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Ignaz v. Döllinger: the development of a XIXth century Ecumenist*

It is not an easy task in our days to reflect on ecumenism in the past. The technical term 'ecumenism', designating the efforts towards reunion of Christians, is a twentieth century creation and many think that only we twentieth century giants have correctly felt the problem and invented the right tools to tackle it. We have ecumenism at all levels: The Ecumenical Council of Churches, ecumenical commissions, theologians and managers of ecumenism, ecumenical reviews and working sessions, ecumenism on the parish level, lectures on ecumenical theology. To say it briefly, ecumenism has become a concern of the whole Christian community.

Yet we are told that the young are growing impatient, that they are disillusioned by the slowness of its progress, that social action and commitment to the Third World are serious rivals of ecumenism and are actually the primary concern of contemporary youth. A former official of the Roman Catholic Secretariate for the Reunion of Christians complains in bitter words about the stagnation in ecumenical dialogue today. He blames, above all, the institutions, Catholic and Protestant, for what he calls an attitude of schizophrenia in ecumenical contacts. It is not dialogue, he says, that Church leaders are aiming at; rather, they want conversion. 'We cannot expect to overcome our denominational differences from official dialogue. The Reason is that its participants are bound to the creed of their respective Churches. They cannot examine with an open mind the decisive questions; these remain out of their reach and are put under taboo¹.' Thus we have Ecumenism in crisis, despite a plethora of ecumenical dialogue.

If this analysis of the present crisis is correct, what can be said in favour of ecumenism in the past? For even if the technical term did not exist, the reality itself was there, the quest for union and reunion. And if denominational self-righteousness is labelled one of the basic reasons for ecumenical stagnation in our times, how much more must this have been the case in previous times. Was not ecumenism in for-

* A lecture given at the university of Louvain Jan. 1973

¹ A. Hasler, Rom-Wittenberg-Genf. Kirchenamtlicher Dialog in der Krise. In: Begegnung (Festschrift Fries), Graz-Wien-Köln 1972, p. 389-401, esp. p.

mer times necessarily amateurish, biassed, triumphalist, shortsighted? Yet, is there anything at all, that can be said in its favour?

The background of John Ignatius v. Döllinger², one of the leading figures of ecumenism in the nineteenth century, was that of militant catholicism. He spent his life in a country which was predominantly catholic, where protestantism was a minority and where Catholics enjoyed, in spite of occasional vexations of government bureaucrats, a privileged position.

He was born in 1799 in Bamberg in Francionia, the son of Ignaz Döllinger, doctor of medicine and famous embryologist in the University of Würzburg. He had a genuine calling to the priesthood, and his devotion to theology was not that of a passive, brooding youth who had fled the pressures of life for the refuge of a scholar's attic. In 1823 he became Professor of Church History and Canon Law at Aschaffenburg. Three years later King Ludwig I brought him to Munich, to which university and city he remained loyal throughout his life. Munich was, at that time, the Mecca of German catholic students. Young men poured in from the Rhineland, Westphalia, Silesia and Prussia, for the privilege of studying there.

During his first decade in Munich, the young professor learned a good deal himself. From Möhler, a colleague about three years his senior, and more gifted than himself in speculative theology, he readily imbibed the doctrine of the 'organic' concept of the Church. Franz von Baader, the *Philosophus per fulgur*, inspired his philosophical development, while Joseph von Görres, the old fighter against the domination of the Church by the State, fired his early enthusiasm for religious freedom. Görres' home, in the Schönfeldstrasse, was the meeting-place of prominent Catholic figures in German and European life. Every week Döllinger attended this gathering of philosophers, mys-

² *J. Friedrich*: Ignaz v. Döllinger, 3 vol., Munich 1899–1901. The best comprehensive article is that of Lord *Acton*, *Döllinger's Historical Work*, in, *The History of Freedom and other Essays*. London 1907, p. 375–435; id.: *Döllinger on the Temporal Power*, *ibid.* p. 301–374. A full bibliography will be found in the article by *W. Müller* in *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques*, vol. XIV, col. 553–563. See also *V. Conzemius*: *Aspects ecclésiologiques de l'évolution de Döllinger et du vieux-catholicisme*, in: *Revue des sciences religieuses*, vol. XXXIV, 1960 p. 247–479; *I. v. Döllinger*: *Briefwechsel mit Lord Acton* (ed. by *V. Conzemius*). 3 vol. Munich 1963–1971. For a more recent outline of Döllinger's work as a theologian, see *J. Finsterhölzl*: *Ignaz v. Döllinger (Wegbereiter heutiger Theologie)* Graz–Wien–Köln 1969. In course of publication is a dissertation by *Finsterhölzl*, *Die Kirche in der Theologie Ignaz von Döllingers* (Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1974)

