men were the 'conservatives' and the Third Men had simply stopped identifying with the church [Hebblethwaite 1975:227]). They are those:

... who remain within the church while recognising that they are in conflict with it on major points. ... they not only remain in the Church out of conviction, they cannot conceive of leaving it, and for a very simple reason: they think of the Church simply as humanity in so far as it has recognised, however falteringly, its vocation in Christ. They can no more leave the church than they can take leave of humanity. To do so would be a form of spiritual suicide. ... His adhesion to the Church is a form of critical belonging, and he sees criticism not as self-indulgence but as a duty if identification is to be combined with integrity. (Hebblethwaite 1975:236)

However, 'the Church also needs the Fourth Man. His [potential] role is as the agent or at least the catalyst of change'

(Hebblethwaite 1975:238). Hebblethwaite (1975) points out the following:

The Council did not make the Body its central and controlling image of the Church. It balanced it with images of growth, and above all with the model of the People of God in history. The People of God is *in transit*. If it stands still to contemplate its own splendour, it becomes false to its calling; if it absolutises a moment in its journey, it betrays its origin and its pilgrim destination. (p. 239)

These 'Fourth Men' can provide a significant catalyst for action in the wake of Benedict XVI's sudden resignation. According to Freind (2013), this event 'has given the Catholic Church an unprecedented opportunity to save itself. And since the eleventh hour is upon the Church, the Pope's action could not have come at a better time.' The subsequent election of Pope Francis I has already signified a progressive commitment to social justice. However, it is important that we do not read too much into this at such an early stage of the new pontificate for, as Chertoff (2013) points out:

To a certain extent that puts Francis in company with his liberation-theologist brothers in Latin America, even if they part ways on political agitation – and on a lot of the social issues that have come to define conflict within the church. (p. 1)

It does not mean that he will not govern the church as a traditionalist since he adheres to orthodox Catholic stances on contraception and homosexuality, for 'indeed, the new pope is expected to take a conservative stance on social doctrine' (Chertoff 2013). And, like his predecessors, he will be unlikely to depart from their teaching, especially whilst one of them is still alive and living close at hand.

Conclusion

In essence, one needs to remember that '[t]he Church is a voluntary association' (Hebblethwaite 1975:239) with all that that implies. Yet, it can also be an institution governed by strict authoritarian regulations. Theologians who have stood out against an ultra-traditionalist narrative have been undermined, marginalised, disciplined and demonised. However, the more they were alienated and the more the previously secret became astonishingly public, Reformers became more intrigued by their prodigious output and found much common ground which provided a means for engagement in an ecumenical theological approach. It is interesting to note that the historiography of Vatican II has expanded and deepened our understanding whilst the narratives have remained relatively static. Ecumenically, at least at an institutional level, this has led to a lost opportunity. Here was a means of moving closer together and finding one another in the Spirit of God through the discovery of an authentic open secret.

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