

THE HISTORICITY OF DOGMATIC FORMULAE

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Source: *Divus Thomas*, Vol. 77, No. 1 (1974), pp. 3-36

Published by: Edizioni Studio Domenicano

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45076109>

Accessed: 20-01-2020 17:11 UTC

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## THE HISTORICITY OF DOGMATIC FORMULAE

**SUMMARIUM.** — *Maxima in re fidei et morum fidelium inseguritas exorta est ex pluribus de doctrina catholica studiis nuper editis, in quibus hoc vel illud dogma ita explicatur, ut sensum suum obvium, olim ab Ecclesia definitum et semper traditum, amittere videatur. Quae christianae doctrinae adaptatio ideis modernis diverse a diversis iustificatur. Argumenta fautorum in decem capita plus minusve distincta dividi posse videntur, ut sunt mutatus fidei et revelationis conceptus, praesumpta impossibilitas cognitionis certae vel non in experientia fundatae, sic dicta historicitas mentis humanae, etc. Quibus argumentis descriptis, auctor in parte centrali huius articuli fidem catholicam inde ab Ecclesiae initio semper ut doctrinam, cuius sensus numquam mutetur, habitam esse demonstrat. Quo facto respondetur singillatim argumentis contra immutabilitatem « sensus atque sententiae » dogmatum alatis.*

Until so recently as fifteen years ago the Catholic Church was kept together by the unconditional adherence of its members to a common creed and by their submission to the teaching authority of the Pope and the Bishops. Hardly a ripple of strife or dissent disturbed the peaceful life of the community of faithful, founded upon the unchanging truths of faith, taught and interpreted by the infallible magisterium.

In sharp contrast to this situation, the Church has now entered a period of storm and turmoil. Hardly a single item of its Creed and moral code is not contested by one or another theologian. Even dogmas like those of the Trinity, of Christ's divinity, his resurrection, of redemption and transsubstantiation, and fundamental principles of Christian ethics such as the indissolubility of marriage and the illicitness of induced abortion, are now being questioned or even denied. It is no wonder therefore that plain Christians all through the world are puzzled because their priests, their parish bulletins and diocesan papers, as well as teachers of Christian religion at schools and colleges, keep talking about change and new liberty. Untold millions of parents and elderly people still believe, still want to believe what the Catholic Church holds, but suffer great anguish because what they see is a striferidden church, a whirlpool of opinions and subjectivity which seems to grow wilder by the year. It is not just the fact that certain theologians and priests take extreme positions, but Christian laymen themselves are shaken when they notice the widening gap between the Christian way of life and the conceptions now prevailing in society. Christianity seems to be

losing its grip and its relevance; modern ethical ideas, especially in the field of sexuality, are so different from what the Church held and is still clinging to. The general difficulties of modern man as to his identity, his purpose in life and the socio-economic system in which he lives, increase the uneasiness of the faithful.

When seen in an historical perspective, the situation is not so new as it would seem at first sight. Our Lord himself predicted that there will arise false prophets and that many will lose their faith. St. Paul also warns that a time will come when men will no longer support sane doctrine (2 Tim. 4, 3). In the course of history the Church has passed through somewhat similar crises, although the present one may well become the most serious threat to the existence and survival of the Roman Catholic Church that she so far has had to cope with.

In the centre of the discussions and of most of the difficulties is the question whether Christian dogmas are really definite, immutable propositions which have to be understood in their literal sense or, rather, are a primitive and mythological expression of faith and must be recast in contemporary concepts. This questioning of the dogmatic formulae is not new. Ever since the beginning of the 18th century the liberal trend of European thought has been opposed to dogmatic faith, rejecting both its objective contents and the authority which is its guarantee. The criticism the Church is facing now is the result of a process which has been at work for more than 250 years. The discussions about the meaning of dogmatic formulae took an important turn at the beginning of this century, when the so-called modernists advanced explanations according to which dogmas are an expression of religious feeling and are subject to change. Catholic theologians reacted sharply, together with Church authorities — some say that they over-reacted — and immanentism and evolutionism were stigmatized as the causes of modern evils. More recently Pius XII, in his Encyclical « *Humani generis* », warned against the dangers of historicism. The Second Vatican Council, on the other hand, acknowledged that revelation takes place in history and that the People of God are traversing history. Some theologians suggest that once the historicity of the Church is fully acknowledged, the absolute validity of dogmas can no longer be sustained and that the Church will enter into a meta-dogmatical age (1). In this view the very expression « historicity of dogmatic formulae » would be a contradiction, for « dogmatic », they say, is that, which never changes.

In view of the vast mass of material to be treated and the complicated subject matter, our examination of this question will proceed in the form of a *quaestio* in scholastic theology, that is, the main criticism of immutable dogmatic formulae is presented in the form of objections. In a central part it will be explained that Chris-

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(1) J. NOLTE, *Dogma in Geschichte*, Freiburg 1970, p. 250.

tian revelation is a doctrine, and why it is presented in the form of articles of faith and dogmas. The latter will be described and defined. In the answer to the objections the difficulties raised will be examined and answered. (In formulating the various objections it has been impossible to avoid a certain overlapping).

