

THE SECTARIAN IN US. QUESTIONS ON THE QUESTION "WHAT IS A SECT?" IN EAST WEST PERSPECTIVE¹

Edward G. Farrugia, SJ

Until before Vatican II the answer to the question what a sect is seemed to present, for many in the Catholic Church, no special difficulties. Whoever cut himself or herself off from the one true Church belonged, in ascending order of distance from the one true Church, to one of three categories: a) schismatics, b) heretics or c) sects. Schismatics had basically rescinded only communion while practically retaining the whole truth; heretics, while giving up some basic truths, had kept many others; and sects had disfigured the truth to such an extent that they could hardly claim to be Christians any longer, in spite of some Christian elements in their new beliefs and could be described as a Christian sect primarily in view of the Christian Church from which they broke off.

0. *Formulating the problem*

Our concern here is **to formulate a problem** in view of a dogmatic aspect which has been insufficiently discussed - sects considered not in themselves, but insofar as they provide elements for a differentiation between East and West. Given such a methodological self-restriction, it cannot be the purpose of this brief contribution to discuss so many studies on the theme, much less so regarding the question of the definition of sect. The study of L. Greenslade, *Schism in the Early Church: What light can the past throw?* (London 1984) could here be mentioned, as representative.

1. Abbreviations:

ALGERMISSEN = K. Algermissen, *Konfessionskunde*, (Revised by H. Fries and others), (Paderborn 1969);

BOLSHAKOFF = S. Bolshakoff, *Russian Nonconformity*, (Philadelphia 1950);

HAUPTMANN = P. Hauptmann, "Symbolik der ostkirchlichen Sekten", E. Hammerschmidt and others, *Symbolik des Orthodoxen und orientalischen Christentums*, (Stuttgart 1962) 92-119.

MERSH = J.L. Wiczynski (ed.), *The Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History*, vols. 1-56, (Gulf Breeze, FL 1976-1994).

It retraces the problem in patristics, showing its fluctuation in the concept of heresy, as well as of schism, which depended on that concept (pp. 18-20. 22. 28-29). For the Fathers the most fundamental distinction, spiritually and dogmatically, was that of being within or without the Church (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*); what was being taught outside the Church could not claim the same interest (pp. 18. 21).

Another representative study is that of K. Rudolph, who in his "Enige grundsätzliche Bemerkungen zum Thema Schisma und Häresie unter religionsvergleichendem Gesichtspunkt", in: C.J. Bleeker et alii (ed.s), *Ex orbe Religionum*, (Leiden 1972), pp. 326-339, puts attempts to define a sect in the ample context of comparative religion. Taking his distance (Ibid., 329) from the term "*Offenbarungsreligionen*" (religions which appeal to a revelation), considered to be ambiguous, or preferring instead the term *Stifterreligionen* (religions which, contrary to *Volksreligionen*, or national-popular religions such as Hinduism, go back to a founder, such as Buddha, Jesus and Mohammed), Rudolph considers that, strictly speaking, the concepts of "heresy", "schism" and "sect" are possible only in a *Stifterreligion* (pp. 327-328). In a *Volksreligion* one can reform rather the cult and thus form a new religious community, even if, in the context of a philosophy in the bosom of such a kind of religion, as in ancient India or in ancient Greece, one can reach sectarian formations. In effect, christianity has adopted the concepts of heresy, schism and sect from the philosophical tradition, rather than from the strictly religious tradition (Ibid., 329).

In the dynamics of *Stifterreligionen* an interpretation which deviates from that of the founder, or even contradicts it, may suffice to give origin to a new sect; therefore, through interruption of tradition (Ibid., pp. 330. 338). The cause of such interruption may be dogmatic, ethical, cultural, social and political (pp. 332-33). However, it would not be just to reduce every sect to a camouflaged social-political revolution.

This fascinatingly simple scheme has come to be challenged from various angles. We may here mention some of them.

a) From a viewpoint of institutions, ecumenism and the recognition of parallel religious institutions as "sister Churches"² give us pause before using expressions

2. For the expression "sister Churches" see 2 John 1, 13; Vatican II's decree on ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 14.

condemnatory of other religious groups instead of recurring to such descriptions as foster dialogue.³

b) If there are *anonymous Christians*,⁴ that is to say people of good will who follow the dictates of their conscience, but who, without any fault of their own, do not belong to the true Church of Christ, one becomes wary of drawing all too stark a distinction even from the viewpoint of the inner voice of conscience. Traditionally one spoke of believers who belonged to the soul of the Church, though not to her body.

c) There has been a *shift from the epochal prevalence of theoretical reason to that of practical reason*.⁵ While the hegemony of theoretical reason in the past degraded schism to a second-rate phenomenon, the shift to the practical induced by such factors as technological culture, have reversed the tendency and given dissent greater prominence. Thus, when theologians are disciplined by Church authorities, a whole sector of public opinion usually reacts by asking spontaneously whether the magisterium did not actually infringe on the freedom of expression of those censured.⁶ Thus, a common if unfortunate attitude is to be against the Establishment, under which one subsumes the establishment Church, rather than look for the truth wherever it may be found.

And yet, when all is said, there is **one** truth and envisaged only one Church. It is thus thoroughly legitimate to ask what those factors or movements are which jeopardize this unity and whether they all impair it in the same way. As a preliminary condition of any serious dialogue the malady has to be diagnosed before remedies can be sought. Of course, in view of the current situation the very question of definition becomes fraught with unexpected complications. Thus, the unschooled believers of any one group may hold views not sanctioned by their Church authorities; so it has been suggested that heresy would then consist in **formalizing** one's own position while ignoring this very difference, i.e. between the catechism of their heart and the official catechism of their Church.⁷ Likewise, schism is usually

3. Cf *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 11.

4. K. Rahner, "Anonymer und expliziter Glaube", *Schriften zur Theologie* XII, (Einsiedeln 1975) 83-84.

5. K. Rahner, "Schisma in der Katholischen Kirche?", *Schriften zur Theologie* IX, (Einsiedeln 1970) 435.

6. K. Rahner, "Häresien in der Kirche heute?", *Schriften zur Theologie* IX, 469.

7. *Ibid.*, 462-464.

defined as refusing to obey the Church. Yet the concept of schism is much more relative than that of truth/heresy, even though the Church to which all owe obedience is one. The Great Western Schism (1378-1417) during which saints were to be found on both sides of the fence is a case in point.⁸

The same erosion of clarity is noticeable in the case of sects. There is even a preliminary need to distinguish between two terms sometimes used interchangeably: cult and sect. According to J.A. Saliba, a sect emerges when a group of people withdraw from an established Church, whereas cult recruits come from the various denominations and Churches.⁹ That cult is a word with less negative implications than sects would be an incentive to abandon "sect" and adopt "cult", while making the necessary adjustments.¹⁰ But the problem remains; whether there is such a thing as a sect in the negative sense of the word, comparable to the question what heresy or schism nowadays mean. Whether it would be advisable or not to adopt a different designation for purposes of dialogue is an important issue which, however, is not part of our question here.

In this article we shall first try to develop suggestions gleaned from a comparison of the factual uses made of the term "sect" and the realities these entail to reach a tentative definition of a sect. In the second part, this tentative definition is confronted with some phenomena from East and West so as to test the viability of the definition. The last section tries to revert the process and look at sectarianism rather than at sects, partly in order to understand the phenomenon of sects rather than simply condemn them, and partly so that the many open questions find a more fitting point

8. St. Catherine of Siena (+1380) did her part in persuading the Popes to return from Avignon, but St. Vincent Ferrer (+1419) and St. Colette of Corbie (+1447) sided at some time of their life with the antipope Benedict XIII (+1423); Y. Congar, "A propos des saint canonisés dans les Eglises orthodoxes," idem, *Chrétiens en dialogue*, (Paris 1964) 295. On pp. 305-306 Congar points out that the Catholic Church has included in her official liturgical books saints who have died separated from her.
9. J.A. Saliba, *Religious Cults Today: A Challenge to Christian Families*, (Liguori, Missouri 1983) 7-8. "Sects (like cults) have an elaborate ritual for initiating adult members into their community, but (unlike) cults seldom borrow from diverse religious traditions but rather reject any attempt to introduce foreign beliefs and practices into their religious system," *ibid.*, 8.
10. H.D. Reimer adds some light on the fluctuating terminology: "Religious groups which originate outside the Christian tradition do not count as 'sects' but as offshoots from other religions. In the USA the term 'cult' has appeared in the last few decades for those new groups with a high conflict potential which stand outside the mainstream of Christianity and are in fact hostile to the prevailing society and its cultural values"; Idem, "Sects", in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, edited by N. Lossky and others, (Geneva 1991) 914.

of reference in the concrete subject rather than in an objective definition. It thus tries to ask what Church members have in common with “sect” thus defined, be it by way of temptation or tendency.

