

A NORWEGIAN NEWMAN

BORGHILD GUNDERSEN

IN the nineteenth century there lived in Norway a theologian whose religious development shows a striking resemblance to that of Cardinal Newman. Although the Norwegian theologian could not well stand an exact comparison with John Henry Newman, for he lacked the Cardinal's unique genius, there is, however, a psychological likeness between the two men. They belong to the same kind of religious type. Both went through a very slow process of conversion. Both began as clergymen in their national churches, and both ended after much study and mental toil in the Catholic Church.

The name of this Norwegian was *Knud Karl Krogh-Tønning*. Unlike Newman, he did not have much influence on his contemporaries or on later generations. Until the present day he has been of no importance to the history of the Norwegian Church. In a way this situation is strange, for he made some remarkable contributions to theological literature.

Krogh-Tønning (born in 1842) was brought up in a very happy and cultivated home. His parents belonged to the Evangelical-Lutheran Church, which is the State Church of Norway. His mother differed from the ordinary Protestants by attributing great importance to the sacraments, and by stressing the ethical aspect of Christianity. Krogh-Tønning has said that his mother was the first to turn his thoughts towards Catholicism.

When Krogh-Tønning had entered the University of Oslo to study theology, he soon came under the influence of two most powerful professors, Gisle Johnson and Carl Paul Caspari. The theological faculty was under the direction of these two professors. However, their influence was not limited to the university. They were also the leaders of a strong pietist movement that passed over Norway in the middle of the nineteenth century and decided the religious development of the country for the following generations. During his studies, Krogh-Tønning held the same evangelical opinions as his professors. His mind was not yet troubled by dogmatic problems and denominational differences, but he suffered from religious doubt of a more general nature. Professor

Caspari helped him with his difficulties, and he left the university with positive religious belief.

Before beginning his ministerial work, he spent some years as the head-master of a teachers' college in rural Western Norway. Those were happy and quiet years, divided between teaching and study. The main result of his studies was a treatise on *The Word of God and the Sacrament* in which he showed that the sacrament of the altar was neglected within the Norwegian Church, and complained of this situation which he considered to be more Calvinist than Lutheran. In fact, the Norwegian Church attributed very little importance to the sacraments, and concentrated nearly exclusively upon preaching and reading of the Bible. Although the Church to which Krogh-Tonning belonged had thus turned nearly Calvinist in practice, it recognised in theory the sacrament of the altar as a means of Grace, but it also taught that the word of God and the sacrament had the same effects. Against this teaching Krogh-Tonning strongly reacted. He held that the effects of God's word and of the sacrament were of different kinds. While the profit which we draw from Bible-reading depends on our mental disposition at the moment, the effects of the sacrament penetrate to the deeper regions of our soul, whose supernatural life is strengthened by the virtue that Christ has given to the sacrament. Krogh-Tonning openly acknowledged his adherence to the Catholic doctrine that the sacrament works *ex opere operato*, and he based his expositions on St Thomas' *Summa Theologica*.

However, his relation to the Catholic Church was as yet limited to a sympathy which resulted in a High-Church attitude. Naturally his thoughts also soon turned towards the idea of the Church.

As a country vicar, he continued his studies and his literary work. He tried to find out what was the Protestant notion of the Church, and he came to the conclusion that there was no such notion. The result had been a constant separation and formation of new sects. He thought that this destructive process could be stopped by a reorganisation of the Lutheran Church, in the same way as the Anglican Church had been renewed by the Oxford Movement. But, according to his opinion, a renewal of the Norwegian Church could be brought about only by a closer connection with the Catholic Church which had existed since Apostolic times. Just like Newman and Pusey, Krogh-Tonning

turned to the study of the Fathers, and, in the same way as these, he considered his own national church as a part of the Universal Church.

Low-Church people accused him of being too Catholic, but he replied that he had only used the Lutheran privilege of interpreting Scripture on his own. Personal experience now opened his eyes to the inconsistency of orthodox Protestants, who feel themselves bound by the pronouncements of official documents, and at the same time vindicate the right of private judgment. That the Lutheran principle of Bible-reading was insufficient he felt even more emphatically some time afterwards, when he went to study for a while at German Protestant universities. There liberal theology with its abundance of different opinions had brought considerable confusion into exegesis. In his *Memories* Krogh-Tonning has some excellent pages on the religious situation of Protestant Germany in the latter half of the nineteenth century which clearly show his power of historical evaluation. He said that his visit to German universities made him realise how true it was that in the Protestant world Calvinism had in fact conquered Lutheranism. Although it may be objected that such a development was to be expected, since the views of Calvin were more consistent than those of Luther, we must in any case pay honour to the historical clear-sightedness of Krogh-Tonning for having discovered that this Calvinist progress was taking place under the guise of the exegesis of the nineteenth century and of the dissolution of the Lutheran Church into sects.

