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The Church, Her Image and Her Critics

INTRODUCTION

The period following the Second Vatican Council has been marked by a lively discussion about the road the Catholic Church of the future should take. Initially Vatican II opened up possibilities of reforms and their experimental and practical application. Much use was made of these possibilities: There were successes and failures, though there was not always agreement about which label to attach to which development. In the last fifteen years the mood seems to have changed. The general climate of opinion in the Church is less receptive to reforms. Complaints about this state of affairs are voiced by lay people in the Church as well as by theologians (cf. Greinacher/Kung, 1986). The "classic" criticisms relate to a lack of democracy and freedom in the Church, the permitting and desirability of (actually existing) diversity, and a lack of willingness to reform practical aspects of the exercise of ministry, etc.

Meanwhile contemporary developments have caused us to ask again what the Church of the future ought to be like. We need only recall the resignation of the French bishop Jaques Galliot, whose departure from episcopal office meant the rejection of a particular vision of the Church, or the so-called "popular church initiative" in Austria in the summer of 1995, which, reacting to dissatisfaction at scandals extending to episcopal level, is demanding fundamental church reforms, especially in the areas of the ordination of women, celibacy, the right to participate in the nomination of bishops, sexual morality, and the treatment of divorced persons who have remarried.

In all this the image of the Catholic Church has suffered considerably. The declining number of theology students is a significant indicator. Examples of this development may be found in Germany, Holland, and Belgium. Along with the general secularizing tendency amongst the membership of Christian Churches, this decline (in student numbers) might well be connected with the declining attractiveness

and credibility of the image of the Church (as a potential employer). It is therefore all the more interesting to discover what is thought about the image of the Church by those students of theology who have most recently embarked on their course. Accompanying them through the training stage of their course also means allowing for a debate about the desired and the actual shape of the Church and its communities.

However, for our purposes, it is important to know whether the young people we are dealing with reject the mainstream public view of the Church and accept it as it is, or not. Is there some mechanism at work in the student selection process that excludes critical spirits? Or is the critical idea still alive which, despite the Church's public image, continues to assert the significance of an *ecclesia semper reformanda* and finds expression in the desire to help change the Church? From a number of empirical studies conducted in recent years with students of theology, it seems reasonable to assume that we shall have to deal with both groups, of which the second is likely to be more numerous (cf. Friesl 1993; Köhler and Schwaiger 1995; P.-A. Ahrens and R. Schloz 1992; Daiber and Jossutis 1985; Traupe 1990; Engels 1990; Van der Ven and Biemans 1994; Verhoeven and Hutsebaut 1995). What does 'criticism of the Church' mean in a theological context and further, what are the findings in our survey?

CRITICISM OF THE CHURCH IN THE THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

In ecclesiological terms the contemporary opinions mentioned here that bear on the Church as it is and as it should be are not mere speculation. Historically Catholic ecclesiology itself was and is a mirror-image of diverse interests. Ultimately Vatican II struggled to establish an intelligible view of the Church, without however succeeding in establishing an unambiguous position. This is the realization that lies at the root of Hermann J. Pottmeyer's recognition that the split in Catholic ecclesiology is the cause of many post-conciliar conflicts in the Church (Pottmeyer 1983). He presents the history of the two Vatican councils in the light of an unresolved conflict, which is just as much an explanation of Cardinal Ratzinger's reasoned criticism of the council as it is of the foundation of a "grassroots" movement in the Church ("Church from below"). Ratzinger had expressed the view that the period following Vatican II might well prove the "earlier churchmen" right: they had recognized a great danger in the carrying out of councils, because they would awaken hopes and desires that could not be fulfilled. One of the examples he cites is the desire for more teamwork in the Church and the participation of all members in the building up of the Christian community. Thus there is a counter-movement of critics who have identified a growing bureaucratic and centralizing trend

in the Church and who are fighting to make good the lack of opportunities for participation.

