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Recent German Roman Catholic New Testament Research

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SINCE VATICAN II the Roman Catholic church has been in a period of rapid and great change, even turmoil, and some have called it revolution.¹ The changes in church life, and the developing opinions of some outstanding theologians such as Hans Küng, are fairly well known to most people who are interested in such matters. They are, in any case, well documented and reported on. However it is not always true that the work of the New Testament researchers is so well known or well reported. This brief report is concerned with the research work that is being done by German speaking Roman Catholics on the New Testament.² It reveals the enormous impact of Vatican II on this work on the one hand, and the sensitivity of these scholars to the issues of the day on the other.

The Teaching Locations

IN the Federal Republic of Germany, as in other countries in the west, universities went through a period of rapid growth in the twenty-five years after the war. According to the *World of Learning* for 1973/1974, thirteen new universities had been founded since 1945, and ten of these had been founded since 1960. This compares with only eight new foundations, which are still in existence, in the previous 150 years. Since there are something like 37 universities in the Republic, this means that nearly one third of them have been founded since 1960. Only three of these 13 universities have theology faculties. This contrasts strikingly with the earlier foundations, that is, those founded before 1800. There are 16 such universities still functioning, of which 12 teach theology. Furthermore approximately 83% of the Professors of New Testament are working in these earlier foundations, and 13% in those universities established since 1960. Half of the theology faculties in Germany are divided into Protestant and Catholic

within the particular university, but all the chairs of New Testament which are not designated as either Catholic or Protestant, with the exception of that at Regensburg, are in universities founded before the middle of the eighteenth century. The situation may be set out as follows:

	Total	Theology	N.T. Professors			Total
		taught in	R.C.	Prot.	N.D.	
Post-war foundations	13	3	2	2	1	5
Post 1960 foundations	10	3	2	2	1	5
1800-1945 foundations	8	1	—	2	—	2
Earlier foundations	16	12	7	8	15	30
Totals	37	16	9	8	16	37

It is apparent from this that the teaching of New Testament in the universities of the Federal Republic is heavily concentrated in the older foundations.

These figures do not show the trend very recently developing in Germany of establishing chairs of religion, or religious studies. These chairs are located in other faculties, and not in the faculties of theology. Holders of such teaching chairs are not required to be church members, as are their colleagues in the faculties of theology. If such a professor wishes to attract theology students who might be in training for the priesthood then he will need to be recognised as a teacher by the church.

The Post Vatican II Position

VATICAN II has had a known and dramatic effect on the freedom with which some of the dogmatic theologians working in Germany have been able to write and speak. Hans Küng is perhaps the best known example of this, but that may be due more to his ability as a public relations man, than to his being all that far ahead of his colleagues in breaking new ground. The real areas of conflict and struggle for him are those of church and office. But behind these dogmatic discussions lie the structural questions of the church and its authority. The danger of his view that bishops should be elected, is not as great as his view that the structure of the church should not discipline teachers in the church, but that there should be open debate and discussion. The real point of opposition between Küng and the Congregation of Faith is not his teachings on justification, or infallibility, or the church, but rather his objection to the idea that he should be adjudged, and his recognition as a teacher in the church decided, by 'blind authority'. The heart of the problem is the actual working in *l'affaire Küng* of the present church structure.

Küng has attacked the treatment he has received from Rome as being unacceptable in a democracy. Even though Küng is Swiss, and that particular attack was made in Switzerland, he works in Tübingen which, like the rest of German society, is marked by a post war social phenomenon called democratisation. This process has gone to very surprising lengths throughout all levels of German society, and not least in the universities. That movement in the structure of German society may come to affect very considerably the relationship between the church and state, not only in the country generally, but in the universities in particular.⁹ In the universities the church-state alliance expresses itself in the position of the theological faculties, and in the fact that no professor of theology may hold a chair in Germany if he is not a member in good standing of one of the recognised denominations. This is besides the influence that the church has in the appointing of professors. Both these provisions might well be subjected to 'democratisation'. The discipline of the church over professors may also be a little diminished by the growth in the number of lay theologians. This growth is related to the large increase in demand for teachers of religion in the schools, and of people who wish to take their academic work further than just the first level, but without committing themselves to the priesthood. These considerations, however, are only the background to the situation in which Roman Catholic research on the New Testament is being done. This background does affect the research work in that it produces a situation in which far more people want to do research, and the opening up of the church scene after Vatican II has cleared the way for considerable influence from Protestant work, particularly the Protestant New Testament work of this century.