1. Sect: What’s in a name?

It has become notoriously difficult to draw the line between some sects and certain Churches, especially Free Churches.¹¹ As a consequence it has become difficult to give one satisfying definition of sect. Given this situation, we may as well start with **nominal** (not nominalistic!) definitions,¹² that is, take a cue from the way words are used to designate realities, because names are the carriers of the accumulated wisdom of the ages, a wisdom which in turn harks back to origins.

“Sect..., from Late Latin *secta*, organized ecclesiastical body, from Latin, way of life, school of thought, class of persons, from *sequi* to follow...: **1a**: a dissenting religious body, especially: one that is heretical in the eyes of other members within the same communion **b**: a group within an organized religion whose adherents recognize a special set of teachings or practices <the Pharisees have been called a sect within Judaism> **c**: an organised ecclesiastical body, specifically: one outside one’s own communion <offered religious freedom to all sects except the Roman Catholics> **d**: a comparatively small recently organized exclusive religious body; especially: one that has parted company with a longer-established communion **2a** obsolete: a class, order, or kind of persons **b** archaic: a religious order **c** archaic: sex, so is all her sect – Shakespeare> **3a**: a separate group adhering to a distinctive doctrine or way of thinking or to a particular leader <fashionable... among many different sects of writers – L.S. Woolf> **b**: a school of philosophy or of philosophic opinion <the sect Epicurean – John Milton> as (1): party (2): an opinionated faction (as of a party <Trotskyism... and other independent communist sects

11. K. Keinath, “Freikirchen und Sekten”, ALGERMISSEN, 682-683. “Free Churches” are either offshoots of a Church who reject the Church-State alliance of the Mother Church, or who go further and alter the creed. Since a sect sometimes develops into a Church, it is difficult to define sects from free Churches.

12. A nominal definition takes its cue from words and their factual use so as to trace them back to origins suggested by these verbal signposts.

– Jim Cork> (3): a school of opinion (as in science or medicine) <medical sects in ancient Greece> 4 obsolete: a body of followers: following.¹³

Given the fact that these many uses of the word sect may not be reduced to a least common denominator, we may at least try to elicit some common characteristics.

1.1 General characteristics. Sect is thus a word which ultimately derives from *sequi*,¹⁴ to follow, rather than from *sectare*, to cut off, and says more about *human gregariousness* than *attempts to separate*; or rather, the latter trait is taken to be a consequence of the former. Sects come about because people feel attracted by the leader or a doctrine, which in turn not infrequently brings about secessions. And yet, this phenomenon is not restricted to religion, but is universal, and is to be found in politics, literature, economics, sports and what not.

1.1.1 Religious characteristics. Sects are usually judged to be such by a majority from which they break off and which considers them to be **dissenters** or **nonconformists**. Precisely for this reason they are often viewed *negatively*. As for the religious contents themselves, they can be analyzed in the light of criteria which may or may not be specifically religious.

(1) *Sociologically*, religious members of sects are often considered to be **truants**,¹⁵ which in turn often serves as a pretext to suppress them. One need only remember the repressive measures meted out against Old Believers in seventeenth-century Russia and Old Calendarist in Greece this century.¹⁶ The label “truancy” ascribes lack of sincerity to dissenters and thus considers their “martyrdom” to be half-suicide, half-farce, exhibitionism, self-righteousness and so forth.

13. *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language*, III. Unabridged, (Chicago 1976) 2052.
14. See “Setta”, M. Cortelazzo/P. Zolli, *Dizionario etimologico della lingua Italiana*, V, (Bologna 1991) 1188.
15. A. Toynbee, *A Study of History*. Abridgement of volumes I-6 by D.C. Somervell, (London 1949) 441-444.
16. When, in 1924, Constantinople adopted the reform which Pope Gregory XIII had introduced in 1582, into the Julian Calendar (whence the name of the new calendar: the Gregorian), nineteen monasteries on Mount Athos rejected the new calendar but remained in communion with Constantinople, the *Palaiomerologitai*, (Greek, “Old Calendarists”) under the leadership of Matthaïos Karpathakis (+1950), separated themselves, from the Orthodox Church: Bishop K. Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, (Harmondsworth; Middlesex 1963) 308-310.

(2) *Epistemologically*, sects' approach to reality has been compared to "segmentary knowledge",¹⁷ or that kind of fragmentary access to the whole comparable to the segments of an orange: "you've seen one, you've seen them all." This epistemological viewpoint presents both advantages and disadvantages. It may be claimed that there is not more to reality than what is revealed to me in my segmentary approach to it, and yet, on the other hand, this claim to completeness is often bought by doing violence to the plurality of the real. The problem is compounded because being a concrete individual means having no other access to reality than that available from one's one stance ("hypostasis") in reality; only, "the whole in the fragment" of Christian theology¹⁸ is a consequence of the incarnation of the Logos ("the Unlimited became Limited") and thus this stance is qualified all throughout by mystery which reaches me as a Word coming from outside my perspective. Rather than absolutizing one's privileged stance or viewpoint, one should rather seek to merge it with that of other individuals in the Church.

(3) *Theologically*, sects pose the problem of a "*grammar of dissent*", in analogy with J.H. Newman (1801-1890)'s grammar of assent, to face up with the problem of nonconformism in religion. In his *Grammar of Assent*,¹⁹ Newman interprets the act of faith in terms of real assent, a wholehearted acceptance of God's truth for which one is ultimately prepared to lay down one's life, rather than in terms of mere notional assent which one gives to abstract propositions. Beyond Newman, the possibilities of dissent have been exploited primarily in the field of morality, where the urgency to act made it imperative to discuss where the urgency to act made it imperative to discuss probabilism, probabiliorism and what not. The absence of a fully developed ethos for loyal dissent as a chapter in the rules for thinking "in and with the Church"²⁰ has often left those who really had plenty of reason to

17. On segmentary knowledge see N. Luhmann, *Funktion der Religion*, (Frankfurt a.M. 1982) 242-243. Dioceses and parishes are examples of segmentations, otherwise differentiated, made necessary by a universal claim with particular implications; *ibid.*, pp. 106-107.

18. See H.U.v. Balthasar. *Das Ganze im Fragment. Aspekte der Geschichtstheologie*, (Einsiedeln 1963).

19. (London 1870).

20. The expression derives from St. Ignatius of Loyola: "Para el sentido verdadero que en la Iglesia militante debemos tener, se guarden las reglas siguientes..." , Candido de Dalmases, *Ejercicios Espirituales: Introducción, texto, notas y vocabulario* (Santander 1987) 180.

protest against abuses in the Church, especially in the past, with no attractive alternative than leaving the Church.²¹

These various criteria, sociological, epistemological, theological, and others besides, are like so many questions which must be answered in order to develop a balanced typology of sects.

1.2 Thus far, we have not examined *sects* in their *specifically Christian* "contribution". Actually, the New Testament uses the expression *haireisis* (heresy), translated in the Vulgate as *secta* or *haeresis* for a group which develops its own line, and the Greek word itself may refer to somebody's attitude of being "choosy about truth". The Sadducees (Acts 5, 17) and the Pharisees (Acts 15, 5; 26, 5) are designated as such groups. Most importantly, **Christianity itself** is described by its opponents as being a sect (Acts 24, 5; 28, 22). Perhaps we can follow the birth of sects within the Christian community at Corinth. Paul identifies four factions: those of i: Peter; ii: Paul; iii: Apollos; and iv: one that claimed special visions of Christ. The Apollo faction Paul castigates for its pretext to have special *wisdom*... (1 Cor 1, 17). When we consider that the two letters to the Corinthians develop the theme of folly for Christ's sake (1 Cor 1, 13-30; 2, 2, 13-14; 2 Cor 11, 16-20), we already have an excellent definition of the sectarian in the moral-theological sense of the word: he is at the opposite pole to the fool in Christ. Imbued with the sense of his or her own importance, the sectarian is divisive of community through worldly wisdom, which destroys rather than builds up.²²

1.3 *Ideal types*. This last characterization suffers from so many attempts to define sects: while it is suitable to describe the problem as such, it shows itself to be less serviceable when it is applied to concrete groups, because intentions notoriously elude the human grasp. Other characterizations, such as numbers, can also backfire. Does not V. Soloviev describe Christianity in the times of the

21. It is remarkable that one of the main moments of failure to listen to dissent has come to be known as Protestantism. R. McAfee Brown, while acknowledging that part of the historical Protestant witness originated in the abuses of the Medieval Church, asserts that the image of Protestantism as "protest against" fails to do justice to its positive import; idem, *The Spirit of Protestantism*, (Oxford 1974) 3-4. But all this goes to show how necessary it is to create **positive** areas of carrying out disputes. In this sense, modern-day ecumenism may be viewed as part of a global grammar of dissent.