tics, politicians and scientists. These visits proved more than an occasion for relaxing in congenial company. He met there not only current political views, but also those of outspoken Catholic writers, who yearned for a breakthrough of Catholicism into public life. Döllinger inherited even more from Görres: the sense of a mission to fight for the freedom of the Church, a polemical verve, a grasp of current issues and a daring in dealing with them, a tendency towards the broad view and that liberal type of Germanism which was ready to receive ideas from all over the world. Also in these early years, Döllinger himself became known outside Germany by reason of his close friendships with leading French and English Catholics. He wanted to share in their spiritual problems, take up their causes, have a part in their plans, and unite them as a strong and vital force in the Catholic life of Europe. At home he fought for the Church in the pages of militant Catholic journals, in the heated discussions of the Bavarian parliament and Frankfurt National Assembly.

His academic work at this time was also devoted to the service of apologetics. He did not embark on original research until well into the second half of his life. His intellectual greatness is not diminished by the fact that he spent his early years on *histoire à thèse*. He was not alone in this; he shared it with all the great historians of his time, including men outside the Church: Michelet and Thiers, Macaulay and Taine, who all wrote under the spell of an ideology that was definitely nationalistic, chauvinistic, positivist and Whig. But Döllinger eventually succeeded in breaking free of denominational limitations. In 1853 his first brilliant critical work, *Hippolytus and Callistus* appeared. This was followed in 1857 by *The Gentile and the Jew in the Courts of the Temple of Christ: an Introduction to the History of Christianity* and in 1860 by the *First Age of Christianity and the Church*. These works were well received by believing Protestants in Germany; in England, they provided Catholics and Anglicans with a protective dam against the rising flood of rationalist biblical exegesis. Thus was Döllinger acclaimed as a theologian of the Christian 'oikoumene'. Indeed he was the first and only Catholic church-historian of his time to enjoy such general esteem.

His first literary acquaintance with Protestantism was indirect, i. e., the reading of the works of the famous so-called romantic converts to Roman Catholicism – Eckhart, Werner, Schlegel, Stolberg and Winckelmann³. Furthermore as a college student in the

³ Friedrich, op. cit., vol. I, p. 86.

aftermath of the Reformation jubilee of 1817 he read one of the less attractive polemical pamphlets of Luther: 'Das Papsttum vom Teufel gestift'. According to Friedrich his biographer who relies on the oral testimony of Döllinger himself, this pamphlet made a lasting impression, and it can be presumed, not a favourable one⁴. It would require a special investigation to grasp Döllinger's appreciation of Protestantism in his early journalism. There are few articles of this period where he deals directly with Protestantism. His opinions on the subject appear mostly in occasional book reviews.

More important is his treatment of the Reformation in the second volume of Hortig's *Handbuch der Kirchengeschichte* (1828). Here he gives what we would call a moderately critical description of the selling of indulgences and shows a psychological understanding for Luther's first reactions. He states that Luther at this moment was obviously right in protesting. Yet this correct, though vague assessment of responsibilities was criticized by a reviewer, a convert named Goldmann. He pointed out that Luther was never right and that the majority of the ninety-five theses were utterly wrong and godless⁵. The young scholar, Döllinger, saw that his orthodoxy was suspected all the more since his colleague Möhler warmly praised the treatment of the Reformation and found fault with him in that he too often took sides with the Jesuits⁶.

Basically one encounters here the same qualities which one can find in his own Church history, which gave him a name in literature. The four volumes, written mainly for seminaries, appeared between 1833 and 1838. Lord Acton characterizes it as follows: 'A celebrated Anglican described Döllinger at that time as more intentional than Fleury', while Catholics objected that he was a candid friend, Lutherans probing deeper, observed that he resolutely held his ground wherever he could, and as resolutely abandoned every position that he found untenable. He has since said of himself that he always spoke sincerely, but that he spoke as an advocate — a sincere advocate who pleaded only for a cause which he had convinced himself was just. The cause he pleaded was the divine government of the Church, the fulfilment of the promise that it would be preserved from error, though not from sin, the uninterrupted employment of the powers committed by Christ for the salvation of man.

⁴ Ibid., p. 95.

⁵ Ibid., p. 261.

⁶ Ibid., p. 268.

By this absence of false arts, he acquired that reputation for superior integrity which caused a Tyrolian divine to speak of him as the most chivalrous of the Catholic celebrities. And the nuncio, who was at Munich during the first ten years called him the 'professeur le plus éclairé, le plus religieux, en un mot le plus distingué de l'université'⁷.