Pottmeyer asks why there should be a "Church from below" and criticism of centralization when the Council has most definitely developed the idea of "the Church as people." The causes are to be found in the unresolved conflict whether the Church is to be regarded as a great institution with the character of a hierarchical pyramid or whether the idea of the *communio fidelium* may be taken as describing it adequately. *Lumen gentium* develops both forms of this ecclesiology; the document emphasizes *fraternitas* in chapter 2 and *paternitas* in chapter 3, in other words the ecclesiology of the *communio* or "God's people" on the one hand and the stress on office within the framework of church structures working downwards from above on the other. The latter sees the pope as the sole figure in direct relationship with Christ—derived therefrom is the *potestas* of the bishops, under whom the remaining faithful are to be found (cf. Pottmeyer 1983, 276). There was a failure to impart both views during Vatican I and again during Vatican II. Events at the latter council increased the potential for conflict, as various groups sought pointedly to emphasize "their" ecclesiology and defend its validity against others.

With regard to "above" and "below" in the Church, Rahner has produced a number of reflections in his paper *Strukturwandel der Kirche* (Structural Change in the Church), where he distances himself from an ecclesiology descending from above. For him there is no doubt that the Church is charged with its task "from above." What Rahner does criticize is the identification of the structure of ecclesiastical office with "above." For him the whole Church is subject to the claims of her Founder, and though He loves the Church, she may be sinful in whole or in part. Only those who come together freely in communities will be the supporters of tomorrow's "Church from below." All ecclesiastical organizations will have to serve "grassroots-fellowships" of this type, not least because religiously defined groups will vanish and, thereafter, the concrete virtues of a community and its members will become the core of what is to be handed on (cf. Rahner 1972, 83 vv.). Rahner is not merely thinking of a circle of core churchmen. Openness of and in the Church is urgently needed; otherwise a sterile ghetto-Church would develop, concerned to shut itself off from the outside world, scenting opposition from the "outside" and devising its own rules for the life of its insiders. The Church has nothing to lose of what it values through a policy of consistent openness, which relates structurally to questions of membership, but also to teaching.

Barely twenty years later Edward Schillebeeckx takes the ecclesiological discussion one stage further by examining the relationship

between “hierarchy” and “democracy,” particularly in the relevant context. He is concerned to refute Pius X’s assertion that the existing organization of the Church (as a hierarchical pyramid) is delimited from the “world,” because it owes its form not to the development of social structures but directly to its divine Founder (Schillebeeckx 1990, 252). The view inherent in this ecclesiology is that the hierarchical structure of the Church accords with God’s plan and that it is contrary to it to entertain the possibility of democratic structures in the Church. It is a view that Schillebeeckx rejects as a major historical misunderstanding. It would be contrary to historical fact to deny that the Church believed for a long time that it was benefiting from the establishment of state Churches and the overlapping of state and Church, and that consent to the modern separation of state and church was given only reluctantly. If there was this interdependence, then it must be seen as a mutual exchange of influences, affecting the organizational structures of both parties. Above all, the end of feudalism and the historical development of modern democratic freedoms has made us aware of a growing tension between social and ecclesiastical organization. Following the rejection of modernism the slogan of the “will of the people,” as represented by the French Revolution, was also rejected. Schillebeeckx’s view is that Vatican II began to address this past, showing liberal tendencies and seeking to bring about a reconciliation of the Church to the modern consciousness of freedom. Schillebeeckx writes, “Before there is even any talk of ecclesiastical office, this Council defines the Church as the people summoned by God. In this all believers are equal, enjoying parity as believers, ‘living by the spirit,’ free children of God” (Schillebeeckx, 1990, 262). There follows a description of special offices in the Church, which are presented as being held by the people’s servants without limiting the individual status of members of the people (cf. Kehl 1994, 411 vv.). It is only when an office-holder puts his duties into practice that a dilemma arises—that “an institutionally protected basis for the free working of the Holy Spirit amongst lay believers is made impossible or, at least, very difficult.”

The mystery of the Church is, according to Schillebeeckx, identified with an internal structure of authority and obedience: “The Church is seen in reality as a *societas perfecta*, as the accomplished Kingdom of God under the leadership of the ‘Vicar’ of Christ, while only the path of obedience is deemed suitable for the faithful” (Schillebeeckx 1990, 263). The inverse picture of faith and obedience as something owed by the hierarchy to the people, as propounded by Vatican I, is no longer a subject of debate and finds only limited institutional expression in consultative bodies such as synods, parochial church councils etc.