22. K. Keinath, "Freikirchen und Sekten", ALGERMISSEN, 659-661.

Antichrist as reduced practically to a sect, as far as membership is concerned?²³ Incidentally, long before Soloviev, the Gospel did just that (see Matt 24, 1-28; Mk 13, 1-23; Lk 21, 5-24).

Perhaps in view of several and elaborate attempts to classify sects according to predominant models²⁴ it might be more useful, in our context, to point to one model which has been indicated as more typical of our times. While Jonas' attempt at interpreting gnosticism in an existential key certainly does not render other classic works such as A.V. Harnack's and other more recent researchers' superfluous,²⁵ it has been taken up by modern theologians to describe our own age with its crisis about the role of the sexes as a "gnostic age".²⁶ This could perhaps throw some light why our age can seem like a New Age to not a few and how it could turn out to be fertile ground for sects. Now, gnosticism was basically a soteriological anthropology, that is, an interpretation of human beings in view of their call to salvation.²⁷ Its interest in the human did not prevent it from having a reductive anthropology, for the strictly material about humans was earmarked to be lost for ever.

A possible typology of sectarianism would thus take its cue from anthropology. Knowledge may be made to serve as a surrogate for salvation, for example, when one pretends to possess a special private revelation,²⁸ or else rationalizes and encroaches on mystery, which is thus reduced to a mere riddle. The rigorism which

23. VI. Soloviev, "Kurze Erzählung vom Antichrist", In: *Deutsche Gesamtausgabe der Werke von Wladimir Solowjew*, VIII, L. Müller and others (ed.s), (Munich 1979) 259-294.
24. F.W. Schluckebier, *Gesunde Lehre und Irrlehren*, (Wuppertal 1964); for a short overview see K. Keinath, "Freikirchen und Sekten," *ALGERMISSEN*, 662-665. A work which has left a deep imprint on the discussion is that of the Heidegger disciple, H. Jonas, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist*, I (Göttingen 1934); II: (Göttingen 1954); see also his "Typologische und historische Abgrenzung des Phänomens der Gnosis," K. Rudolph (ed.), *Gnosis und Gnostizismus*, (Darmstadt 1975) 626-676
25. A. Darby, "Recension ibes: Hans Jonas, Gnosis und spätantikes Geist I," in K. Rudolph, *Gnosis und Gnostizismus*, pp 374-386, especially p. 386.
26. W. Kasper, *Der Gott Jesu Christi*, (Mainz 1982) 174. 224 and 312.
27. A. Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche*, I, (Freiburg i. Br. 1979) 188. 192. As A. Orbe has shown, strictly speaking, the only docetists among the Gnostics were the Valentians; see A. Orbe (ed.), *Il Cristo*, I, (Firenze 1985) xxiii. For the relationship of docetism to gnosticism see "El docetismo gnostico," *Cristologia Gnóstica: Introducciòn a la soteriologia de los siglos II y III*, I, (Madrid 1976) 380-412.
28. A. Orbe, *Christologia Gnóstica*, II, (Madrid 1976) 533-534.

characterizes sects narrows down the choices of the will into a false "hierarchy of goods", in which a secondary good becomes top priority, or worse, in which a false good becomes absolute, as in libertinism. Thus, one of the possible ways of classifying sects is yielded in a comparison between a Christian anthropology and the reductive anthropology characteristic of sects. The scientific elaboration of such a sectarian anthropology remains to a large extent a desideratum. For example, our treatises on the Church do not usually feel obliged to discuss sects at some length, and that is as if a treatise on health would have nothing to say on illness!

2. *Confronting realities*

Since definitions, or even descriptions, can only help us up to a point, we should be well-advised to turn to concrete manifestations of how sects were formed. Perhaps they can bring us farther in our attempt to understand them. Since a comparison between the formation of sects in the West and that of sects in the East is precisely what is missing from so many studies on sects, it would be worthwhile to pursue precisely this particular aspect of the theme. Naturally, since the field of research is enormous, we can here only draw some conclusions as to method while drawing upon previous studies.

If sects relate to Churches as illness to health, then one would expect sects to reveal, in their own distorted way, something about the essence of Church and of the relationship obtaining between the particular Churches themselves. Now, the relation between ecclesiastical reality in East and West has been described insightfully along these lines: in the East, Church and its theology are characterized by the *primacy of the Spirit*, with the further stress laid on seeing and vision, whereas, in the West, there is a corresponding *primacy of the Word*, which leads to a keen sense of hearing and listening to the Word of God.²⁹ Whereas in the healthy person sight and hearing are coordinated, on the contrary, in the sick organism one would expect that, as a result of disintegration, vital functions would become dissociated and would thus enter in competition with one another.

a) *In the West*. An example of a medieval sect which lends itself for illustrative purposes is that of the Waldenses, which eventually developed into the Evangelical

29. H.U.v. Balthasar, "Sehen, Hören und Lesen in Raum der Kirche," *Sponsa Verbi*, (Einsiedeln 1971) 484-501.

Waldensian Church with a creed of Calvinistic inspiration. Thus, with sects such as these in mind Dante admonishes:

Siate, Cristiani, a muovervi più gravi:
 non siate come penna ad ogni vento
 e non crediate ch'ogni acqua vi lavi.
 Avete il novo e 'l vecchio Testamento
 e 'l pastor della Chiesa che vi guida:
 questo vi basti a vostro salvamento.³⁰

The solution Dante envisages, like the doctor's prescription, tells us succinctly wherein to his mind the sickness lay. Significantly, the poet suggests that the revelation contained in the Old and New Testaments suffices, as the Waldenses claimed, but only so long as interpreted by the magisterium of the Church. In his "On the Late Massacre in Piemont" (1655), written in their defence, J. Milton refers to this unadulterated purity of revelation which the Waldenses claimed to possess,³¹ a claim which they justified through the primacy of the Word of God.

As for the reference to water – not just any water cleanses! – this is a gibe at a favourite thesis among sects and their revision of the universality of salvation. Salvation becomes dependent on belonging to an elitarian sect, with its claim to exclusivity translated into a rejection of infant baptism.³² To this Luther has given an answer, reflecting the discussions in connection with sects of his time such as the Anabaptists. In Luther's own explanation, one does not ask for baptism because one is sure of faith, but because it corresponds to God's will.³³

30. Paradiso, v, 73-79, *La Divina Commedia di Dante Alighieri*, III, commented by L. Petrobono, (Turin 1960), "Christians, be slower to move;/ do not be like a feather in the wind/ and do not believe that every water cleans./ You have the Old and New Testaments/ and the shepherd of the Church to guide you;/ let this suffice for your salvation;" *Dante: The Divine Comedy*. A new prose translation with an introduction by H.R. Huse, (New York 1965) 352. The fifth canto has as a theme "Compensation for Broken Vows", and, as it turns out, the Waldenses, a movement which goes back to the preaching of Peter Waldo (Twelfth century), rejected oaths.

31. "Even them who kept Thy truth so pure of old/ When all our fathers worshipt stocks and stones/ Forget not...;" F.T. Palgrave and J. Press, *The Golden Treasury*, (London 1968) 51.

32. For the rejection of infant baptism on the part of the Waldenses see H. Densinger and A. Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum Definitionum et Declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, (Barcellona 1976) nos 793. 794.

33. K. Aland, *Did the Early Church Baptize Infants?*, trans. by G.R. Beasley-Murray, (London 1963) 115.

Naturally, in the West, we come across sects which stress rather a direct access to the Spirit so as to be able to side-track the magisterium of the Church. Such negative elements, along more positive ones, were to be found among certain members of the religious movement of the *alumbrados* ("enlightened ones") who flourished in Spain towards the end of the fifteenth to the seventeenth century. In 1527 St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) was suspected for a time to be one of them, which perhaps explains why, in spite of his tender devotion to each of the three Persons of the Trinity, he finishes his *Spiritual Exercises* with the Ascension and thus leaves out the descent of the Spirit in Pentecost.