This evolution towards a fair and detached view of Protestantism was interrupted by Döllinger's intervention in Bavarian politics. He was by no means the man who confined himself to a scholar's attic. He always liked to voice his opinion on the questions of the day. He had never heard anything of political theology; yet he was very much of a political theologian himself. One of the problems of the day was that of mixed marriages. They had become a real pastoral problem only in the post-napoleonic era, when the denominational homogeneity of the German States had been broken up. At first the children of mixed marriages were brought up Catholic or Protestant according to the religion of mother or father, the girls following their mother, the boys their father. In Bavaria parish priests were obliged by civil law to tender *litterae dimissoriales* or even to perform a religious marriage, where the stricter Roman rules on this matter were not observed. When a few parish priests refused to comply with these prescriptions, government officials tried in a harsh way to remind them of the duties they were paid for. The overstatement of government competence in this matter and the treatment of parish priests as ministers of the State prompted in 1831 a sharp reply by Döllinger. He pointed out that it would be a flagrant violation of religious liberty if a priest were forced by civil law against his conscience and the rules of his religious authority to perform such a ceremony⁸.

Seven years later he came back to the same issue in an anonymous pamphlet, which had five editions at the time. There is one main difference between the two pamphlets. Whereas in the first he holds that the priest confers the sacrament of marriage, he concludes in the second that the contracting parties give the sacrament to each other. It cannot be said that he took a maximalist view in this matter and that he tried to enforce the stricter Roman rules regardless of the German context. One has to remember that the root of the trouble was that the priests were acting as civil offi-

⁷ Acton, art. cit., p. 384.

⁸ Friedrich, op. cit., vol. I, p. 323.

cers, because there was no civil marriage at the time. Döllinger's opponents were not Protestant theologians, but government bureaucrats who thought in terms of complete subordination of the Church to the State. The only proper way out of the dilemma would have been the introduction of civil marriage for which the Bavarian Government was not yet prepared. Döllinger made a suggestion along this line, but I suspect it was more rhetorical than wholehearted. At no time did he consider a mixed marriage concluded before a Protestant minister as invalid⁹.

At the time of his second pamphlet the mixed marriage question in Prussia had led to a serious conflict between Church and State. The imprisonment in 1837 of the archbishop of Cologne and the archbishop of Poznań, who tried to reinforce Roman instructions on this subject, were in themselves minor incidents; but the psychological impact on the Catholic section of the nation created by their arrest was enormous. We have a new denominational consciousness in Germany from 1837 onward. Catholics will unite and claim for more liberties. As a denominational pressure group Catholics will fight for more democratic rights, of course their own interests being served first¹⁰. In the aftermath of the Cologne affair relations between the Christian bodies in Germany will rapidly deteriorate.

We notice a shift in Döllinger's publications of the period. There is a series of articles on the Protestant idea of the Constitution of the Church¹¹; there is a sharp attack against the institution of a Prussian bishopric in Jerusalem¹²; and there is, above all, his attitude in the genuflection case in 1843.

King Ludwig I of Bavaria had read somewhere how impressive it was when the French soldiers made a genuflection at the moment of consecration, when the new cathedral of Bona in North Africa was inaugurated. How nice it would be, he thought, if my soldiers did the same on Corpus Christi and on other occasions, when soldiers came to Church. Genuflection as part of a military exercise, a special climax of a military parade! The king took to it with the

⁹ Ibid., vol. II, p. 91 sqq.

¹⁰ See R. Lill in: *Handbuch der Kirchengeschichte* (ed. H. Jedin), vol. V, p. 397 sqq.

¹¹ See S. Lösch, *Döllinger und Frankreich. Eine geistige Allianz*. Munich 1955, p. 522.

¹² Ibid., p. 522-532; see also Döllinger's review of a book by Richter on Church-union, *Archiv f. theolog. Literatur* vol. I, 1842, pp. 361-366.

same stubbornness with which he fell in love, about the same time, with a young Irish lady, Limerick-born Lola Montez.

Despite the outcry of the Protestants, the King was very keen on the execution of his order. When the Protestants' protests grew stronger and Parliament was involved, Döllinger was entrusted by the Court to defend the royal order. He complied to this request at first in an anonymous pamphlet defending the genuflection as a purely military order. He examined the Protestant attitude towards genuflection *in genere* and genuflection *in specie* at the moment of consecration. He took advantage of this liturgical situation, however, to combine with it a formidable attack on the credibility of Harless, the Protestant General superintendent of Bavaria, who had been one of the spokesmen for a relaxation of the order. Yet at the end of the pamphlet, although reluctantly, he suggested that a change should be made in the present rule in favour of Protestants, who took offence to it¹³. Harless replied and Döllinger came back with a vicious assault in a pamphlet of which I should like to give a short extract as a proof of Döllinger's extraordinary polemical verve: 'Sir, we have gone through too different schools, much too different that we could fight with the same weapons. You, Professor, have gone through the school of the Reformer of Wittenberg, you have nourished your mind with the milk of his writings... The great master at whose feet you have sat, stuck to the principle to treat his opponent like a man, who against his better knowledge, just for greed or out of jealousy or out of some other mean motive defends Catholic doctrine. It belongs to his tactics to discuss as little as possible the motives of his opponent, his arguments, but all the more his personality, his intentions, what he could have thought and not said, or what he might have said and not thought. You, Sir, have faithfully copied his example... I myself have dealt with the works of the Reformer of Wittenberg and the products of literature that have grown on this soil, but not without taking the same spiritual precautions one has to take physically if one goes through a dirty bog or a stinking mudhole¹⁴.'