Schillebeeckx recognizes a decisive and legitimate impulse whenever, in discussion of the Church as mystery, there strongly appears that dual presentation of the Church's two realities (empirical/worldly <-> metaphysical/religious) which must be bridged dialectically. In fact we deal with only one reality which makes up the mystery of the Church. But this reality may be considered from different perspectives, all of which are accessible to all. A split between the religious and the empirical that would allocate areas to one or the other is not a theological proposition. Even the fundamental core of the Church's existence, God's self-revelation, is an historical event interwoven with this. This offer of grace is deserving of the complete faithfulness of all believers. The whole Church is bound to subject itself to it.

In this connection the task of those exercising office is to ensure "that the ever-present liberating authority of the Lord Jesus in the life of the christian community is always and again validated." What therefore counts fundamentally is not the formal powers of office in the Church but the "committing to trust" (1 Tim 6, 20; 2 Tim 1, 14), as the apostles expressed it (Schillebeeckx 1990, 272).

In Schillebeeckx's view these findings are not an argument against the possibility of authority and leadership in the Church, but they do not confer legitimacy for a hierarchical structure of the kind that first emerged as a mirror-reflection of the Greco-Roman Empire and which is said to be impossibly out of step with democratic procedures (cf. also Boff 1985, 110). It would be a false conclusion to use evidence that the Church was almost never democratically organized as an argument to reject democracy nowadays. More to the point would be the recognition how greatly the Church had been receptive to certain "worldly" forms of domination. This should lead to new thinking and an understanding that "hierarchy" does not intend or legitimize an implementation of conditions of property and domination, but that more prominence must be given to the common submission to the word of God, whose dignity is not impaired because more participation and democracy have become possible in the Church. It is in any case not part of the essential character of the Church to have to be undemocratic. "The only argument used to defend a non-democratic Church," says Schillebeeckx, "is in fact a mere harking back to twenty centuries of non-democratic cultures from which the Church took over the broad lines of its own forms of government" (Schillebeeckx, 1990, 276).

Though the "democracy-problem" can be pursued further, we cannot do so here. All institutions that do not respond to the need for self-determination and personal freedom and instead try to lay down

guidelines and define areas of activity and views are subject to criticism in the context of the modern development of liberty. The fundamental question is what relationship the Church is to establish with the modern world (cf. Kehl 1994, 199ff.). Against this background it is obvious that any consideration of the fundamental equality of the whole of God's people will lead to a demand for cooperative structures of leadership and the ordination of women. In all this it is also essential that the Church has more of interest to offer than formal structures. A Church that is true to its traditions and to the contemporary situation must address the source of its ideas and what they imply. For such a Church Leonardo Boff stipulates, "Social change for juster living together, human rights as the rights of the large and poor majority, social justice, complete liberation above all through social-historical liberation, real service to help the disadvantaged of this world. . . ." (Boff 1985, 27f.).

What this short review shows in any case is the systematic and theological consideration of a potential for reform, containing greater prospects of development than is often assumed. The fact that Vatican II did not, in Catholic ecclesiological terms, come down firmly in favor of either the hierarchical pyramid or the more democratic style underlines the officially admitted possibility of discussion. What the characteristic content and structure of the two styles is or could be, whether there is to be mediation between the two or weightings are possible or desirable, has not been finally established. Most authors do not doubt that office will in future be capable of clear differentiation in terms of function and sex. The option tends to be towards an open, communicatively organized Church, open to all who have concerns to express and to a joint process in the search for obligation in faith. Increased democratic participation and communication, as content and method, are conditional on each other. At the same time, however, the Church remains particularly interested in those who have the least chance of a life of human dignity.

Whether and how these theologically based development possibilities will find a practical response is clarified below. Four problem areas touched on in the literature referred to will feature in our survey of students of theology. This is a group of particular interest as it will be entrusted in future with the future of the Church.

THEOLOGICAL STUDENTS' IMAGE OF THE CHURCH IN GERMANY, BELGIUM, AND THE NETHERLANDS— FRAMEWORK OF THE SURVEY

The students referred to at the beginning provided the impulse for our own survey—a three-country study projected as a longitudinal section, wherein the question of the Church's image is only one aspect.

What are students of Catholic theology like? Can the trend outlined above be confirmed? Is it true that a high proportion of them entertain a thoroughly critical attitude towards the empirically knowable Church? If so, it would mean that the current public image of the Catholic Church cannot deter young people from preparing themselves for professional tasks in the Church or church-related work, although they do not approve of the Church's current image in certain decisive points. What are the parameters of their critical attitudes and the differences between students from different countries?