In a famous passage of his *Autobiography* Ignatius makes the astounding claim about himself: "Had there been no Scripture which teaches us these matters of faith, he would have been prepared to die for them, if only on the token of what he had seen."³⁴ This immediacy to God, comparable to St. Francis' experience when the crucifix at San Damiano talked to him, is in line with the Eastern Doctrine of deification, or the progressive becoming like God, which, far from rendering Church mediation through her teaching and sacraments superfluous, makes it indispensable as a mediation to immediacy with God. Instead of ignoring the magisterium, Ignatius speaks of rules for being in tune "with, and in, the Church," and sheds precious light on how to distinguish between the good and the bad spirits that move us.

Dealing with sects in the West which emphasize the Spirit or his illumination, one has to ask whether they were not meant as a charismatic corrective to a sterile orthopraxis which largely, however, left the faith intact, except in the fringes of that particular religious movement. Or one has to ask whether, in the case of a Western group which dogmatically stresses Spirit at the expense of the Word, whether it is not the exception which proves the rule. At any rate, in the West, sects tend to show a special interest in revelation, closed with the death of the apostles, but which sects believe to have been extended to their founder, in one way or another. Thus, the books of the sect-founders may come to be honoured as being on a par with Scripture, as in the case of the J. Smith's (+1844) "Book of Mormon". By implication, Scripture is then degraded to being a book that is incomplete and

34. "Si no hubiese Escriptura que nos enseñase estas cosas de la fe, él se determinaría a morir por ellas, solamente por lo que ha visto;" Ig. Iparraguirre and C. de Dalamses (eds), "Autobiografía", *San Ignacio de Loyola: Obras Completas*, (Madrid 1982) 108; cf K. Rahner, "Rede des Ignatius von Loyola an einen Jesuiten von heute", idem, *Schriften zur Theologie XV*, (Einsiedeln 1983) 374-375.

that can at best be used as a source book from which to prove the doctrines of the new sect.³⁵

b) In the East. The same need to establish priorities in the relationship between Word and Spirit, as part and parcel of the revelation coming from the trinitarian God is also to be found among Eastern sects.³⁶ Here we find a certain emphasis on the Spirit and his “goods”, which includes tradition and the various ways through which it expresses itself. No wonder, then, that we come across religious symbolism aplenty among the Eastern sects, as their names already show.³⁷ Where sects present a deviation from Orthodoxy itself the bridges that still stand, or that still stand broken, are eloquent indeed as a warning of jeopardized communion.

The *Khlysty*, appeared somewhat earlier than the *Starovery* (Russian for “Old Believers”), and are thus Russia’s oldest still surviving sect,³⁸ or at least the earliest

35. K. Keinath, “Freikirchen und Sekten,” ALGERMISSEN, 666-672.

36. We follow the following attempt at ordering Russian sects, which serves as a good basis for further discussion: “What characterizes the different types of sects of the Eastern Church can be gauged by their attitude towards the problem of the relationship between Word and Spirit. The Russian *Old Believers* and the *Old Calendarists* in Greece represent, from the standpoint of Orthodoxy, a deviation to the right. For them, the written word of Church tradition is the only bearer and mediator of the Spirit and, as such, it is beyond the possibility of reform through Church regulation and reform. The *Khlysty* (“God-people”) form an extreme deviation to the left: in their eyes, the only thing that counts is the ecstatic experience of the Spirit in the heart of the faithful. With the *Dukhobors* (“Spirit-wrestlers”) there is a corresponding emphasis on the Spirit as inner light. Later on, the “God-people” added an arbitrary interpretation of Church writings, as may be gathered by the sect which sprang up from their midst, that of the *Skoptsy* (“White Dove”). The teaching of the *Molokans* (“Spiritual Christian Milk Drinkers”) built, from the start, on a spiritualizing and allegorizing interpretation of Scripture. Through the *Russian Gospel-Christian-Baptists* a naive biblicism was now introduced. The numerous other sects, which frequently disappear just as quickly as they originate, ... under one of the groups mentioned here;” HAUPTMANN, 92 (trans. and underlings by me).

37. In his *Pravoslavie, Rimo-Katolicestvo, Protestantizm i Sektanstvo*, (Izdanie Svajto-Troskoj; Sergivoj Lavrie 1992) 188, Protoierej Mitrophan Znosko-Bopovskij says that Russian sects, with the exception of the Raskol and its derivatives, are not in organic continuity with orthodoxy because they have been introduced from outside, but says nothing about the wealth of symbolism of the former group.

38. For a short survey of sects see J. Gründler, “Orthodoxe Sekten”, *Lexikon der christlichen Kirchen und Sekten*, II, (Vienna 1961) 1030-1032. Some of the earlier sects foreshadow, in the various values they assign Scripture and Tradition, much of later sectarianism. See G. Fedotov, “The First Russian Sect” (=the *Sirgolniki*, Russian for “those who shear”) *The Russian Religious Mind*, IV, (Belmont, MA 1975) 113-148.

of the mystical sects.³⁹ They often described themselves as *Bozij Ljudi* (Russian for “God’s people”), but, given their peculiar christology, a more accurate designation for them is *Christovoverie* (Russian for “Christ-faithful”), whereby in the process of verbal assimilation the r was slurred into l.⁴⁰ Their christology was adoptionist, i.e., the Khlysty did not believe that Christ was the son of God by nature, but that the spirit of God came to dwell in him, as he can dwell in any of the true faithful. Their origins go back to 1645,⁴¹ when a farmer, Danila Filippov, declared himself to be God the Father and adopted a fellow-worker as Christ the Son. With their penchant for mysticism and asceticism, they formed an easy target for caricature, as their polemical designation, “scourgers”, demonstrates.⁴²

The Old Believers started in 1653 as a protest against Nikon’s reforms, who had them condemned in the synod of 1666-1667. A comparison between these two practically contemporaneous sects shows the whole breadth of Russian sectarianism, ranging from the extreme right reaction of the Old Believers who sought refuge in the written letter of tradition to that of the Khlysty, who gave up much of what made up that tradition to abandon themselves to the Spirit.⁴³ An offshoot of the Khlysty, the *Skopsty* (Russian for “castrated”) made sexual abstention even more rigid when Andrei Ivanov (+1832) enjoined castration as a means toward becoming “eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom” (Matt 19, 12).⁴⁴ Actually, physical mutilation was not so central to their doctrine; spiritual castration, or sexual abstinence, sufficed for probably most of the members. As a matter of fact, the sect preferred to be called “White Doves” (*Nelye Golubi*).⁴⁵ More typical was the divine veneration accorded Kondratii Selivanov, the name adopted by Ivanov, as the second incarnation of God. Besides, Selivanov’s collaborators Akulina Ivanovna and Aleksandr Shilov bore the title, respectively, of “Mother of God” and “John the Baptist”.

39. BOLSHAKOFF, 83; on p. 107 he says of one of the earlier sects: “The Judaizers, it may be said, never disappeared in Russia.”

40. G.E. Munro, “Khlyst”, *Merzh* 16 (1980) 150. The process took place over the general designation of them as *Khristovshchina* (literally, the “company of Jesus”), which became *Khlystovshchina*.

41. S. Bolshakoff gives the date of 1631 when Danila Filippov proclaimed himself to be God Sabbaoth; BOLSHAKOFF, 83.

42. “Khlyst” in Russian means whip or the scourge used for self-discipline.

43. G.E. Munro, “Khlysty”, *Merzh* 16 (1980) 150.

44. HAUPTMANN, 110.

45. P. D. Steeves, “Skopsty”, *Merzh* 35 (1983) 171. 175; BOLSHAKOFF, 93.

As opposed to the mystical sects of the Khlysty and the Shoptsy, the *Dukhobortsy* (Russian for "Spirit-wrestlers"), as their opponents called them, though the sect-members were quick to turn it to their own advantage: fighters for the Spirit. With the Khlysty they reject the Trinity, for they claim that the Son of God revealed himself as Sophia (wisdom) in the Old Testament, whereas the New Testament ushers in the age of the Spirit.⁴⁶ Still, they prefer to be called "Christians of the Universal Brotherhood". Active since the middle of the eighteenth century in what is now called the Ukraine, they are a rationalistic sect⁴⁷ which rejects the sacramental structures of the Church and any Church organization and are of pacifistic convictions. No wonder that Lev Tolstoj (+1910) came to their defence in his 1899 novel, *Resurrection*.⁴⁸ Many of them settled in Canada, whence they are more known, in English, as *Dhukhobors*.