At the time when he wrote this, Döllinger was collecting materials for a three volume work on the Reformation. It appeared from 1846 to 1848 and was the first Catholic treatment of the topic in modern times. The work set a mark, by the mass of documents

¹³ Friedrich, vol. II, pp. 197 sqq.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

used, by its learning and by a certain effort of impartiality in letting the sources speak for themselves. There was perhaps as much naiveté as other unavowed second-thoughts in the scheme to let the sources speak, for sources skilfully selected, say what you want them to say. The third volume published in 1848 contained the theology of the Reformation. The book remained unfinished because he had to abandon his studies in order to take his place at the Francfort Parliament (1848/49).

Acton gives a pungent description of the book's central idea: 'The peculiarity of his treatment is that he contracts the Reformation into a history of the doctrine of justification. He found that this and this alone was the essential point in Luther's mind, that he made it the basis of his argument, the motive of his separation, the root and principle of his religion. He believed that Luther was right in the cardinal importance he attributed to this doctrine in his system, and he in his turn recognized that it was the cause of all that followed, the source of the reformer's popularity and success, the sole insurmountable obstacle to every scheme of restoration. It was also, for him the center and the basis of his antagonism. That was the point that he attacked when he combatted Protestantism, and he held all other elements of conflict cheap in comparison, deeming that they are not invariable, or not incurable, or not so supremely serious. Apart from this there was much in Protestantism that he admired, much in its effects for which he was grateful. With the Lutheran view of imputation, Protestant and Catholic were separated by an abyss. Without it, there was not lasting reason why they should be separate at all¹⁵.'

The doctrine of justification, as the core of the Reformation, was indeed the main thesis of his Reformation study. When in 1881 Ritschl, the author of the chief work on the subject of justification, visited Döllinger he found him still full of these ideas and possessing a thorough knowledge of Luther¹⁶. In July 1888, a couple of years before his death, when Döllinger discussed Luther's qualities and weaknesses with Lord Acton he said: 'It does not come to my mind to excuse him for his behaviour during the Peasant's war. He was quite often enraptured with his own words. As for myself I have to raise another accusation against him, namely that through his wrong doctrine of

¹⁵ Acton, art. cit. p. 394.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 395.

imputation he has confused the moral conscience of people and corrupted it¹⁷.’

It can be shown today that Döllinger’s interpretation of the doctrine of imputation was far too extrinsecist, that he did not grasp its deeper implications. Thus, good works became unnecessary in his view and the doctrine itself could be looked upon as a letter of franchise for moral libertinism¹⁸.

In spite of these and other shortcomings, Döllinger’s merit lies in emphasizing the importance of the doctrine of justification in Luther’s development. Justification was the central theological issue in Luther’s personal crisis with the traditional doctrine. In this Döllinger is in tune with subsequent Reformation scholars and theologians¹⁹.

Lord Acton suggests that it was precisely the lack of such a theological abyss that attracted Döllinger to Anglicans²⁰. In order to settle this point, a more accurate investigation of Döllinger’s attitude towards Anglicanism than I can give in this lecture should be done. On his knowledge of English theology Acton says: ‘English theology did not come much in his way until he had made himself at home with the Italians and the primary French. Then it abounded. He gathered it in quantities in two journeys in 1851 and 1858 and he knew the English divines to perfection, at least down to Whitby and the nonjurors²¹.’ One could hesitate with regard to these dates, for Döllinger had shown, already previous to his later visits to England, a keen interest at least in the Oxford movement. And he would hardly have been consulted by Anglicans like Brewer, Hope-Scott and Archdeacon Wilberforce in the haydays of the Oxford movement, if he had not been acquainted in a more than casual manner with Anglican theology. The most illustrious visitor he received was W. E. Gladstone who visited him in October 1845²², and had a long discussion with him on the Eucharist. This was to

¹⁷ Döllinger–Acton: Briefwechsel, vol. 3, p. 375.

¹⁸ Finsterhölzl, p. 39.

¹⁹ For an assessment of Döllinger’s place in Reformation scholarship see A. Herte, *Das katholische Lutherbild im Bann der Lutherkommentare des Cochläus*, 3 vol., Münster 1943; H. Jedin: *Wandlungen des Lutherbildes in der katholischen Kirchengeschichtsschreibung*. In: *Wandlungen des Lutherbildes*. Würzburg 1966, pp. 86–87; W. Beina, *Das moderne katholische Lutherbild*. Essen 1969, pp. 15–17.