Sample and Method

At the beginning of the winter semester in the autumn of 1994, first-semester students of theology at four German (D) faculties (Mainz, Munster, Regensburg, and Wurzburg), three Dutch (NL) (Nijmegen, Utrecht, and Tilburg) and one Belgian (B) (Louvain) were asked to complete a written questionnaire, of which 810 were distributed (D:610, NL: 135, B:65). Feedback (as an average of the three sample surveys) was of the order of 46% (D:36%, NL:38%, B:63%).

A total of 322 completed questionnaires were returned by the students. The sample survey revealed significant national differences. We refer briefly to some of them. The average age of first-semester students was 19 in Belgium, 21 in Germany, but 37 in the Netherlands. This is due to opportunities for people in employment to study at the same time ("part-time"). In Belgium women constituted 61% of interviewees, in the Netherlands and Germany 54% and 55% respectively. The proportion of students for the priesthood was only 7% in Belgium, but 15% and 14% in the Netherlands and Germany respectively. Of the German students 34% are preparing for their qualifying diploma, 56% for a teaching qualification and 10% are aiming at another final qualification. In the Netherlands diploma students make up over 70% of the total. This is due to the fact that professional specialization is only possible in the final phase of the course and beyond. We have no detailed information from Belgium on this point. Also, just under half the students in all three countries were active in a church community at the beginning of their courses (D:47%, NL:43%, B:40%).

Operating procedure

The enquiries briefly presented above have brought a number of aspects to our notice, which allow us to draw certain conclusions about theological students' image of the Church. Below we introduce the different areas of inquiry (bracketed abbreviations refer to abbreviations in the tables). We can assume that these are contrasting areas, albeit in varying degree. Four such line-ups can be posited theoretically:

(A) "Open Church"—"Decided Church"

The tension and problems implicit in this line-up have been clearly described by Karl Rahner. A Church that sees itself as open to all humankind was understood to be an important and signal form of a Church of "popular character" (scale 1: OPENCHUR). Relevant comments are: "The Church must not reject people who wish to join," and "Everyone should be able to join the Church."

A clearly different emphasis is contained in comments below, which speak of the Church in terms of a decided Christianity (scale 2: DECIDCHU), a concept that includes a deliberate profession of faith by believers as well as the right of the Church to require conditions of membership. Relevant comments are: "One can really only count people as church-members if they consciously commit themselves to the Church and make this clear outwardly by being decisively Christian," "The Church has the right to require conditions of its members" and "The Church ought not to hesitate to issue binding guidelines for successful living together in families and communities."

(B) "Modern, up-to-date Church"—"Metaphysical Church"

From the studies cited it is clear that there is a desire for a modern, up-to-date Church (scale 3: MODERNCH). Comments such as, "The Church must always adapt to the changing ideas of society" and "The Church must develop as much as possible in line with new ways of thinking in our modern world," are used in support—there is also the negative item, "The Church does not always have to adapt to all new developments in society." In the report on his survey Friesl mentions that roughly 60% of the students he interviewed were prepared to follow others towards modernity even if this meant abandoning traditions.

A clearly different emphasis is found in comments that the Church should be freed from its social and cultural bonds while its metaphysical aspects are stressed instead (scale 4: METPHYCH). Relevant comments are: "To see the Church as a social and societal construct is to deny its essential character," "It would be better for the Church if it did not join in every conceivable spiritual movement of the day but remembered its received traditions" and "There is an invisible Church, the community of the faithful, that exists outside all human law."

(C) "Political, social-work Church"—"Unpolitical Church"

The preferred church-models often included one favouring a social work-aspect (scale 5: POLSOCCH). The key comments supporting this view include, "The Church's missionary task is nowadays best fulfilled through social commitment to the needs of the underprivileged

at home and abroad," "Many sermons and church views (e.g., on sexuality, marriage, the family) express the values of bourgeois morality and put these forward as the essence of the Gospel," "The urge to social liberation, implicit in the Christian message, is ignored by the church establishment."

Opposed to this view is the desire for a Church that keeps out of the social and political debate, and as a direct alternative to this pursues kerygmatic aims. In a certain sense the supporters of this attitude reject the view that mysticism and politics should be linked. Their ideal is an unpolitical Church (scale 6: UNPOLCHU). Items are, "The Church ought to keep out of the political arena," "The Church ought to occupy itself less with economic, social and educational questions, but should concern itself more intensely with the proclamation of the faith and inner renewal," "The Church should not allow itself to become involved in the quarrels of interest groups in our society and should strive for neutrality" and "The Church's commitment to social tasks is most truly exercised on the basis of the Gospels, if it refrains from more extensive, long-term political objectives."