When Simeon Uklein, son-in-law of one of the early Dukhobor leaders, N. Pobirokhin, revolted against his father-in-law's contempt for the Bible, the *Molokans* (from Russian "moloko" for milk) began to form as a group. They called themselves "True Spiritual Christians," but, since they drank milk during the fasting-time when milk was prohibited by the Orthodox Church they were dubbed by their opponents "Milk Drinkers". This they interpreted along the lines of the spiritual milk St. Paul speaks about (1 Cor 3, 2),⁴⁹ a typical example of their spiritual exegesis; thus, baptism, too, was interpreted as listening to the Word of God. Not only was there a sustained effort to interpret the Bible according to the inner inspiration of the Spirit, but the Bible was their only authority and, in their rejection of rites and sacraments, their liturgy was reduced to Scripture readings and hymns.⁵⁰ This in turn led the *Khlysty* to develop a hermeneutic of their own, albeit a very arbitrary one. It was only much later on, with the *Russian Evangelical Christian Baptists*, a movement which draws its inspiration from the Baptists in the West, that there was a sustained effort at giving biblical interpretation pride of place, even if the interpretation itself was naive.⁵¹

46. BOLSHAKOFF, 104.

47. BOLSHAKOFF, 97-112 discusses them as "Russian 'Protestant' Sects".

48. I. Avakomovic, *Merzh* 10 (1979) 30-33.

49. A.S. Beliajeff, "Molokane", *Merzh* 23 (1981) 22.

50. BOLSHAKOFF, 107.

51. See F.H. Epp, "Mennonites in the Soviet Union," and A.Q. Blane, "Protestant Sectarians in the First Year of Soviet Rule," in R.H. Marshall (ed.), *Aspects of Religion in the Soviet Union*, (Chicago 1971) 285-299 and pp. 301-322 respectively.

In a sense, flouting the rules is endemic to the very life of sects. In Russia, religious freedom was only at the beginning of the century (1905), so that sects were quite accustomed to lead an underground existence. This stood them in good stead in the times of communist repression, so that new sects were formed. Little wonder, then, that the exegesis of these “underground groups” would be an “underground exegesis”.⁵²

The relationship of the Word to Spirit is seen in a new light when we turn to the most famous Raskol (Schism) of Russian history, the Old Believers (starovery). It arose in a dispute over Patriarch Nikon (1605-1681)’s reform of the liturgy in the seventeenth century.⁵³ The basis on which millions of Orthodox separated from their mother Church might seem flimsy to a Westerner.⁵⁴ The exact point of dissent was not the need of the reform, but Nikon’s exclusive orientation on Greek models. Thus the Greeks had changed the two fingers, the forefinger and the middle finger, used to make the sign of the cross and interpreted as symbol of Christ’s two natures, into three fingers by the addition of the thumb, now interpreted as the symbol of the Trinity. But, since many had grown accustomed to use five fingers anyhow it seemed as though one doctrine was being abandoned for the sake of that of another (the five fingers, separated properly, stood for both dogmas).⁵⁵ Nikon’s orientation to Greek Orthodoxy clashed with the messianic-eschatological “Third Rome Theory”. So, as P. Meyendorff has pointed out, the question was not so much liturgical as eschatological: Nikon was coming to terms with Constantinople, the second Rome, badly compromised by making peace with Rome at the Council of Florence (1439), when he should have been consolidating the last bastion of

52. The sects which arose under communism are known as *Krasnodrakovtsen* (“Red-Dragon-Fighters”) as they considered the Soviet Government to be the red dragon of the book of Revelation (12,3). See Fr. Heiler, *Die Ostkirchen*, (Munich 1971) 78.
53. P. Meyendorff, *Russia, Ritual and Reform: The Liturgical Reforms of Nikon in the 17th Century*, (Crestwood, NY 1991) 39.
54. “On the surface the issues seemed trite: the way of making the sign of the cross, whether processions should march west or east, an additional letter in the name Jesus, the repetition of ‘Allelulia’ twice or three times, the number of loaves on the Holy Table”, G. Dogulas Nicoll, “Old Believers”, *Mersh* 25 (1981) 230. On the double Allelulia see G.P. Fedotov, *The Russian Religious Mind*, II, (Belmont, Massachusetts 1975) 259-260. For some of the premisses of Old Believers which seek to understand them from the inside see B. Uspensky, *The Semiotics of the Russian Icon*, (trans. by P.A. Reed), (Lisse 1976) 15-16. 27-30.
55. P. Hauptmann, “Altgläubige – Raskol”, *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, (Freiburg i. BR. 1993) 465-467.

orthodoxy, Moscow, after which there would be no “Fourth Rome”.⁵⁶ The Old Believers, who insisted on the old ritual, came to be known as *staroobradny* (“Old ritualists”), but were dubbed by their opponents *Raskolniki* (“schismatics”).

Irony of ironies! While the *casus belli* of two versus three fingers could splinter up the Roman Catholic Church today into countless sects with greater substantial differences, the Old Believers soon broke up into the *popostvy* (with priests or “priestists”) and the *bezpopostvy* (without priests or “priestless”). Among the latter, the liturgical omissions which had to be made – most unwillingly, it is true, but inevitably – by far surpassed any liturgical reform in the Russian Orthodox Church.⁵⁷

In spite of the fundamentalism of the word of tradition in the *Raskomliki*, one cannot ignore a remarkable literary creativity. In the second generation, we come across it in the literary productions associated with the Vyg commune, the stronghold of the *bezpopostvy* set up on the shores of the Vyg river by Andrew and Simeon Denisov in 1695.⁵⁸ But already the first generation produced a leader of the calibre of Prototyp Petrov Avvakum who wrote the first autobiography, in the modern sense of the word, in Russian literature. In it he depicts himself as a saint and adopts the genre of the Saint’s life. He depicts himself as a *fool in Christ*⁵⁹ and his opponents as consorting with the Antichrist.

So they were seated. And I walked over to the door and fell down on my side: “You sit there and I lie here”, I said to them. So they laughed: “Our archpriest is a fool! and he does not revere the patriarchs!” And I said: “We are all fools for Christ’s sake! You are glorius, we are dishonoured! You are strong, we are powerless!”⁶⁰

It is this theme of *sophia*-folly which is central to his autobiography. Thus, folly is ripe in Russian sectarianism. However, already the combination of rationalism and spiritual exegesis would give us pause, for example, not to see in

56. P. Meyendorff, *Russia, Ritual and Reform*, 223 and 226-227.

57. HAUPTMANN, 99-101.

58. G. Douglas Nicoll, “Old Believers,” *Mersh* 25 (1981) 233.

59. This well-known category of sanctity, so typical of Russian spirituality, enabled inspired people to dissemble their criticism of the State or of the Church under the guise of folly.

60. J. Bortnes, “Sainthood and Submission: The *Life* of the Archpriest Avvakum and the Russian Literature in the Seventeenth Century”, *Visions of Glory: Studies in Early Russian Hagiography*, (English Translation by J. Børtnes and P.L. Nielsen) (Oslo 1988) 274.

the Molokans a simple Western-type sect in which the Word predominates at the expense of the Spirit. "Like the Soviet Orthodox," wrote S. Bolshakoff, "the Soviet Baptists are strict traditionalists. They have no use for modernists who want to make Christianity acceptable to unbelievers by stripping it of miracles and compromising the divinity of Christ".⁶¹ In the elaboration of a typology of sectarianism in East-West perspective, the analogical differences of movements with the same name remains one of the major reference points towards answering such questions as to Russian idea, or soul, or, in other words, Russian identity in its analogical difference with other forms of Christianity. Like love, which is only one of its forms, folly, more than any ecumenism, will unite East and West.

c) *A Common Heritage*. The recent discovery of the *Cologne Mani Codex* (CMC) has helped shed new light on *Manichaeism*, a sect capable of establishing undercurrents between East and West. "Manichaean" was a term often used indiscriminately for "heretic" in the Middle Ages. In this codex, Mani (+276) is depicted as a leader ("the head") of the Christian sect of the Elkesiates.⁶² A patristic scholar such as H. Kraft has dismissed this sect as a phantastical fabrication and reduces its reality to the influence exercised by the *Book of Elchesai*,⁶³ written in Jewish-Christian quarters in the Persian Empire. At any rate, its Christian veneer explains the fascination it could exercise on St. Augustine, held in its thrall as an *auditor* for about 8-10 years.⁶⁴ Manichaeans' participation at the Christian Eucharist was a way of eluding episcopal control, their own "eucharist" consisting in eating foods prepared by the *auditores* or beginning candidates to full membership.⁶⁵ In

61. BOLSHAKOFF, 127.

62. R. Camron and A.J. Dewey, *The Cologne Mani Codex*, (Missoula, Montana 1979).

63. H. Kraft, *Kirchenväterlexikon*, (Munich 1966) 183-184. Quite different is the conclusion W. Brandt reaches in his *Elchesai: Ein Religionsstifter und sein Werk*, (Amsterdam 1971) 167: "The man, whose work and style we have tried to bring to light in the sections of the present work, is a founder of a religion" (my translation).