²⁰ Acton, art. cit., p. 395.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 388.

²² Friedrich, vol. II, p. 223.

become a life-long friendship, perhaps because Döllinger carefully refrained from proselytizing, as Gladstone gratefully recorded²³. In 1865, when E. B. Pusey, the leading writer of Anglo-Catholics, published his 'Eirenicon' (the book claimed that Anglican priests were kept back from a union with Rome, not so much by the official doctrines of the Roman Church, but rather by the tolerated unofficial excess of mariology, the doctrines of purgatory and indulgences) he got the following reply from Döllinger: 'I am convinced by reading you Eirenicon that inwardly we are united in our religious convictions although externally we belong to two separated Churches. There can be no fundamental difference between us²⁴.'

This is still a very vague statement, but it belongs to a period of his life, when he had freed himself, or at least was struggling to free himself, from anti-protestant prejudice and was developing the idea of a reunion of Churches. He was still very Catholic, even triumphalistic as can be seen in his book 'The Church and the Churches' — which was published in 1861. The book was hastily written, partially with older materials, and with a definite political outlook. In April of the previous year Döllinger had publicly warned Catholics that they must be prepared to accept the downfall of Temporal Power. These conferences had stirred up a big reaction in the Catholic world. Friends urged him to publish his text so that one could see what he had said and what he had not said. In a few months Döllinger produced his text, but with an introduction which was at least ten times longer than his conferences. He pursued a very precise aim: 'The argument of the book was that the churches, which are without the pope, drift into many troubles and maintain themselves at a manifest disadvantage, whereas the Church which energetically preserves the principle of unity has a vast superiority which would prevail, but for its disabling and discrediting failure in civil government²⁵.' Once the Catholic Church had freed itself from the Temporal Power, it would take the lead in the religious affairs of the world. The picture Döllinger gives of the other Christian communities from Russia to the United States is a very gloomy one. As to the Anglican communion, he describes the decay of its divinity and the general aversion to theological research as he sees it. He concludes that its dissolution is a question

²³ Acton, p. 416.

²⁴ Döllinger-Acton, Briefwechsel, vol. II, p. 425.

²⁵ Acton, art. cit., p. 414.

of time. 'No State Church can long subsist in modern society which professes the religion of the minority²⁶.' While Scotland has clung to the original dogma of Calvin at the price of complete theological stagnation, the Dutch Church has lost its primitive orthodoxy in the process of theological learning. On the whole: the future of non-Roman Churches is gloomy, but the future of Rome is bright.

The harsh judgment on Protestant Churches was part of a manoeuvre which was meant to silence his critics in Rome. They were upset because he did not defend at all odds temporal power. Yet there was something more in it than mere politics. Especially when he came to Germany he saw more ground for a rapprochement of the two big religions of the country. The main reason for this positive outlook was a growing friendship with Lutheran laytheologians who tried, just at this moment, to open a dialogue with Roman Catholic divines and laymen (Erfurt conference of 1860)²⁷.

Döllinger's ecumenical thought is slowly reaching its maturity. Protestants are no more opponents to be fought against; they are no more to be taken in by Roman superiority. Rather, they are separated brethren with whom dialogue must be sought. He realizes that this is putting demands on his own Church and takes a more searching look at his own community. In this self-critical prism, he no longer sees each element of Catholic doctrine and tradition by its nature to be above historical and theological criticism. He more consciously realizes that a good deal, at least of the exterior form of the Catholic Church, cannot claim to have its origin in the pure source of the Gospel and the early Church. The Rome of Pius IX is very helpful in making him take a more detached look at his Church of the time. He sees the enormous task that is ahead for theology, and he gives his concern a classical expression in the 1863 Munich Conference of theologians²⁸.

'It has been the fate of the German Church alone to be so rent asunder that it has fallen into two almost equal parts ... Should not

²⁶ J.D. Acton, Döllinger on the Temporal Power, in: *The History of Freedom...* London 1907, pp. 301–374, esp. p. 335.

²⁷ See V. Conzemius, Hermann Adalbert Daniel (1812–1871). Ein Forscherleben für die *Una Sancta*, In: *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 1965, p. 64–111; M.P. Fleischer, *Katholische und lutherische Ireniker*. Göttingen 1968, p. 130–191.

²⁸ G. Schwaiger, *Die Münchener Gelehrtenversammlung 1863 in den Strömungen der katholischen Theologie des 19. Jahrhunderts*, in: *Begegnung (Festschrift Fries)*, Graz–Wien–Köln 1972, p. 735–748.

German theology prove itself to be a spear of Telephus which first delivers the blow and then heals the wound? German theologians both started the schism and nurtured it. Therefore, it is the task of Catholic theology in Germany to reconcile the divided confessions in an even closer unity. It can do this by fulfilling three conditions!