(D) "Democratic Church"—"Hierarchical Church"

In all the surveys the question of church structures was a controversial point. So as to examine the notion of a participatively and democratically constituted Church we used the following comments (scale 7a: DEMOCRAT): "It would be a good thing if believers could simply share in decisions about everything that happens in the Church," "It is a fundamental shortcoming of the Church that its purposes and ends are not democratically determined by its members," "Responsibility for the Church's activities must not be placed in the hands of a few individuals" and "Believers must be able to decide for themselves what is supposed to happen in their Church."

A special aspect within the framework of a structurally changed Church has become a subject of discussion. This is represented by the notion of a "broadening" of church office, whereby the strict division between ecclesiastical office as exercised by priests and functions of the Church that can be performed by laymen is abolished. This idea lies behind the relevant items addressing the opening-up of office (scale 7b: LAYSERVI): "In the Church lay persons too should be able to preside at all services": No distinction was made between men and women.

Opposed to this picture of a democratic Church which has extended office to lay people we have the picture of a Church in which there predominates the traditional form of hierarchical and instructional office, reserving to itself the right to make decisions and conduct services

(scale 8: HIERARCH). "The Church is best led by persons with special authority who bear responsibility," "In church only those people should celebrate a service who have been charged with this special purpose" and "It is not desirable for every believer to be allowed to interfere in all the Church's decisions."

RESULTS

Before the analysis of the scale median values and correlations that we shall be discussing, the scales were first tested for their reliability. In all cases a sufficiently high alpha for reliability was registered. We now examine the following questions: how do the student respondents judge and weight the various scales? Are the assumed contrasts really apparent and what preferences are expressed? Finally, are there differences between the three national groups?

The first two questions are answered by Table 1. For a general impression the right-hand column of Table 1 should be consulted; it shows the ranking of the different scales. The statements of the OPENCHUR scale are the most strongly supported, followed by DEMOCRAT and POLSOCCH. The respondents' view of the Church clearly visualizes one that is open to all, democratically structured and committed to social work. Near the bottom come MODERNCH and UNPOLCHU, but HIERARCH is last of all. What students support least is a hierarchically constituted Church. They view with almost as much disfavour a Church that sets out to be unpolitical and aims at social neutrality. A third factor here is the MODERNCH scale, whose items point to the necessity of an up-to-date Church adjusted as far as possible to the thought patterns of our time. From the students' view these statements seem to paint too positive a picture of modernity; they would like to see the Church keeping somewhat more distance towards it. However, the standard deviation would indicate that for this scale there are greater differences between respondents.

Table 1: Scale median values

Scale	Mean	Standard deviation	Ranking of all scales
(A) "Open Church" — "Decided Church"			
Scale 1: OPENCHUR	1.8206	.7883	1
Scale 2: DECIDCHU	2.9439	.7963	6
(B) "Modern, up-to-date Church" — "Metaphysical Church"			
Scale 3: MODERNCH	3.0571	1.0012	7
Scale 4: METPHYCH	2.7661	.7420	4

(C) "Political, social-work Church" — "Unpolitical Church"			
Scale 5: POLSOCCH	2.6984	.8667	3
Scale 6: UNPOLCHU	3.1897	.7660	8
(D) "Democratic Church" — "Hierarchical Church"			
Scale 7a: DEMOCRAT	2.5214	.8093	2
Scale 7b: LAYSERVI	2.9413	1.1097	5
Scale 8: HIERARCH	3.2056	.8078	9

(1 = very strong agreement; 3 = median; 5 = very strong disagreement)

The ranking of individual scales also helps us quickly establish contrasting polarities. We note divergences in all four cases. In the question of "open Church" or "decided Church" the preference is clearly for an open Church. Similarly the students see divergence, between a Church brought up-to-date and the metaphysical-mystical concept of the Church. Their preference, however, is clearly for the latter. Thirdly, there is divergence between a political, social-work orientated and an unpolitical Church. Respondents prefer "political, social work." And finally we can establish divergence between a democratic Church standing for the reform of office and a hierarchically constituted Church. Concerning the question whether ecclesiastical office ought to be cast in a new mold there are, however, considerable differences within the group of respondents (stand.dev.=1 .1097). By contrast, views of a democratic or hierarchically constituted Church are more homogeneous. In the two divergent relationships (DEMOCRAT-HIERARCH and LAYSERVI-HIERARCH), but overall too, the difference between "democratic" and "hierarchical" is greatest. We can already conclude here that polarity is most clearly defined between these two.