64. A. Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche*, 2/1, (Freiburg in Br. 1986) 199-200 and 215. "According to the CMC, Manes seems to have belonged to a Christian baptist sect, more precisely the Elchesaites. Consequently, his teaching could be regarded as Christian heresy... Manes had no intention of displacing Christ from (the) centre, nor of imposing his own name on his supporters...;" A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 2/1 (trans. by P. Allen and J. Cawte), (London 1987) 174 and 189.

65. A. Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus in Glauben der Kirche*, 213-214.

the case of the related Bulgarian sect of Bogomolism, its influence on the Western Cathars is well attested.⁶⁶

3. *Sectarian Tendencies*

One of the reasons why “sect” proves so elusive to define is due to the **relativity** of the concept. But there are undercurrents of folly-wisdom which at least can help specify the values at stake in sects.

a) The Unlucky Faust, the Master and Margarita.

One such cultural undercurrent, fraught with philosophico-theological implications, is the legend of *Faust*. Much points to the likelihood that gnosis started **after** the christian era but **before** the New Testament was committed to writing. Given the anti-Jewish bias of gnostics (e.g., the favourite thesis that Yahweh is the “bad God”) and its apocalyptic tenor (probably because it was a movement which took off the ground after 70AD when Jerusalem was captured), all this makes it plausible that the Samaritan Simon Magus would be considered to be the founder. Depicted in Scripture (Acts 8, 9-25) as a sorcerer who, once baptized, sought to acquire charisms by paying for them, he is described by St. Justin (+c. 165) and St. Irenaeus (+c. 200) as a founder of a sect; but debate has concentrated on whether St. Justine did not mistake Simon Magus with Simon of Gitta, who lived much later.⁶⁷ In the beliefs elaborated in this sect, Simon Magus had met Helen (*selene* means moon; the latter had an epistemological role in Aristotle’s cosmology of the Unmoved Mover) in a brothel in Tyre and she became his companion, *Ennoia* (thought). In gnostic systems *Sophia* is the daughter of Ennoia’s flirting with the deity. Simon’s

66. See S. Runciman, *The Medieval Manichee*, (Cambridge 1947); A. Rigo, *Monaci Escastici e Monaci Bogomili*, (Firenze 1989); P. Eleuteri and A. Rigo (ed.s), *Eretici, dissidenti, Musulmani ed Ebrei a Bisanzio: Una raccolta eresologica del XII secolo*, (Venezia 1993); Y. Stoyanov, *The Hidden Tradition in Europe: The secret history of medieval Christian heresy*, (London 1994) xvi-xviii.

67. E. Ammann, “Simon le Magicien”, *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, xiv/2, col. 2130-2140, especially col. 2137. Even if the older view that all gnostic religion derives from Simon Magus is untenable, his name remains a first and necessary point of reference until more light is thrown upon a research -area, which, like gnosticism, bristles with question-marks. see J. Mènard, *De la gnose au manichéisme*, (Paris 1986) 28-32; K. Rudolph, *Gnosis*, (trans. by R. McLachlan Wilson), (New York 1983) 294-298.

showdown with St. Peter in the Roman forum led to his being called *faustus*,⁶⁸ a euphemism (on the model of the euphemistic name “Eumenides” or “gentle goddesses” for the Furies): The Unlucky One is called the “lucky one”, Faustus.

Goethe’s *Faust* is depicted as a sophist,⁶⁹ who like Simon Magus really tries to have spirit under control by magic, who however truly yearns for a divine revelation.⁷⁰ He finds the acme of Wisdom in John’s Prologue, but reduces the Word at the beginning to activity, *Tat*, act.

M. Bulgakov’s *Master i Margerita* takes up Goethe’s theme (Gretchen was Faust’s Margherita in *Faust*).⁷¹ But it is not simply a retelling of Goethe’s story in the Soviet Russia of the late 1920’s or early 1930’s.⁷² There is a reversal of roles: it is Margarita who goes down to hell in search of the Master, an apparent Ieshua (Jesus) figure. Here there is only an apparent paradox, for it is when we search for Christ that He finds us. Interestingly enough for our study of sects, the critic Latunsky describes the Master as a “militant and Old Believer.”⁷³

68. M. Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, 2, (trans. by W.R. Trask), (Chicago 1982) 375; also: G. Quisopel, “Faust: Symbol of Western Man,” *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 35 (1966) 241-265.

69. See, for example, “Daß ich nicht mehr mit saurem Schweiß/ Zu sagen brauche, was ich nicht weiß,” (“That I need not work and woe/ Go on to say what I don’t know”), Part I, lines 380-381, *Goethe’s Faust*, (trans. by W. Kaufmann) (New York 1990) 94-95.

70. “Wir sehnen uns nach Offenbarung/ Die nirgends würdger und schöner brennt/Als in dem Neuen Testament...”; “We long for the light of revelation/Which is nowhere more magnificent/Than in our New Testament...”, Part I, lines 1217-1219; *Goethe’s Faust*, 150-153.

71. The quote from *Faust*, Part I, lines 1335-1336, on the title page sets us on our guard; see M. Bulgakov, *Master i Margarita*, in *Belaja Gvardja, Teatral’nij Roman, Master i Margarita*, (Moscow 1973) 423. For Goethe’s influence on the Slavic world see H. Kindermann, *Das Goethebild des 20. Jahrhunderts*, (Darmstadt 1966) 693-698; with regard to the Soviet milieu a literary review stressed that Goethe was Marx’s preferred poet; *ibid.*, 696.

72. M. Hayward, “Literature in the Soviet Period (1917-1975)”, in R. Auty and D. Obolensky (ed.s), *An Introduction to Russian Language and Literature*, (Cambridge 1977) 207; T.R.E. Edwards, *Three Russian Writers and the Irrational*, (Cambridge 1982) 169-179, 175.

73. *Ibid.*, 158: “Latunsky’s article on the Master is entitled ‘A Militant Old Believer’, and there is indeed much of the sectarian, especially the priestless Old Believer, about the Master which links him to the heretic Ieshua: a simple lifestyle, a concern for his own view of the truth, non-resistance to evil; they share the ‘free and adventurous’ thinking which Berdyaeu associates particularly with the *bespopovtsy* (It is interesting to note that this sect was, according to Conybeare, especially under the influence of Manichaean ideas...). Ieshua is described as ‘the wandering philosopher’..., and the Master too suggests the spiritual nomad, in Russian sectarianism the *stranik* or *begun*... However, it is not correct, as Edwards does on p. 156, to describe hesychasm as implying the

Aside from the references to Russian sectarianism Bulgakov's novel is important because it establishes a positive link to "wisdom". This transpires already through the title, which designates not a man of letters but "the Master", an eminently wisdom word, a title which indicates a direct link between a grasp of theoretical principles in their practical application.⁷⁴ But precisely on this question we touch a point common to both East and West. In the West, prudence, understood as that cardinal virtue that mediates between theory and practice, comes closest, perhaps, to the Eastern concern with Sophia as synthesis of this world and the next in view of praxis here on earth. In harmony with this tradition, Thomas Aquinas describes natural law the way in which humans may participate in God's eternal wisdom.⁷⁵ And, in the same practico-pragmatic⁷⁶ sense of prudence,⁷⁷ but this time transposed to poetry, T.S. Eliott dedicated "The Waste Land" (1922) to "Ezra Pound, *il miglior fabbro*",⁷⁸ a word borrowed from Dante⁷⁹ meaning more than its literal rendition as "(black)smith" might seem to imply.

rejection of an intermediary priesthood, "another important theme of the novel;" St. Gregory Palamas (+1359), for example, who wrote a classic work in the defense of hesychasts, was a bishop.