One way in which the massive increase in the amount of research being done in the last ten years (Vatican II met from 1962 to 1965) can be seen is the rapid growth of series of monographs, which usually are published dissertations.

Stuttgarter biblische Monographien (Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk), vol. 1 in 1967, vol. 12 in 1971.

Studium zum Alten und Neuen Testament, vol. 1 in 1960, vol. 36 in 1974.

Bonner Biblische Beiträge, vol. 1 in 1950, vol. 21 in 1964, then vol. 31 in 1969, and vol. 41 in 1972. In other words the time taken to produce ten volumes has come down from about eight years, to five, and finally to three.

Biblische Untersuchungen (Edited by the prolific Otto Kuss), vol. 1 in 1967 to vol. 10 in 1973. This series is mainly made up of dissertations done under the supervision of Kuss.

Forschung zu Bibel has just begun and there is as yet only one volume.

This information reflects an astonishingly prodigious amount of work. The last mentioned series also illustrates the other side of this work. The one volume in the series so far is a book by Dieter Zeller, *Juden und Heiden*, which contains a long excursus on recent interpretations of the Pauline teaching of justification. This excursus shows that scholars from Roman Catholic and Protestant positions are very substantially mixed together. A number of Catholics take up positions which are really indistinguishable from that of Ernst Käsemann. The earlier debate on this subject reflected by Peter Stuhlmacher, *Gerechtigkeit Gottes bei Paulus*,⁴ and Karl Kertelge, *Rechtfertigung bei Paulus*,⁵ has continued across the Protestant-Catholic boundary.

The introduction of contemporary Protestant thought has been promoted very vigorously by Anton Vögtle. In 1961 at the biennial conference of German Catholic New Testament scholars (*Arbeitstagung der deutschen katholischen Neutestamentler*, which later became *Tagung der deutschsprachigen katholischen Neutestamentler* when it had grown and spread beyond Germany) Anton Vögtle gave a report to the conference on the work of Bultmann and his associates on the question of the Son of Man. In 1966 he published a book on the New Testament and the recent Catholic exegesis (*Das Neue Testament und die neuere katholische Exegese*), and this was to be followed by two further volumes dealing with literary forms in the gospels and the non-gospel literature in the New Testament. These later books have not yet appeared, but the first volume, which deals with basic questions on the formation and character of the New Testament, reflects the significant influence of Protestant scholarship, for example in the way he handles the development of the synoptic tradition. The increasing acceptance of the ideas of contemporary Protestant scholarship would not have been as easy as it has been if it were not for the much freer rein given to biblical scholars by Vatican II.

New Trends

IN this attempt to identify the trends of recent German Catholic New Testament research it is worth first of all noting the trends in a quantitative way, before saying something about the particular themes that seem to be apparent. In the *Biblische Zeitschrift* there is a report, approximately every second year, of unpublished dissertations. The first such notice was given in 1963 (*BZ* vol. 7, p. 317) which noted only one dissertation, that of P. S. Hofbeck, from Würzburg, on the signs in John's gospel. From 1964, however, a list has appeared giving the details of the dissertations, and grouped according to university. The

following list gives the numbers of dissertations under the year in which the report in the *Biblische Zeitschrift* appeared.

University	1964	1965	1966 no report	1967 no report	1968 no report	1969 no report	1970 no report	1971	1972	1973 no report	Total
Bonn	4			7					7		18
Freiburg (Schweiz)	4							8	20		32
Graz	4			2					3		9
Münster	2	1		4		6		16			29
Tübingen	2					1		3	4		10
Würzburg	10	1		4		4		5	9		33
Wien		9		11		1		5	4		30
Freiburg in Br.				2		2		4	3		11
München				5		4		4	5		18
Trier				4		3			5		12
Innsbruck				1							1
Mainz								1			1
Salzburg								1			1
Bochum									2		2
Regensburg									2		2
Strassburg									8		8
Totals	26	11		40		21		47	72		217

It is probable that these figures should not be over-rated, but it is impossible not to notice the dramatic increase in 1967 (five years after the start of Vatican II), and the way in which in the seventies the figures are 'taking off'. In time most of these dissertations work their way into publication in one or other of the series which were noted above, though increasing difficulties are experienced by authors because of the sheer number of dissertations to be published (in order to satisfy the requirements for doctoral degrees), and because of the escalating costs of publication.