If these results are classified by country (see Table 2), four scales evidently show significant differences in outlook: METPHYCH, LAYSERVI, DECIDCHU and MODERNCH. There is a marked difference between the German theologians and their Belgian and Dutch colleagues as to whether the Church can rightly be considered a major metaphysical construct. In the sequence below agreement with this concept of the Church shows progressive decline. In the question of the desirability of opening up the concept of office the German theologians express the greatest reservations, the Dutch are in the middle and the Belgians clearly say "yes." The Belgians are in a special position too over the question of whether the Church is to be seen as an expression of a "Decided Christianity." In contrast to their German and Dutch fellow-students, who give some slight support to this notion, the Belgians are inclined to reject it. Finally we have the problem of an up-to-date Church, whereas the Dutch and Belgians express

roughly equal support for such a Church, the Germans have reservations about this idea.

All in all these few results already allow us to recognize that the German students are marked out by a somewhat more traditionally accentuated ecclesiological perspective; they, more than others, emphasize the metaphysical nature of the Church, they are less prepared than others to go along with an opening-up of office and, by contrast, criticize more strongly a Church that adapts to our times. Compared with the Germans and the Dutch, the Belgians stand out because they support the opening-up of office unambiguously and take a critical view of the church concept of "Decided Christianity." There are no recognizable "mavericks" amongst the Dutch; their opinions are either on a par with those of another group or between those of the Belgians and the Germans.

Table 2: Mean values by countries

Variable	Mean Germany (N = 223)	Mean Belgium (N = 54)	Mean Netherlands (N = 45)	Significance
METPHYCH	2.66	2.98	3.02	*
LAYSERVI	3.10	2.53	2.70	*
DECIDCHU	2.82	3.45	2.96	*
MODERNCH	3.25	2.62	2.64	*
OPENCHUR	1.84	1.84	1.65	ns
DEMOCRAT	2.46	2.75	2.56	ns
POLSOCCH	2.62	2.56	2.67	ns
UNPOLCHU	3.18	3.20	3.24	ns
HIERARCH	3.20	3.34	3.05	ns

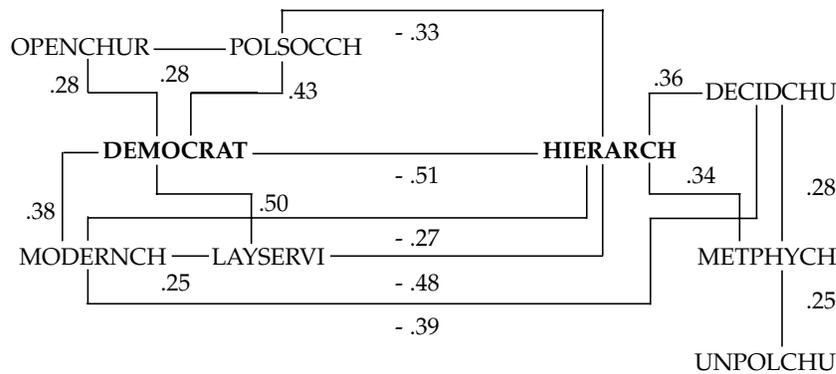
(1 = very strong agreement; 3 = median; 5 = very strong disagreement; ns = not significant)

Hitherto we have examined the scales singly or in terms of theoretically assumed poles. The connection of the nine scales with one another is shown in a correlation test. Diagram 1 shows the values for the correlation coefficients. Clearly recognizable are two "systems," whose centres are the DEMOCRAT and HIERARCH scales. These scales, as has been shown above, are the furthest apart in respondents' opinion. Statements favouring a democratically constituted Church are flanked by support for an opening-up of office, a political social-work orientation of the Church, an "open" and, finally, an up-to-date Church. Apart from items relating to the up-to-date Church (MODERNCH) we are dealing here with scales which, without exception, have been judged

as more positive than their opposite poles. Statements favouring a democratically constituted Church, however, are flanked by support for decided Christianity, an unpolitical Church and a metaphysical view of the Church.