74. T.R.N. Edwards, *Three Russian writers and the Irrational*, 160-161: "Christ was a carpenter – spirituality was rooted in a modest background and the direct experience of working with one's hands. The Russians have traditionally held this to be a self-evident truth to which, for instance, Tolstoy tried to give practical effect; this arouses the derision of mainly western critics who fail to grasp the intimate association in Russian thought of direct experience and spirituality. (An old meaning of the word *sophia* is trained intelligence or skill)."
75. St. Thomas of Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, IIae, art. 91, nos 2-4.
76. "Practical", because it is an activity, rather than a theory, and, as such, it modifies the agent; "pragmatic", because, modifying the agent as subject of the activity, it produces something, the wise decision (policy, moral decision etc.)
77. This practical meaning of wisdom is thoroughly familiar through Scripture; see K.E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant: A literary cultural approach to the parables in Luke*, (Gran Rapids, Michigan 1976) 105-106.
78. T.S. Eliott, *Selected Poems*, (London 1973) 49.
79. Dante (Purgatorio, xxvi, lines 115-117) puts on the lips of his famous predecessor, Guido Guinizelli, the following words which signal out the Provençal Arnaut Daniel for excellence in poetry: "'O frate,' disse, 'questi ch'io ti scerno/ Col ditto,' ed additò un spirito innanzi/ 'Fu miglior fabbro del parlar maternò,'" E. Moore and P. Toynbee (ed.s), *Le opere di Dante Aligheri*, (Oxford (1924) 91: "'O brother', he replied, 'that one' (i.e., Arnaut Daniel)/ (and with his finger he pointed to a soul ahead)/ 'was a better artist in the mother tongue';" *Dante: The Divine Comedy*. A new prose translation with an introduction by H.R. Huse, p. 291. See also M. Cortellazzo and P. Zolli, *Dizionario etimologico della lingua Italiana*, 2, (Bologna 1992) 411; S. Battaglia, *Grande dizionario della lingua Italiana*, 5, (Torino 1972) 546.

Last but not least, there has always been a sapiential strand in theology, which conceived theology to be a *sapientia*.⁸⁰

b) The Sectarian in Us.

Sapiential literature discusses not only the master-disciple relationship, but also the presence of the foolish in the midst of the community of the wise. The Gospel sensitizes us to both cases (Mt 11, 28-30; 25, 1-13; Lk 16, 1-8). Folly and wisdom reside in the same community, sometimes within the same person.⁸¹ The same holds true for sects and factions: the line of demarcation runs not only through the same group but also through the same individual.

Deep down, the sectarian is one who lets his head dictate to the heart, instead of doing what so many texts in the venerable Eastern tradition of prayer inculcate: "pray with the head in the heart",⁸² i.e., integrate one's thinking, which is only a part of us, into the whole of ourselves with its centre in Christ, whose memory is cherished in the Church. The sectarian thus cuts off several of the vital links to the whole of reality⁸³ as interpreted by the Church as a community of minds and heart in her all-out effort to save it in its entirety.⁸⁴

80. "Sapientia" is cognate with "sapere" (to taste) and so refers to experience. St. Bonaventure (+1274) was a chief representative of this sapiential view of theology, whose ideal he summed up in the words "ut boni fiamus;" *Prooemium in IV libros Sent.* q.3. M.J. Scheeben (+1888) finishes with a note on "theology as wisdom par excellence;" idem, *Die Mysterien des Christentums*, (Freiburg i. Br. 1912) 673-679. In his *Sophia ou le monde en Dieu*, (Paris 1994) L. Bouyer points out some sophiological points common to East and West, e.g. on pp. 89-92, without failing to mention some of the related difficulties, which he however comments as follows: some days before his death, V. Lossky, relentless foe of S. Bulgakov's sophiology, entrusted to Bouyer, according to the latter, that Bulgakov really had a feeling, if not for the answers, at least for the questions; *ibid.*, p. 113.

81. St. Augustine affords a precious commentary. "Whence come schisms? When men say, 'We are righteous, we cleanse the unclean';" *In 1 Joh.* 1, 8; quoted by S.L. Greenslade, *Schism in the Early Church*, 19.

82. Bishop K. Ware, "Introduction", *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology*. Compiled by Igumen Chariton of Valamo, trans. by E. Kadloubovsky and E.M. Palmer, (London 1966) 17.

83. It is interesting that M. Bulgakov, considering pure intellect to be a sin, advocates banning Kant to Solovetsky Monastery, the renowned centre of sectarian rebellion (1668-1676); T.R.N. Edwards, *Three Russian Writers and the Irrational*, 164-166.

84. The viewpoint of Orthodoxy is different, as T.R.N. Edwards, who interprets the role of experience in line with apophaticism, points out: "The argument seems to run thus: the ideal is synthesis, oneness with God; the intellect is inherently analytical; therefore, even though it must be employed

We can thus catch a glimpse how deep runs sectarianism as an underground religio-humanistic movement. **The** reason for our difficulty to define sects must now be seen in the context of Eastern theology: concepts remain abstract unless they are seen in the light of the “soul” they have, the vital functions in us, of which the unity of dogma and spirituality is but one – the major – exemplification. Given the difficulty to exorcise “sects” from our midst as if the reality lay completely outside of us, we have to try and figure out which those vital functions in us are that act as a bridge between Church-goers and sectarians.

It has been argued that sects can flourish because they address themselves to vital questions in the human and that consequently a good way of approaching them is to try to find out what these needs are, and work out the answer of theology, instead of simply adopting from the start a negative attitude.⁸⁵ Now, one vital function of religion is its capacity to generate enthusiasm, which, in turn, when earnest, engenders zeal. This goes counter to the temptation of reducing the Church to her functions, or services, as administrator of salvation, instead of regarding her as custodian of “mysteries”, the Greek word for sacraments.

Sects sometimes perform the vital function of serving immediate enthusiasm⁸⁶ as opposite against an atrophied system of doctrines, where stress is more laid on formal orthodoxy and orthopraxis than on the well-springs of charity which should inform them. Actually, life calls more for faithfulness than enthusiasm, which is why masters of the spiritual life speak not only of “consolation” (enthusiasm) in prayer but also of “desolation” (dryness).⁸⁷ Zeal without self-criticism is misguided; criticism of the Church without dedication to her becomes corrosive.

Both may be illustrated by religious orders, who in several ways may be compared to sects, but with a great difference. Religious orders, too, are capable, when they live out their original charism, to fire the imagination with a will to

in the first steps towards the ideal (it being an inalienable part of man), at a certain stage it becomes a stumbling block, and must give way to something in which division is not inherent: Orthodoxy sees this as experience,” *Ibid.*, 164. As the author reminds us, Michail’s father, A.I. Bulgakov, was professor at the Theological Academy of Kiev.

85. J.A. Saliba, *Religious Cults Today*, 5. 35-36.

86. *Ibid.*, 17-18. Naturally this enthusiasm, if not guided by Christian morality, can degenerate into Dionysiac destructiveness, of which Jonestown in the United States affords a vivid example.

87. This is the language of St. Ignatius of Loyola; see Dalmases, *Ignacio de Loyola, Ejercicios Espirituales*, 192-193.

serve God and the imagination, yet, they are not self-enclosed societies but are open to the universal Church and her guidance. In this regard, an inversion obtains in the relationship between holiness and Church and in that between holiness and religious orders. The Church cannot make membership in her dependent on the holiness of its members; religious orders should, at least holiness of aspiration. Religious orders, too, live at the fringes of society; but this should serve as a challenge for them to devise ever new ways in consonance with their charism to offer alternatives to egoistic models in society and not remain trapped at the periphery of life.⁸⁸

The example of religious orders is instructive, because one of the vital functions for the proper functioning of society is the status in it of minorities and the way in which the majority relates to **minorities**. Our inability to attain everlasting peace is in part in function of our inability to come to terms with **God's** minority, the Jews.⁸⁹ Vladimir Soloviev died praying, in Hebrew, for the Jews. At any rate, the lack of maturity in our perception of minorities wreaks havoc on the whole organism like a cancer. This has a social correlate. Thus scapegoating is a process that mimics democracy and can range from framing to judicial murder. In the religious sphere, the search of unanimities and the desire that God occupies himself with me alone, at most with my group, exemplifies an overlooking of minorities and how much we should be grateful to God for our critics. Incapacity to accept our "minority" – to accept the fact that we had a childhood, ultimately accepting the fact that God became a child, and that, as a man, he grew in age, experience and grace (Lk 2, 52) – wreaks havoc in education and engenders neuroses in life.⁹⁰ To ignore this is – sectarianism, or, at least, the seed-bed on which the sectarian in us thrives.

How often do people, in politics or religion, become heretics or schismatics because **we** force them into that uncomfortable role, when less zeal and more tact, and, at any rate, more of that humanity which became God's in the incarnation,

88. See R.W. Southern, "A Confusion of Tongues", *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*, (New York 1976) 318-358.