These reports in the *Biblische Zeitschrift* can be analysed according to the subject or area of the dissertation. This is not an easy matter since the subjects covered are so varied. The following analysis lists the number of dissertations done in the various sections of the New Testament, and according to whether they were exegetical studies or historical studies on a broader scale. These categories overlap, and some dissertations are included in more than one figure on this table.

<i>Area</i>	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	Total
			no report		no report		no report			no report	
Bible as a whole				2				1	5		8
OT Exegetical	4	2		7		2		4	10		29
OT Historical	3	1		8				4	19		35
NT as a whole	2	1		2		3		3	4		15
NT Exegetical	9	4		10		12		25	21		81
NT Historical	4	3		9		7		5	9		37
Gospels	3	3		4		11		15	17		53
Paul	6	3		9		3		7	10		38
Others	5	2		5		3		5	3		23

A small number of 'likely' subjects were tested in these reports as follows:

Justification	1										1
Heilsgeschichte				1					1		2
Church/Office	1	1		5				3	4		14
Canon				1				1			2
Interpretation				4		4		3	4		15
Resurrection								2	3		5

In considering these figures it is important to realise that by and large the subject of a dissertation is not selected by a student. The normal pattern is that a student approaches a professor to take him as a candidate, and then the professor suggests the title, or at least the area in which the student might work. In this way the professors have a very considerable influence on the direction of New Testament research. There are a number of things that are noteworthy about the above table. Firstly, the steady amount of work that is done on the Old Testament and New Testament as a whole, the broader historical study of the gospels, Paul and the other New Testament writers. There are no categories in which there is any kind of diminution in the amount of research being done. The major growth areas are study of the gospels and studies of an exegetical kind. Exegetical studies have increased quite dramatically in the period since Vatican II. These studies are often linked with a hermeneutical interest, either in terms of the interpretation of the passage for today, or in terms of the history of the interpretation of a passage.

In the terms of the subjects being worked on, the small scoring of justification is very interesting, especially when one remembers that books and articles by Catholic scholars have continued the debate on this subject during this period. Similarly *Heilsgeschichte* and the canon do not score well, though in Protestant scholarship these have been significant subjects in this period. The three important growth points are church/office, interpretation and resurrection. The first of these subjects directly relates to the concerns raised in the Catholic Church by Vatican II for the life of that church. That is to say the question of church/office relates not to the academic matters implicit in, or raised by, Vatican II, but it is a matter of immediate church

concern. The response of the professors at the level of supervised research in the New Testament indicates a high degree of sensitivity to the life of their church. The question of interpretation is also an implication of things raised at Vatican II, and this is also a subject that is widely discussed in books and articles by Catholic scholars during this period. These two subjects have not been raised in Protestant scholarship. It is true that interpretation has been a major concern of the group around Ebeling and Fuchs who write about the New Hermeneutic. These Protestant scholars, however, are coming to the question from the position reached by Barth and Bultmann, and are seeking to deal with the results of their work. The question comes up for Catholic scholars much more in relation to the authoritative interpretative role of the church and the questions that have been put to that by Vatican II.

It might be helpful at this point to illustrate the main themes by reference to particular dissertations. On the church for example there have been some very notable works done. Franz Sidl submitted a dissertation to the University of Vienna in 1963 on *The Church as a Principle of Life of Human Society in the Letters of the New Testament*, and just a little later two dissertations were submitted at about the same time to the University of Wurzburg, where Rudolf Schnackenburg was Professor. First, there was P. Karl Maly, *Mature Community. An Enquiry into the Apostle Paul's Pastoral Leadership in 1 Corinthians*, (1966) and then P. Barthomoläus Henneken, *Proclamation and Prophecy in 1 Thessalonians. A Contribution to the Theology of the Word of God* (a Lizentziatsarbeit 1966/1967). In 1970 Richard Giesriegl submitted his dissertation on *Office and Gift according to 1 Corinthians*, to the University of Salzburg. These dissertations are useful illustrations in that they point to the basic biblical work that is being done by Catholic scholars on this subject.