Conspicuous in the two “systems” are five negative correlations, of which the two strongest relate to the poles “hierarchical” or “democratic Church” ($r = -.51$). The ecclesiological discussion around and about this, which was referred to earlier, seems to have struck a chord with the students. The divergence between “hierarchical” and “democratic” has therefore been justifiably seen as the core of the debate about the future of the Church. The idea of office has been introduced into this area of divergence, and it is clear that all three scales are closely connected. More than all other concepts, statements about opening up office correlate most strongly with the democratic view of the Church; they show an almost equally strongly felt negative relationship to the hierarchical concept of Church and office ($r = -.48$) as the democratic church view (cf. regression analysis as appendix).

Diagram 1: Reciprocal connections between scales



(Only correlations considered $< .25$; $p = .000$)

DISCUSSION

The analyses presented here leave no doubts. Concerning the model of a future Church, which may be hierarchically or democratically orientated, there is a clear view: first-semester students have opted for a democratic and open church structure. A number of nuances, detectable across national borders, change nothing in this picture. Although the respondents consider this aim to be far removed,

in some respects, from the current state of the Church, they express their hopes for a democratic, open Church. Despite this unambiguous discrepancy they are, nevertheless, embarking on theological studies, which must mean either that they believe the Church can really change or that there are other factors relating to their chosen profession which allow them to ignore the actual structure of the Church. Engels found in his long-term study (1990) that a raft of religious and ecclesiastical views remain fundamentally unaffected by a course of studies—they survive. More conservative students are, according to this, able to preserve their view of the Church throughout their course against all critical objections. But there is also a group of more critically minded students, whose critical attitude is strengthened, which can in the end cause them to give up their studies. What the future holds for the students surveyed herein will become evident when a further planned series of surveys has been evaluated.

What policies ought to be adopted for higher education? What role is there for practising criticism? That criticism and a critical attitude to the Church were of the essence of Christianity and the Catholic faith itself had already been stressed by Rahner (1972, 42). V. Konzelmus, referring to the history of the Church, emphasizes “that church criticism is a legitimate expression of the general human capacity for judgment, in still greater degree a legitimate task of theology and equally an indispensable condition of the Church’s inner life” (Konzelmus 1986, 44). Criticism is legitimate and indispensable because in the history of the Church decisions have frequently been made that have subsequently proved wrong. Examples one could name are colonialism justified on religious grounds, religious compulsion, the Inquisition and Crusades, the encouragement of religious fanaticism and the intolerance of the Church, alliances with the powerful, prevention of social justice, hostility to common sense and science and the exploitation of human fears—such is the debit side of the Church’s balance sheet (id.45).

Precisely because the history of the Church demonstrates that it has not been free of error, a critical attitude towards it is not only possible but legitimate and indispensable. It seems that in higher education the practice of the critical faculties is essential. For this students need to familiarize themselves with the sources which provide the criteria for church criticism. Such sources are the biblical tradition, also a critical reappraisal of the history of the Church. The stream from both sources is combined in the contemporary view, and to learn about it in conjunction with the history of the modern freedom movement is indispensable. Legitimate criticism must first acquire knowledge of the

context from which it derives its yardstick, i.e. the Church is not there for herself alone but following biblical tradition prepares people for the Kingdom of God. That is her elemental task. Thus the core question for critics to ask is whether the Church is fulfilling this task or, more precisely, whether she conforms to those values that are inherent in the proclamation of the Kingdom of God.

One should always try to remember that criticism is legitimate; for every institution, including the Church, tries to attain a maximum of internal homogeneity. Then, criticism is often not lightly borne. There is also the question of how criticism is expressed. Cognitive-rational aspects have been mentioned; besides this many theologians speak of a force of expression that refers to the veracity and authenticity of the speaker. On this point Konzil describes the authenticity of critics as an important pre-requisite of legitimate and indispensable criticism. This is a criticism which can refer to the continuity of tradition and which commends the critic's authenticity. Rahner has similar views. He argues that authenticity is found in critics' expressions of commitment when they not only criticize but stand up positively for faith in God and Jesus Christ and participate in the life of the Church (Rahner 1972, 59f.). On institutional grounds it is easy to see that the Church can more readily come to terms with those critics who strive for change in it. Efforts in institutions of higher education would be well directed towards maintaining this connection (cf. Ziebertz 1995).