As far as the mother country of Krogh-Tonning is concerned, his statement about the fading of orthodox Lutheranism is even more true at present than it was at his time, for there has been a growing influence of Methodism and other Anglo-Saxon non-conformist movements. On this point Krogh-Tonning foresaw what was to happen. The theology of Karl Barth cannot well be regarded as a proof to the contrary, for its success now seems to have been rather temporary and local. From a historical point of view, Barthianism may be considered as a protest against the theological development within Protestantism. In any case, Krogh-Tonning made a historical judgment which can be defended even in our days.

After his travels abroad, Krogh-Tonning returned to his ministerial charge, this time in a small town of South-Eastern

Norway. Here his practical duties brought him into contact with lay-preachers and revivalists who had a completely non-ecclesiastical attitude, which made Krogh-Tonning feel even stronger his own High-Church views. His thoughts constantly centred on the problem of the Church. The power of the Low-Church party was in the ascendant, and they knew how to profit by the political situation of the country, for they joined the liberals, who just at that time (about 1880) took over the government. This political-religious coalition, and the fact that the administration of the Norwegian Church is in the hands of the State, could explain how it was that the government now abolished the practice of giving absolution before the distribution of the sacrament of the altar. Although the Norwegian Church does not accept confession or the sacrament of penance as a necessary institution—it recognises only two sacraments: baptism and the sacrament of the altar—Lutheran ministers used to give absolution to those who were to receive the Eucharist.

To Krogh-Tonning, this new governmental action was a sad illustration of what may happen when the State is the head of the Church, and he raised his voice in protest against the decision. He tried to prove that the sacrament of penance belonged to the Lutheran Church and complained of its disappearance from the Norwegian Church. Therefore he recommended that private confession be reintroduced in connection with absolution. He thought that the sacrament of penance was as necessary as Baptism and the Eucharist, and he was strengthened in his opinion shortly afterwards, when he had been appointed chaplain to a hospital and a prison in the capital. He began to hear confessions and to give absolution after a form which he made himself, since the Norwegian Church did not have any liturgical form for that purpose.

He gradually adopted Catholic habits of life, such as reading the breviary and prayers for the dead, but his progress was slow, much slower than Newman's. He studied much, especially the Fathers, but also more recent literature, such as Cardinal Wiseman's *Fabiola*, and he was promoted doctor of theology for a work on the 'Apologetics of the Primitive Church'.

On account of bad health he went abroad to rest. A visit to the German Benedictine abbey of Beuron was of great importance to his religious development. He was admitted to the library of

the abbey, and he also talked to the monks. Some words of the abbot made a deep impression upon him. The abbot said that it was his opinion that many Protestants who had approached the Catholic Church had stopped half-way because they did not really understand the nature of the Church. They were blind to the most essential thing. The abbot thought that was the reason why Pusey had not come in to the Church. Those were words for Krogh-Tønning to ruminate, since they just touched his own preoccupation with the notion of the Church. He went home to reflect further. He had now become parish minister of the oldest church in Oslo.

In the following years he was doing something which may look like an imitation of Newman. While writing a great work on dogmatics, his main contribution to Norwegian Lutheran theology, he tried to work out a *Via Media* theory for the Lutheran Church. As Newman had considered the Anglican Church as the *Via Media* between Romanism and Protestantism, Krogh-Tønning tried to explain the Lutheran Church as the *Via Media* between Catholicism and Calvinism. He regarded Catholicism exclusively as the religion of authority, and Calvinism as the religion of subjectivism. His thesis was that Lutheranism might be able to reconcile these opposites and thus bring about Christian unity. Since he was fully aware of the fact that his exposition of Lutheranism did not agree with reality, he sought to justify his theory by saying that it corresponded to the idea of Lutheranism, but, in spite of theories, it was all only a projection of his own wishes.

His ideas at this stage of his religious development may seem somewhat disappointing if we compare them with what he had already said and written. They indicate no progress, but rather the contrary. However, he wanted to work for Christian unity, and his motto was: *Ut omnes unum sint*. He also wanted to build unity on a dogmatic foundation. In his sermons he often preached on the unity of the Church in faith, hope and charity, and he added that a unity built on love and charity was not sufficient. He said so, not because he underestimated love, but because he knew that the name of love is often abused to hide dogmatic indifference. He also complained that there was not enough love in the church to which he belonged, but, in its stead, constant quarrels.