It is not just basic biblical work that is being done, it is basic biblical work with a view to the present needs of the church. This can be illustrated by two other dissertations on this subject which are both comprehensive and extremely valuable. The first is a work done with Otto Kuss at Munich by P. Hainz, *Ekklesia. Structure of a Pauline Church—Theology and Church Order* (1972). His interest in the contemporary situation is reflected in his introductory remarks, especially when he claims that the Pauline ecclesiology is taken over into the self-understanding of the reformation churches only doubtfully and uncertainly, and this is why the Pauline understanding plays such a significant role in the current ecumenical dialogue. H. Merklein did his dissertation at Wurzburg under Rudolf Schnackenburg in 1973. It is called, *The Church Office according to Ephesians*, and is very comprehensive (439 pages), dealing with the whole Pauline corpus. He traces the material from Paul's work in Antioch to his final period in Ephesus. He concludes that office is a function of the gospel in

Paul's understanding. He also demonstrates his contemporary interests in his work when he charges that a modern discussion of office based on the basic *theologoumena*, which he has treated in his dissertation, has yet to be done. His work, however, has provided the exegetical ground work upon which such discussion could be based.

Since the university professors have such a significant influence on the direction of New Testament research it is perhaps worth at this point looking more particularly at the work which has been stimulated by one of these professors. Rudolf Schnackenburg is well known to English-speaking students of the New Testament from his writings. His students have worked in important areas of contemporary significance, not least the work of Merklein just noted. Schnackenburg himself has written persuasively on the church, and the recent Festschrift for him was entitled *Church and Bible*. However, Professor Otto Kuss is not so well known to English-speaking people, and yet he has been prodigious in his work on the New Testament, and particularly on Paul. Three volumes of collected writings have now been published by Kuss, and the third volume published in 1971 is devoted to the role of the apostle Paul in the theological development of the early church (it runs to 504 pages!).

Otto Kuss now works as professor at Munich, and attracts a considerable number of research students. In 1967 the first volume of *Biblische Untersuchungen* appeared, edited by Kuss but without any introduction to the series. The first four volumes were advertised and a volume from Kuss on law in the main Pauline letters was also promised. This last has never appeared, though Kuss had published a long article in the *Münchener Theol. Zeitschrift* in 1966 (vol. 17, pp. 173-227) in which he gave a resumé of scholarly opinion on the subject before offering his own general conclusions. Seven years before that he had also published the first two volumes of a multi-volume commentary on Romans. The new series which he started in 1967 published mainly the dissertations of his students, most of whom offer their gratitude to him for his stimulating teaching (J. Ernst says that Kuss gave him his love of the New Testament). The series changed in 1971, and from volume 6 on was marked, *Münchener Universität-Schriften. Katholisch-Theologische Fakultät*. This change coincided with a change of subsidy from the German Research Fund to the resources of the University of Munich. The titles in the series are suggestive of the kind of work that has been stimulated by Kuss during his time in Munich.

1. Georg Richter, *The Foot-washing in John's Gospel. A History of its Interpretation*, 1967.
2. A. Sand, *The Idea of 'Flesh' in the main Pauline Letters*, 1967.
3. J. Ernst, *The Eschatological Adversary in the writings of the New Testament*, 1967.

4. Friedrich Schröger, *The Author of Hebrews as a Scripture Exegete*, 1968.
5. J. Ernst, *Fulness and the Fulness of Christ*, 1970.
6. J. Eckert, *The Early Christian Proclamation in the conflict between Paul and his Opponents according to Galatians*, 1971.
7. B. Spörlein, *The Denial of the Resurrection*, 1971.
8. J. Hainz, *Ekklesia. Structure of a Pauline church-theology and church-order*, 1972.
9. F. Laub, *Eschatological Proclamation and Life Style according to Paul. An Inquiry into the Work of the Apostle in the Building up of the Congregation in Thessalonica*, 1973.

Any brief survey of the current research by German-speaking Catholics on the New Testament must inevitably be impressionistic. This report must share this characteristic. The published and unpublished dissertations to which I have referred indicate, however, an astonishing activity which seems to be largely stimulated by the new spirit breathing through the Catholic Church since Vatican II.