‘First, summoning all the knowledge and resources at our disposal, we should disapprove of all that is truly divisive and uncatholic in the doctrine of the Church; in other words, all that has been contrary to the mind of the Church in all ages. On this matter we still have much to do by way of clearing our own mind.

‘Secondly, we should endeavour to show the Catholic doctrine as alive with an organic unity and inner coherence and, keeping this living faith in view, distinguish between what is essential and permanent and what is fortuitous, transitory and extraneous.

‘Finally, the third condition is that the theology... that is, everything good and true that has been discovered or nurtured by our separated brethren, whether in their teaching, their historical development, or in their lives – should be carefully sifted of any error, and then freely and openly accepted and acknowledged as being part of the birthright of the one true Church which once possessed these things, at least in embryo or outline...

‘Two years ago I said in public that reunion was not possible, either now or in the near future, since the majority of Protestants did not want it. I would have liked to say that on the other hand, we Catholics wanted it and were striving for it in deadly earnest. But truth and justice forebade my saying this then and still forbid it. For we only really desire the end when we desire the means; otherwise, the end is unattainable. The means, in my opinion are these: humility, brotherly love, selfdenial, and real understanding of where truth and goodness are to be found, an awareness of the weakness and offence in our own attitude, and a determination to get rid of them²⁹.’

Such were the guidelines he proposed. They contain general principles for any Catholic ecumenism e.g. the hierarchy of truths proposed at Vatican II). But in Rome the theologians did not at all like this demand for a contemporary historical-exegetical orientation of theology. Nor did the Curia like it, nor the ecclesiastical au-

²⁹ I. v. Döllinger, Rede über die Vergangenheit und Gegenwart der katholischen Theologie, in: Kleinere Schriften (ed. Reusch) Stuttgart, 1890, p. 183–184.

thorities in Germany. Both were at pains to intercept the telegram of congratulations which the Holy Father had decided to send to the Munich Conference. The Jesuit-owned *Civiltà Cattolica*, in Rome, attacked Döllinger's lecture with undignified zest. The anonymous writer rejected Döllinger's idea of an historical basis for theology, and went on to make the incredible suggestion that it was 'futile to employ historical criticism when discussing human behaviour, and ridiculous to use comparative philology in a treatise on conscience³⁰.' Finally he accused the Munich theologian of semiprotestantism.

Döllinger, as he saw his hopes crushed time and time again became a disappointed man and gradually an embittered one. The disappointment that quite overwhelmed him was the refusal of the Roman Curia to recognise how justified he was in his desire for a reform in ecclesiastical organisation and for an adaptation of theology to contemporary language. Then the encyclical *Quanta cura* of the 8th of December, 1864, with its syllabus of errors, dealt him a direct blow. The final thesis of this collection of random pronouncements condemned those 'who believe that the Roman Pontiff may and ought to reconcile himself to and to agree with progress, liberalism and modern culture'. If this anathema represented the true mind of the Holy Father, what course remained for a Catholic theologian except to beat a retreat from his time and keep silence or fade into anonymity? Döllinger called it a day and buried himself in academic research.

However, embitterment seeped through in his letters and in anonymous articles in the leading liberal newspaper of Germany, the *Augsburger Allgemeine*, where he was to take refuge from now on. In 1867, the canonisation of the Spanish inquisitor, Pedro de Arbues, who had been murdered in the 15th century by an embittered and frenzied mob who sought to escape their persecutor, was to Döllinger almost a personal affront. He thought of it as a canonisation of the Inquisition itself. When, in the same year, the Austrian emperor was condemned in extremely harsh terms at a papal consistory, Döllinger felt that an arch-enemy of the Church could not have delivered a more violent address. His soul cried out in anguish when disillusioned young English converts left the Church for fear of becoming enclosed in a Catholic ghetto. He complained to the Countess of Leyden, the future Lady Blennerhassett.

³⁰ Döllinger-Acton, Briefwechsel, vol. I, p. 376 n.1.

‘In general it can be said that the basic, indeed sometimes the only, reason why folk continue to leave the Church, is a fear-dominated distaste for the absolute power which the popes claim. How often people have said to me:

“If the papacy, that is the present papacy, did not exist, the separated Churches would be able to unite without much difficulty or compromise.” Yet Rome and the Jesuits not only disdain to help non-catholics who fight in the uphill effort towards reunion, but also repel the well-disposed who are yearning for it. When I look at these failings, I see also the counterblast that is sure to emerge in the Church because of them³¹.