To his great disappointment he discovered that his colleagues

did not want to work for Christian unity. They attacked the Catholic Church without knowing or even wishing to know Catholic doctrine. Krogh-Tonning became very pessimistic when he thought of the difference between the high-priestly prayer of Christ for unity and the present condition of Christianity. He even began to doubt if there existed any church that corresponded to the promises of Christ. At such moments he was tempted to disbelieve.

Krogh-Tonning soon also discovered that many Lutheran ministers did not even know the doctrine of Luther. They mixed up what was common to all Christians and what was specifically Lutheran, and they attributed to Luther many elements of modern Protestantism which did not agree with the views of Luther. This observation prompted Krogh-Tonning to study the history of Protestant theology. His results were laid down in an excellent treatise, called *The Doctrine of Grace and the Quiet Reformation*. He wrote his treatise with the special intention of refuting the accusation of Pelagianism that many Protestants raised against the Catholic Church.

Krogh-Tonning said that it was no longer possible to identify the Protestant doctrine of Grace with the doctrine of Luther. By ethical movements, such as German Pietism about 1700, Protestantism had gradually slid away from the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith alone and had approached the Catholic doctrine of Grace, which also implies sanctification. This movement had taken place quietly, and most Protestants were not even conscious of what had happened. Therefore Krogh-Tonning called it the 'Quiet Reformation'. The Quiet Reformation was thus nothing else than a Catholic Reformation of Protestantism on its most fundamental point, the doctrine of Grace. The change of opinion included both sanctifying and actual Grace. The theory set forth by Luther in his treatise '*de servo arbitrio*' might have rendered the question of actual Grace meaningless within Protestantism, for actual Grace presupposes a will that is able to react on divine impulse and act accordingly, which would be impossible if the will were by nature passive and slave-like, as Luther thought. However, the history of Protestantism showed that there had been different opinions on the question. There had even been a conflict between orthodox Lutherans and Pietists, not unlike the disagreement between Dominicans and Jesuits.

It must indeed be remembered that this comparison is incomplete, for the Lutheran conception of Grace as a grant of amnesty only, has nothing in common with the Dominican teaching.

Krogh-Tonning's theory of the Quiet Reformation was a novelty within the Protestant theological world. Some others had also been conscious of what was taking place, but he was the first to state the situation in terms of a definite theory which, strangely enough, was not refuted by any orthodox Lutheran.

Even though Krogh-Tonning held that there had been a movement away from Luther within Protestantism, he certainly recognised that it did not embrace the whole Protestant world. However, he meant that Protestantism had proved its vitality by the development that had taken place. Therefore he would not yet give up Protestantism. He hoped that in the future it would continue to approach the Catholic Church, from which all Christianity received its spiritual life. When reading Krogh-Tonning's argument for his national church, we are struck by the evident fact that he defended Lutheranism by proving its dependence on Catholicism, just as Newman before his conversion had defended the Anglican Church by showing its harmony with the Catholic Church.

The doctrine of Grace must have occupied the mind of Krogh-Tonning for several years, for a second treatise on the subject appeared some years after the publication of *The Doctrine of Grace and the Quiet Reformation*. This second study, which was written in Latin, was called *De Gratia Christi et de libero arbitrio*. It was an excellent piece of work, of which Cardinal Satolli said that it was written '*con mano maestra*'.

When these studies were over, Krogh-Tonning returned to his old problem, the Church. As regards the Protestant idea of the Church, he had to state that on this point there had been a movement opposite to that which had taken place with the doctrine of Grace. The Protestants of the nineteenth century had no definite concept of the Church, and were in this matter further away from Catholicism than Luther had been. To Krogh-Tonning the Church meant an institution for the salvation of mankind, an institution whose main function was the administration of the sacraments. Now he wanted to know if the Church that the Reformation brought into the world had a right to administer the sacraments. To ask if the administration of the sacraments was in the right

hands, meant the same as to ask if the Lutheran Church had a legitimate ministry, or apostolic succession. Krogh-Tonning accepted apostolic succession, but he held that presbyteral succession was sufficient, and since the Norwegian Church had not lost presbyteral succession by the Reformation, he still thought that it constituted a part of the true Church of Christ. On another point, however, *viz.* the relation between the Church and Scripture, he came to the conclusion that Reformation had not understood this when it claimed that the Church must be built on Scripture, which was impossible for the simple reason that the Bible is historically subsequent to the Church.