The Bi-ennial Conference of German Catholic New Testament Scholars

IN March 1957 a gathering of 19 German Catholic New Testament scholars took place and they discussed old and new interpretations. The discussion reflected a move away from a literal exegesis to a more theological interpretation. Those present enjoyed the gathering, and expressed a desire to hold such a meeting on a two-yearly basis. In volume 1 of the revived new series of the *Biblische Zeitschrift* a report of this meeting was given under the heading, *Arbeitstagung der deutschen katholischen Neutestamentler*, and it indicated that this meeting was the second such conference. This conference has been held every two years since and its subjects give some indication of the concerns of these people. During the 1960s the conference spread beyond Germany both in terms of its membership, and its location, and it came to be called, *Tagung der deutschsprachigen katholischen Neutestamentler*. The conferences and the overall theme considered at these conferences were as follows:

- 1957 Old and New Interpretation
19 present. A move away from a literal exegesis to a theological interpretation.
- 1959 Various New Testament topics
36 plus some guests present. H. Schlier gave a redaction treatment of Mark 1-8.
- 1961 Son of Man
A paper on the work of Bultmann on the Son of Man, by Anton Vögtle. 50 plus guests present.

- 1963 Form-critical method
Over 50 plus guests present.
- 1965 Johannine problems
Many present.
- 1967 New Testament Christology
A notable number present. The discussion showed different trends in opinions among Catholics. Between the conservatives and the progressives a wide gap was apparent. However a collegial atmosphere prevailed.
- 1969 Church office in New Testament
About 40 present. The discussion revealed wide differences of opinion, and the discussion was so extensive and lively that it could not be contained in the time available. The subject to be continued at the next conference.
- 1971 Church and office in New Testament
About 40 present. Once again the discussion was lively, and Werner Bracht in his report formulated four theses as a result of the conference.
1. The New Testament does not yet speak of church office in the later sense of permanent and legal. The office appears more as a 'service function' of the church.
 2. This office is christological and based on the sending of Jesus, but it is also ecclesiastical and to be seen in combination with and in the service of the church.
 3. The recognition of Paul's apostolic office is from the church, and also from his own self-understanding, which is eschatologically orientated.
 4. From a purely historical point of view the New Testament shows a gap in the succession of the office of apostle, which does not allow a view of a direct succession. However, there it is not possible to exclude an actual context between the later office and the original apostolic office.
- 1973 Historical Jesus and the Jesus tradition of the gospels
About 65 present.
- 1975 The projected subject is the theology of the death of Jesus.

It hardly needs to be emphasised how interesting to readers of this journal the 1969 and 1971 conferences appear. That this topic commanded two conferences shows how important it has become in the Roman Catholic Church. It also is in line with the very considerable, and very valuable research that has been done on this question by Catholic scholars.

Conclusions

THIS report has been brief, but it may give some impression of the great amount of work being done by German-speaking Catholics on the New Testament. It also seems that Vatican II has had a major role in allowing this work to develop. Indeed it is the influence of Vatican II in combination with other factors which has produced the pattern of work we observe. Vatican II and the increasing influence of Protestant scholarship has led to the questions starting with justification, but going on to the origins of the resurrection faith, and the question of the purpose of Jesus' death. This last is of greater immediate interest to Catholics because of its relation to the last supper and the significance of this for the Catholic doctrine of the Mass. Secondly, Vatican II and the influence of the life of the church in the societies in which these scholars are working, with the ecclesiastical turmoil, has influenced the concentration on the study of church and office in the New Testament. Thirdly, Vatican II and the continuing presence of the Roman Catholic tradition has stimulated the work of New Testament scholars on the question of authority and interpretation. For Protestants the current interest (in Germany at least) in hermeneutics has largely come from the work of Fuchs and Ebeling, but this is not the case for Catholics.

This report also suggests that there is a fund of work and research that German Catholic scholars have been doing which relates to some central questions of our own. Two at least of these for Evangelicals are interpretation and church/office. On the questions of the interpretation of the New Testament and especially on the subject of church and office there is a great deal to learn from our Catholic colleagues. It is also worth noting, finally, how the report shows up the awareness of professors and New Testament scholars of the society and the church in which they and their fellow Christians live.

¹ See Andrew Wells, *Revolution in Rome*, Downers Grove, 1972.

² I would like to acknowledge help, and to express my deep appreciation for the warm hospitality which I received in the summer of 1974 from the Theological Faculty of the University of Freiburg in Breisgau, and particularly the Dean of the Faculty, Prof. G. Biemer.

³ During the summer of 1974 the FDP appeared in campaigns as the first political party promising to review the Church-State relationship. It is perhaps worth remembering that while Protestants and Catholics form approximately equal parts of the population in the Federal Republic, in the area covered by the Democratic Republic the proportion of Protestants to Catholics used to be about 10-1.

⁴ Göttingen, 1966.

⁵ Münster, 1966. For an English discussion of the subject see J. A. Ziesler, *The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul*, Cambridge, 1972.