89. The phrase comes from E. Trutwin.

90. Often at the roots of the human quest for sects is security at all costs, which in turn has been identified as part of the psychology of fundamentalism; see Th. F. O'Meara, *Fundamentalism: A Catholic Perspective*, (Mahwah, N.J. 1990) 69-70.

would have created the conditions necessary for a fair dialogue?⁹¹ How often do we rob free agents of their liberty by forcing them into actional patterns through **our** determining them, by forcing them to protest **against us**, and thus not allowing them to do that which they deem to be right and just? And how much is a limited and delimiting perception the result of sin – how often does the sinner clutter his own vision and thus become unable to perceive his luck? All this is, potentially, sectarianism.

How often do we consider experience as if it were grace? To choose an example from the more libertine aspects of sects – and in this the sectarianism of contemporary bourgeois society becomes manifest – those who defend pre-marital sex because they feel entitled to **know** (a form of gnosis) do not want to go to prison to discover freedom. As a matter of fact, vintage theology in both East and West insists that experience is paramount, that it is the only way to prevent religious assertions from degenerating into an ideology, but that this has to be the experience of God, but it adds that this experience, as the experience of grace, often seems to be anything but grace – in this, Vladimir Losskij (+1958)⁹² and Karl Rahner (+1984)⁹³ meet half-way. The canonization of one-sided experience is the beginning of sectarianism.

Sectarianism thrives everywhere where there is a diastasis between ideal-image and concrete reality, where, in the phrase of R.W. Emerson (+1882), Judas passes for Christ and Christ for Judas, – unless, of course, something is done to restore the balance. Everywhere where the hierarchy of truth⁹⁴ and the *ordo charitatis*⁹⁵ is set

91. “Unfortunately we come across in the history of dogma as often as in politics the tendency that ‘government’ and ‘opposition’ depict each other only in black and white, without any attempt to nuance thier judgment”, says A. Grillmeier, who goes on to give some examples from some misunderstandings in the case of Nestorius; A. Grillmeier, *Mit ihm und in ihm. Christologische Forschungen und Perspektiven*, (Freiburg i. Br. 1975) 234 (translation my own).

92. V. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Church*, Trans. by members of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, (London 1973) 10-11. 23-43.

93. K. Rahner, “Über die Erfahrung der Gnade”, *Schriften zur Theologie*, III, (Einsiedeln 1967) 105-109.

94. According to the hierarchy of truths, not all truths have the same importance, which depends on their closeness to the central mysteries of salvation: the doctrine of the Trinity, christology and grace; see *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 11. This enables the Catholic Church, while claiming to be the true Church, to see in other Christian Churches a greater or lesser realization of the Gospel.

95. I.e., that order of charity which sets actional priorities according to God’s and the Church’s law. Top priority for the Christian is the love of God and of one’s neighbour.

aside, and marginal truths are given prime importance, and second-rate virtues blown up to the proportion of first rate ones, which invariably happens at the expense of charity, damage is done to our souls and the sectarian in us receives a boost.⁹⁶

(c) *The Church as a Sect.*

Naturally, talking of sectarianism, even if only in the methodic key of discovering elements in common capable of making Church members understand the phenomenon of sects, may lead to a misunderstanding. It may sound as if we wanted to blur the distinction between Church and sect.

The fear is unjustified. In the creeds known to the Great Undivided Church of the first centuries a main recurring article of the creed is: "I believe in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church".⁹⁷ The claim to universality is meant as an antidote against the selective-elitarian character of sectarianism.⁹⁸ Once this basic difference is recognized,⁹⁹ a difference based on the notes of the Church as one, holy, catholic and apostolic, one may further ask whether it is not possible to take the cue from the Gospel and consider, again for methodic reasons, the Church as a sect.

Thus, the Gospel suggests that the Church dwindles in numbers at the end of time; therefore, according to the sociological criteria of nonconformism and minority status the Church would then be a sect. Naturally, one may ask whether these criteria are adequate, and yet it cannot be denied that nonconformism and minority status have something to do with sects. On the other hand, not infrequently, in the diaspora, in the missions, in persecution, the Church retrieves herself because she recuperates her minority status.

However, the sectarian character of the Church is not only – or primarily – shown in the weak moments. Is it only due to numbers that the Church appears to be a sect? One could argue that nonconformism is the essence of being a Christian. "Do not conform yourselves to the ways of this world", writes St. Paul (Rom 12,2). Faith, and especially faith in the moment of opulence, is *solipsism*. The believer is, **in principle**, a loner, nobody can decide for him or her to believe, although the

96. See H.D. Reimer, "Sects", in N. Lossky and others (ed.s), *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, (Geneva 1991) 914.

97. See H. Denzinger and A. Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, nos. 1-150.

98. See *ibid.*, no. 792.

99. See *Théo: Nouvelle encyclopédie catholique*, (Paris 1989) 539.

Church is the salvific community for loners and makes out of the loner a member of the community.

And so the question becomes more poignant: Granted that, given the normal use of words, Church and sects are considered to be two mutually exclusive entities, are there no ways in which the Church could be considered to be a sect and a sect to bear the semblances of the Church? Do Church and sect, so profoundly different as they are in their essence, have nothing in common? The first question would thus concern these four marks of the Church (as they are called),¹⁰⁰ their epistemological status and their concrete applicability to resolve the issue. Like everything that has to do with faith, like the so-called proofs for the existence of God themselves, these four signs given to help humans find out the true Church are in turn characterized by mystery.¹⁰¹ This in turn presupposes human cooperation, i.e., openness to faith, and are not signposts which render the human seeker passive in front of their message like an anaesthetized patient on the operating table. Since human cooperation in turn depends on elements usually not permeated through and through by grace, but still resistant to it through concupiscence, this gives rise to ambiguities, so that sincere people may interpret these signs and the one objective reality they point to differently.

The Church is one; but the division among Christians make the Church sometimes look like a sect contending for equal attention with other sects.

The Church is holy, but this very holiness can be a temptation to identify the Church with a society of saints,¹⁰² whereas, in point of fact, the Church is a church for sinners, the holy Church of sinners, with the means to make them all saints, which is what they are called to be. Without sanctity the Church would be a benevolence club; with compulsory sanctity she would be a sect.

The Church is catholic; but the ghetto mentality of groups in her may make her look like an outdated physician. In this regard, Eastern groups have been made to feel not seldom like minorities. Proselytism and rigorism are tactics unworthy of the beauty and the thereapeutical value of Christ's truth.

100. *Catéchisme de l'Eglise Catholique*, (Paris 1992) 190-191.

101. *Katholischer Erwachsenen-Katechismus: Das Glaubensbekenntnis der Kirche*, edited by the German Episcopal Conference, (Bonn 1985) 271. 279.

102. A heresy which the Church has condemned as Donatism, a schism in the African Church which started in the fourth century. see K. Rahner, "Die Kirche der Heiligen", *Schriften zur Theologie*, III, (Einsiedeln 1967) 111-126.

The Church is apostolic; but many quarrels among Churches in the past were above the heads of the respective Church members and were carried out almost exclusively among hierarchs.

All this does not invalidate the marks or notes to recognize the true Church, but shows why it is possible for her to appear at times as a sect. The fact that, in spite of the ambiguity of the human condition, humans have continued to throng to enter where they find light, warmth and nutrition, is a striking index that more than merely human elements are at play when we come to Church.

This brings us to one of the hottest debated questions of our times. The treatise on the Church is among those which has developed most and is still developing. And it must continue to develop, for the answer to the questions raised here is an index of how sorely needed it is to bring our treatises on Church up-to-date.¹⁰³ Not only *ecclesia semper reformanda* is true, but also *ecclesiologia semper reformanda*! Not only the Church is in need of constant reform, but so is her ecclesiology!

One of the most urgent reforms in ecclesiology is to take into account both the Eastern and Western experience, not only as far as saints is concerned, but also all that sects have to teach us about an on-going schism between East and West which has long become obsolete but which nonetheless refuses to heal.

Conclusion

One of the unfortunate aspects of Church life is the sudden proliferation of sects. One of the more unfortunate ways of preparing oneself for this eventuality is to try to understand sects without the continuum of Church and sect, a truth which, if ignored, would not allow us to see how sect is a sickness of which Church is the cure. The most unfortunate aspect of it all would be to ignore the fact that that continuum is found in us, and that we heal the moment we let grace put us humans into question and the sectarian in us in his or her place, provided we open up to mystery of which only the Church is the custodian.

Pontificio Istituto Orientale
Piazza S. Maria Maggiore, 7
00185 Roma
Italy

¹⁰³For some of the pastoral and ecumenical problems involved in treating with sect-members see *Evangelischer Erwachsenkatechismus*, (Gütersloh 1977) 1001-1011.