Krogh-Tonning also said that Protestantism lacked a Christian view of society, and therefore approached its own dissolution. This process of dissolution was accomplished in two ways: by the formation of new sects and by rationalistic Bible-criticism. Protestantism was itself responsible for this development by declaring that the Bible was clear enough for everybody to understand.

These views were set forth in a book called *The Process of Dissolution within the Church*. The critics attacked the book for its Catholic tendencies. Krogh-Tonning's dogmatic difficulties were now so great that he began to think of resigning office, but, although his views were different from those of the Norwegian Lutheran clergy, he did not yet have Catholic conviction. So, without leaving the State Church, he gave up his position as a clergyman. This step naturally attracted great public attention, for Krogh-Tonning was one of the most prominent and learned theologians of the country. The immediate effect of his resignation of office was an extensive newspaper debate, dominated more by surprise than by indignation. It was even said that he might have become a bishop if he had remained in the Norwegian Church, and it was clear to everybody that it was a matter of conscience to him, since he even lost his means of subsistence. However, his courage on this point was soon rewarded, for the Norwegian author Bjornstjerne Bjornson, who was then an atheist, pleaded the case of Krogh-Tonning so valiantly that the National Assembly felt obliged to grant him a pension.

Krogh-Tonning now felt tired. To get peace and opportunity to continue his studies he went to a Jesuit house in Denmark. The dogmas of apostolic succession and of infallibility were still

unsolved problems to his mind. Having been satisfied with presbyteral succession, he was only half-way to his solution of this question, but on consulting the writings of the Fathers he now found that he had to accept episcopal succession, for it appeared that since the days of the Apostles the ordination of priests had always been the privilege of the bishops. By Reformation episcopal succession had been broken in several Protestant countries. The Norwegian Church had also lost episcopal succession and consequently a legitimate authority, which meant that it had no right to administer the sacraments. This recognition was decisive to Krogh-Tonning.

He had already earlier come to the conclusion that the Church must be infallible on all essential points if there is to be any foundation of belief common to all Christians, but since there must be some authority to decide what is essential he now understood that the Catholic dogma of infallibility offered the only satisfactory answer.

When nearly half a year had passed after his resignation of office, Krogh-Tonning fell ill in the middle of his studies. Seeing that there was no longer a single dogma to separate him from the Catholic Church and longing very much for the Eucharist, he was afraid of hesitation, for, as he has written in his 'Memories', he knew that the call of God sounds weaker the second time if we do not answer the first time. He was received into the Catholic Church on June 13th, 1900.

His illness lasted for a long while, but finally he recovered. Owing to his age and family obligations, he had to remain a lay member of the Church, which was indeed all he wanted. He took up his studies again, and wrote some books, of which the most important was his autobiography, called *Memories of a Convert*. It is a kind of Apologia, where he gives us the development of his religious opinions. Although no literary masterpiece, it is a well-written book, and it is a pity that it is very seldom read by his countrymen.

Krogh-Tonning died in 1911 on a Sunday morning, on his way to church. The whole Norwegian press unanimously paid him honour, and a Lutheran review even wrote of him that, since the days of Newman and Manning, the Roman Church had not made a more important conquest among the Protestant theologians of Europe.

Considering the great respect which Krogh-Tonning enjoyed, it might have been expected that his conversion would have some influence, but, apart from some isolated cases, he did not change the mind of anybody, and until the present day his conversion has been of no historical importance. It is not easy to give the reasons for this: we can only set forth a hypothesis. However sympathetic, Krogh-Tonning was no powerful personality, and however learned, he did not have any special literary qualities. His style is clear and his argument well exposed, but his words do not catch the mind of the reader. This may be partly due to his mother-tongue, which has gone through very rapid changes in the last generations, so that what is written in old-fashioned language often loses its strength of appeal.

Historical conditions were also unfavourable to the theological message of Krogh-Tonning. At the time of his conversion the Norwegian public was perhaps incapable of theological reactions, most interests being then political and national. Neither were people prepared to judge of what happened, for the Catholic Church was practically unknown to them. In the whole country there were at most from two to three thousand Catholics, mostly of foreign extraction. From the Catholic point of view it is sad that Krogh-Tonning was not born a little later. If his conversion had taken place, for instance, about 1930, its effect on public opinion might have been much stronger and more lasting.