It is doubtful whether it is sensible to reactivate formulae such as "suffering for the Church." They certainly cease to be useful if they are offered along with a surreptitious psychological therapy, and at the same time the status quo is cemented. Practice in criticism according to the criteria named above must also lead to real changes, if the examination of the sources and the history of the workings of the ideas found therein leads to the recognition that changes are necessary and possible. In view of the time factor and its significance for changes in the Church we may well believe that a long and deep breath is a necessary part of the practice of criticism. Nevertheless, if hopes for real change are not based on any real substance young students will all too soon become frustrated. It therefore seems sensible to work together with communities located near institutions of higher education in which practical experience of and experiments with "another kind" of Church are possible, alongside the academic exercise of theologically founded criticism. Finally, it is significant that the "Church" does not change; only the people within it can; and to enable young students to do so may be taken as a genuine component of theological training.

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APPENDIX

In conclusion, we will present the connections as a linear regression, as such an analysis elucidates even more clearly which concepts the scales for the democratic (DEMOCRAT) and hierarchical (HIERARCH) Church “explain” ($p < .05$ every time). First the DEMOCRAT scale is used, followed by HIERARCH, as dependent variables. All other scales are used as independent variables. The inclusion of further scales which were part of the survey did not prove very productive. As they scarcely increased the declared variation we shall restrict ourselves here to the scales already discussed. Results are calculated for all the respondents as well as for national groups.

(1) Regression analysis for the scale DEMOCRAT

All respondents		Netherlands	
	β		β
1. HIERARCH	-.25	1. LAYSERVI	.49
2. LAYSERVI	.27	2. MODERNCH	.34
3. POLSOCCH	.22	3. POLSOCCH	.26
4. MODERNCH	.17		
5. OPENCHUR	.11		
	adj. $r^2 = .45$		adj. $r^2 = .59$
Germany		Belgium	
	β		β
1. HIERARCH	-.29	1. HIERARCH	-.43
2. LAYSERVI	.29	2. MODERNCH	.37
3. POLSOCCH	.22	3. DECIDCHU	-.24
4. MODERNCH	.20		
	adj. $r^2 = .49$		adj. $r^2 = .54$

The DEMOCRAT scale is roughly 50% “explainable”; the highest declared variation occurs in the Dutch partial sample survey. Another characteristic of the latter is that it only features positive Betas. As far as Dutch students are concerned the democratic Church option is marked “positive” and is connected with support for an opening-up of office and an up-to-date Church that is orientated towards social work. All three scales are also significant for the German group, although there is additionally a negative value—the rejection of the hierarchical view of the Church. For the Belgian group there is also a second negative indication—the rejection of the idea of being decidedly Christian as an individual or a Church. The Belgian students’ concept of a democratic Church is positively determined by the wish for an up-to-date

Church. In this case “up-to-date” can have the completely positive meaning, “conforming to democratic culture.” Their main concern is to reject a hierarchically constituted Church.

(2) Regression analysis for the scale HIERARCH

All respondents		Netherlands	
	β		β
1. DEMOCRAT	-.27	1. UNPOLCHU	.50
2. DECIDCHU	.21		
3. LAYSERVI	-.23		
4. METPHYCH	.14		
5. UNPOLCHU	.11		
6. POLSOCCH	-.12		
	adj. $r^2 = .43$		adj. $r^2 = .59$
Germany		Belgium	
	β		β
1. DEMOCRAT	-.27	1. DEMOCRAT	-.53
2. LAYSERVI	-.30	2. UNPOLCHU	.27
3. DECIDCHU	.19	3. LAYSERVI	-.27
4. METPHYCH	.16		
5. POLSOCCH	-.12		
	adj. $r^2 = .49$		adj. $r^2 = .44$

Declared variations relating to the concept of the hierarchical Church fluctuate around 50%. For the Dutch group we can see only one “explanatory” scale: a Church that keeps out of social and political entanglements and concerns itself with the proclamation of the Gospel instead. This aspect also weighs heavily with Belgian students. But for both Belgian and German students negative lines of explanation carry most weight, i.e. rejection of a democratically constituted Church and of the idea of opening up ecclesiastical office.