

A RESPONSE: PICTURES AND PROBLEMS

I am happy for the chance to respond to the paper of Professor Joseph Komonchak, whose continuing scholarship is a contribution to us all.

Professor Komonchak has given us an interesting paper, even a suggestive one. It seeks more to clarify the situation than to offer praise or blame. At the heart of the paper is its suggestion "that the internal tensions between Church and theology cannot be understood without understanding the transformation which has taken place in the Church's relationship with modern culture." To elaborate this thesis, Professor Komonchak has painted for us a series of pictures. First, he sketches the Church of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when "official Catholicism began to include in its self-definition a repudiation of the principles on which modern society and culture were basing themselves." To serve this repudiation, the Church multiplied its organizations and centralized its authority so that it had, like the modern state, "an ultimate and unappealable authority to guarantee its doctrinal and structural integrity." At Vatican II, Catholicism made a dramatic change in its evaluation of modernity and sought to reform its procedures and shed its Eurocentric character. Finally, in his picture of Catholicism since the Council, Professor Komonchak sketches for us the conflict among theologies of the right, the left, and the far left. He also describes the tension between ecclesiastical magisterium and theologians. Theologians, on the one hand, have emerged from their intellectual ghetto to grapple with construction of a theology which mediates between religion and a culture, using in part some distinctive features of modernity even when criticizing modernity. Meanwhile the magisterium wishes to safeguard "the centuries-old Catholic insistence that Catholicism as a faith offers an alternative to both the liberal and the socialist articulations of human life and that this vision requires for its preservation and for its effectiveness a united and spiritually vibrant community of faith." Such a vision makes the present pontificate's emphases more understandable, we have heard. At the same time, the magisterium should recognize the appropriate autonomy and unique role of theology in correlating Church and culture.

Professor Komonchak points out with insight the difficulty of discerning on particular issues who are the conservatives, who the liberals. I would add that the same problem exists in trying to determine and evaluate who is really modern in practice. This question might complicate even more the pictures which Professor Komonchak has painted. He correctly reminds us that Vatican II recovered a more biblical, traditional, liturgical, and symbolic language from the premodern world precisely in order to serve modern concerns. Theologians working on ecumenical statements find themselves using this same method of recovery. It is also interesting to remember that minority bishops at Vatican I complained about the pro-

posed definition of papal infallibility for two reasons: both because it would offend modern ears and because it represented extreme novelty, a departure from earlier practice which they sought to preserve. George Tavard echoes these minority bishops when he criticizes the overly centralized modern exercise of authority by the magisterium for its managerial style, which he claims it adopted from the modern capitalist model.¹ If theologians must be evaluated critically in their adoption of modern insights for their work, the magisterium must be asked similar questions about its adoption of a modern managerial style.

Again, in a second way, the problem arises: who is really modern? I think that both theologians and the magisterium are tempted to adopt another modern practice when we analyze our roles within the Church: the ambivalent practice of specialization. Each has its job, we think, different but serving the same overall purpose. Often the magisterium these days seems to understand its purpose too much the way Professor Komonchak at one place appears to be recommending. He believes that tradition serves the role of the "classic," and often the magisterium as well understands its role to be the preservation of tradition as a classic confronting the modern world. In this division-of-labor model, the theologians are then charged with the role of mediating between culture and the classics. But does not this picture of specialization, like a portrait of part workers in an early industrial factory, lose the dynamic sense of tradition? For Catholic theology, tradition is not just a "classic," not just the past, but *anamnesis*, a dynamic remembering which effectively proclaims for today the remembered events of the past, and so makes their benefits available for today's hearers. Tradition, handing on, in this sense is the work of both magisterium and theologians; in a conflict between them the challenge is to discern who proclaims the tradition, that is, who proclaims dynamically for today the implications of the biblical vision. Such conflicts are not resolved if we use the division-of-labor model from the modern factory. Perhaps in modern conflict situations between theologians and magisterium our real problem is what Professor Komonchak calls the principle of formal authority in the Church, that is, "the identification of authority with office" so that it became "the guiding methodological criterion of Catholic apologetics and theology." Such a criterion tends too much toward prejudging a conflict. Is not this identification, like the identification of tradition with the function of a "classic," one of modernity's dangers?

Karl Rahner noted that the history of theology is a history of forgetting as well as remembering.² The minority of Vatican I and theologians in ecumenical dialogue today both agree that remembering and recovering our earlier ecclesiology may in fact be the best service to the modern world. Vatican II agreed and began to recover the biblical and patristic ecclesiology of communion. In addition, it emphasized the call and responsibility of the whole Church to pass on the tradition of the Gospel in every age. In this twentieth anniversary year of that great council, we need to remember again its vision of openness to the positive insights of the

¹George Tavard, "Primacy in *The Final Report*," unpublished paper delivered at the General Theological Seminary, New York, N.Y., 8 October 1983.

²Karl Rahner, "Current Problems in Christology," in *Theological Investigations I*, trans. Cornelius Ernst (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961), p. 151.

modern world linked intimately with its recovery of an authentic ecclesiology. Professor Komonchak has again done us a service in evoking this remembrance, and for this we thank him.

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