The counterblast came about in that very year, 1869, but not as Döllinger had conceived it. By the time the excitement over the First Vatican Council was over, he was already a refugee from Roman Catholicism and very soon to become the subject of a quasi-historical mythos. But the facts are these: bitterly disappointed and disgusted at the methods of the Curia, he found himself in the recent years relegated, as it were, to the fringe of the Church. He protested against the exaggerated claims, as he saw them, of papal authority – a caricature of infallibility – rather than against a balanced interpretation of the doctrine. The concept of infallibility against which he fought in 1870 was not the infallibility taught by the Roman Catholic Church. Only thus can we explain the famous sentence that occurs, like a refrain, in his letters and public statements: ‘Neither as a Christian, nor as a theologian, nor as a citizen, can I accept the teaching of infallibility.’

As a Christian, he rebelled against the unlimited domination of the papacy. The doctrine of papal freedom from error in matters of faith was, he thought, but the latest effusion of the type of pope-worship peddled especially by the French journalist Louis Veuillot.

As a theologian he desired a long new look at what history and exegesis had to say about tradition.

As a citizen he wanted to defend himself against the ghostly apparition of a papal autocracy, which, as had happened so often in history, would burden the Church with doubtful claims to worldly power, to the detriment of her religious life³².

³¹ Transcript in the possession of the author.

³² For a better understanding of Döllinger’s position in the infallibility discussion see V. Conzemius, *Die Römischen Briefe vom Konzil. Eine entstehungsgeschichtliche und quellenkritische Untersuchung zum Konziljournalismus Ignaz v. Döllingers und Lord Actons*. In: *Römische Quartalschrift* 59 (1964) p. 186–229.

There was of course much in this outcry which betrays fear, anguish and exaggeration. Yet one of the hidden and unavowed motives of Döllinger's fight against infallibility was the ecumenical one. He foresaw that such a definition would for the time being destroy all hope for dialogue, let alone reunion. It is generally ignored that he was working, in the years previous to the Council, on a large handbook of 'Church History', which was never published. It bore the significant title 'Cathedra Petri'. The title shows how much the See of Rome meant to him. The first part was to be an unbiased history of the Papacy, acceptable to scholars of other denominations. In the second part, he intended to describe the attempts that had actually been made to reunite the Churches and to give the reason for their failures. This book was to be something more than a detached Church history. It was meant to be guide, a handbook of ecumenism, surpassing, as we could imagine, one single man's capacity, yet overwhelmingly impressive by the task he had set for himself³³.

At this very moment came the Vatican Council and, in its aftermath, Döllinger's excommunication. He was now utterly homeless. What he intended to work for in the last years of his life, the reunion of Christians, had received the most serious blow. And yet the excommunicated Döllinger did *not* give up. With all his energy, he tried to save from the wreckage what could be saved. The same year that he was excommunicated, he gave a course of public lectures on the reunion of the Churches. They found a wide audience, especially in the English speaking countries³⁴.

We cannot enter into a discussion of these lectures, but simply point to a few of the central ideas of his ecumenical outlook at this point in his life. The basic information he gave in the 'Lectures on Reunion' was extracted from the material he had collected for the second part of the 'Cathedra Petri'. He had really mastered his subject, going back as far as the early Church. Of course he could not have delivered the talks without heaping slightly biased criticism on the See of Rome in the past and present. However he indicated that the positive point of departure for a future reunion is baptism, the common bond of Christians. 'And because most Protestants, according even to strict Catholic interpretation, err without their own fault, they belong already to the one Catholic

³³ See Döllinger-Acton Briefwechsel, vol. I, pp. 530-535.

³⁴ Lectures on the reunion of the Churches. Translated by H. N. Oxenham. London 1872.

Church³⁵.’ Thus the concept of Catholicity was enlarged, and a disgraceful narrow-minded interpretation of the sentence *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* precluded. On this common basis, theologians should cooperate by solid theological work to dismantle entrenched denominational doctrines. Unity itself is a gift of God for which one should pray.

There is much in this brief outline, which has become a real element of Catholic ecumenism in our time.

The main ecumenical adventure, on which Döllinger embarked in his non-Roman period, were the Bonn Union-Conferences of 1874 and 1875³⁶. They were the most important ecumenical talks in the nineteenth century. A recent investigation has shown quite clearly, that the moving force behind the whole enterprise was Döllinger³⁷. He brought some of his friends, who had more utopian views on such a meeting (they were thinking of calling in a Council) back to reality. But it should be said in fairness to his Old Catholic friends, that they helped him to prepare the grounds. Michelis, for example, had experience in this field since he had been the leading Catholic theologian behind the Erfurt conference in 1860.

There had been in the last twenty years before Bonn a surprising number of ecumenical associations, some with the definite aims of proselytizing. To mention a few, there was the ‘Association for Promoting the Unity of Christendom’, founded in 1857 and including Catholics, Anglicans and Orthodox. (The Roman Catholic co-founder was the convert Ambrose Phillipps de Lisle.) It was accused of holding the ‘Branch theory’ of Churches and condemned by Roman Catholic authorities in 1864. Besides there existed in England the ‘Anglo-Continental Society’, founded in 1853, and the ‘Eastern Church Association’. In the following year a commission for intercommunion with the Orthodox Churches was established at the Convocation of Canterbury. The Orthodox Church was moving too, encouraged by the conversion of a few Catholic and Protes-

³⁵ Ibid. (German edition of 1888) p. 727 sqq.

³⁶ Only the text of the second conference was published in English: Report of the Union-Conferences held from August 10 to 16, 1875 at Bonn under the Presidency of Dr. v. Doellinger, London 1875. (There are two other editions of the proceedings, Lösch, p. 554.)

³⁷ Ch. Oeyen, Die Entstehung der Bonner Unions-Konferenzen im Jahr 1874 (Manuscript Old Catholic Fac. of theology at Bern, Switzerland) 1971.

tant priests (Overbeck³⁸, Guettée). In 1862 an 'Association of the Friends of Spiritual Illumination' was founded in St. Petersburg, which was to promote closer relationship with the international friends of Orthodoxy abroad. The recent secession of the Old Catholics had met with a sympathetic following in Anglican and Orthodox circles. The latter especially hoped that they would join, sooner or later, the Orthodox Church. Döllinger's thought fell therefore, on well-prepared ground.

The first of the Bonn Union Conferences was held at Bonn in September 1874. Döllinger was chosen president by acclamation and made the important statement that he and his colleagues did not feel themselves bound by all the decrees of the Council of Trent, which could not be regarded as ecumenical. The representatives of the Western Churches agreed that the insertion of the 'Filioque' clause had been unlawful. After this, fourteen articles, dealing with points supposed to be in dispute between the Old Catholic and Anglican Communion, were discussed.

The following year Döllinger wanted to go a step further: to discuss the dogmatic differences behind the doctrine on the procession of the Holy Ghost. As a foundation for the talks Professor Ossinin from St. Petersburg requested a return to the basis of the old undivided Church and the seven first ecumenical councils. Later developments could not claim the same authority. Anglicans and Old-Catholics made a big effort to distinguish between dogma and theological opinion. The Orthodox were unable to follow this method and lost themselves so much in terminological difficulties, that Döllinger had to employ all his energy to prevent a dissolution of the reunion talks. He emphasized that the differences between East and West on the procession of the Holy Ghost rested on a terminological misunderstanding. Relying on St. John of Damascus he drew up a list of six theses which concluded that there was dogmatic agreement on this point³⁹.

This conclusion was far too optimistic. The Bonn delegates were private individuals without special commission from their Churches. When they returned home to their respective religious

³⁸ See W. Kahle, *Westliche Orthodoxie. Leben und Ziele Julian Joseph Overbecks*, Leiden-Köln 1968.

³⁹ For a brief survey of the discussions see V. Conzemius, *Katholizismus ohne Rom*, Zurich-Cologne, 1969 p. 126-127; C. B. Moss, *The Old Catholic movement, its origins and history*. London 1964² pp. 258-270.

bodies, their conclusions met with fierce opposition. Pusey, for example, would not allow any tampering with the Western tradition as to the *Filioque*. Political tensions between Russia and England made a pursuit of the discussion impossible, and Döllinger abstained from calling any further meetings.

This brief outline of Döllinger's development as an ecumenical theologian is incomplete and unfinished. A more detailed analysis would reveal perhaps other interesting aspects of his approach to this question and give a more precise chronology of its different stages. And above all: beyond the biographical data which we have given a careful investigation of the theology underlying the theologian's changing positions would be necessary. The following contribution of Kurt Stalder is taking up certain aspects of this central problem.

Yet our survey, however limited and sketchy it may be, brings home a few 'forgotten truths'. It shows how much a brilliant theologian's outlook on other Christian Churches depended on his personal experiences and on the political, social and cultural climate of his environment. The impressions of the young man, deepened by the mainly polemical activities of the 'political theologian' have been decisive. Well up into his sixties Döllinger was as sure of the dissolution of Protestantism in the near future, as Protestant contemporaries of his were convinced of the imminent disappearance of the Church of Rome, once the Temporal Power had gone. In the sixties his attitude changed, he became less self-confident and more self-critical; for the first time he realized the psychological and theological problems of reunion in an objective way. It was tragic that at a moment when he was about to devote himself wholeheartedly to the cause of reunion his Church widened the gap between her and other Churches. The responsible leaders of his Church showed themselves completely unable to understand for what he justly foresaw to be the main task ahead of historical theology. The Bonn reunion conferences were the ultimate and perhaps desperate manifestation of his growing ecumenical concern; even as a failure they were a signal for the future.

There is a final point to be made. The long and difficult process of Döllinger's maturation as an ecumenical theologian shows a slow and constant process of purification. If there is enough humility in ecumenically minded people to accept such a purification there should be no reason to despair of ecumenism in our days.

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