This essay is therefore divided as follows:

#### AGAINST IMMUTABLE FORMULAE

- Objection one : *the changing conception of Christian faith.*
- Objection two : *the changing conception of revelation.*
- Objection three : *always true propositions seem impossible.*
- Objection four : *in order to have a meaning dogmatic formulae must be verified in the experience of the faithful.*
- Objection five : *the historicity of all human thought.*
- Objection six : *the demythologisation of Holy Scripture entails that of dogmas.*
- Objection seven : *the internal structure of the judgement of faith is such that the concepts used are not essential.*
- Objection eight : *dogmas are the expression of the subjective religious sense.*
- Objection nine : *many dogmas are no longer acceptable to modern man; because of their accidental origin dogmas should not have an important place in the life of the Church.*
- Objection ten : *if there is a hierarchy of dogmas it follows that some are less important and can be conveniently set aside.*

CENTRAL PART: *relation, doctrine and dogma.*

#### ANSWER TO THE OBJECTIONS

#### AGAINST IMMUTABLE FORMULAE

##### *Objection 1:*

The traditional idea of faith is that of an intellectualistic assent to dogmatic propositions. Nowadays, however, Christians are more concerned with their surrender to Christ and with the attitude they must take in face of the world. Hence to them the contents of what is believed are no longer very important. There is therefore a shift of interest away from the « *fides quae* » towards the « *fides qua* », that is, from faith in deposited truth towards an experience in depth. Modern Christians feel that they must free themselves from a faith which is a system of complicated propositions, thought out by previous generations who had no inkling of what is living in modern man; modern man shuns definitions and wants leeway for a personal expression of his faith. He experiences faith as a fundamental decision, by which he opens himself to all the good around him.

In agreement with this new orientation it is suggested that the Catholic Church no longer should be the gathering of those who profess the same creed. Rather it must be the community of those who seek the truth and act together in truth (2). Thus faith becomes the concern to understand reality rather than the assent to God's revelation; it becomes a driving force at the level of social relations in view of the well-being of man. Any reference to supernatural reality makes modern man feel uneasy (3).

### *Objection 2:*

Modern man is said to think that his most valuable knowledge is not that which is proposed to him by others, but rather his own immediate experience of reality. This experience is novel, and often strictly personal. In agreement with this, certain theologians advance a new conception of revelation, according to which r. is not the bringing of an objective message about God, but consists in man's answer to his encounter with Christ. For instance, R. Bultmann argues that what Jesus reveals is not an objective knowledge about God, but the fact of his eschatological existence. Questions concerning the « what » and the « how » of his message are not important to us. The revelation brought by Jesus should be detached from its historical context, for the latter is irrelevant to us and, moreover, cannot be known well. Revelation takes place when one decides to accept Jesus in one's life and discovers that one's sinful being is now justified. Revelation, therefore, comprizes two elements: God's intervention and man's answer which gives meaning and expression to God's intervention. There is no revelation as long as man does not accept it and give expression to it. It follows that in what the Church hands down to successive generations, the identity of the formulae of faith is not important, for the latter are only the expression of the experience of certain Christians brought to a common denominator. The socio-cultural situation in which those Christians lived, played an important role in the redaction of these formulae. Apparently the process of the formulation of dogmas will never come to an end as long as there are Christians. And in this sense we must speak of continued revelation, to be realised in the subjective faith of each generation.

This interpretation of revelation would be confirmed by the fact that Jesus himself has not left behind written records (or magnetic tapes) with a precise message, but left to his disciples and the succeeding generations the task to interpret the events of his life and death. Thus the Dutch pastoral Council could write that the answer to the question of what revelation is will become clear when people

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(2) W. KASPER, *Einführung in den Glauben*, Mainz 1972, p. 127.

(3) These ideas are also found elsewhere in modern literature, in particular in the texts of the schemata of the Dutch Pastoral Council of Noordwijkerhout, published in 7 volumes, Amersfoort 1968-1970. See P(astoraal) C(oncilie) 5, the first 30 pages.

learn to understand, in an exchange of thought, the value of true human life and of freedom (4).

### *Objection 3:*

It is very problematic whether there are true sentences as such. The terms of propositions come to be understood differently in the course of time, for they are involved in a process of change. For all practical purposes one might say that sentences are simultaneously true and false (5). If propositions which contain and express exactly the same truth for ever, do not exist, dogmatic definitions cannot be absolute statements and, in the course of time, will have to be replaced by other formulae. We should therefore drop any claim to have « infallible dogmas », but be satisfied with the conviction that, regardless of dogmatic definitions, the universal Church, owing to Jesus' promise will remain in the truth.

Some even go beyond this and say that dogmas are like chains which impede our experience of reality. They will often be the product of dogmatism, i.e. of a way of thinking which makes its own positions absolute. This dogmatism has become rampant after the Council of Trent. The Church should abandon it and resort to the use of « meta-dogmatical » propositions, that is, of statements which remain « open » and can be adapted to changing needs and insights (6).

There are also those who are so impressed by the variety of expressions of the faith which they notice in today's Church, that they no longer think it possible to determine which is right, and which is wrong. No institution, no culture can claim to possess all truth. Hence we must admit that the Western linguistic expressions of the faith have not yielded its full sense. The Church should moreover recognize the rights of the individual conscience in this field and tolerate the most varied expressions of faith, ranging from faith in the letter of Denzinger to religious atheism (7).

### *Objection 4:*

Propositions formulated in terms which are dead to us or express a truth beyond our experience are meaningless (8). The statements of the Christian creed may perhaps be emotionally significant to many, but from the point of view of analytical philosophy they are non-sensical, because they cannot be reduced to a verifiable ex-

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(4) P.C. 4, 116; R. BULTMANN, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* 4, Tübingen 1961, 418-420; Cl. GEFFRÉ, *La révélation hier et aujourd'hui*, in vol. (coll.) *Révélation de Dieu et langage des hommes*, Paris (Cerf) 1972, 95-121.

(5) Cf. H. KÜNG, *Unfehlbar? Eine Anfrage*, Zürich 1970, pp. 128ff.

(6) Cf. J. NOLTE, *op. cit.*; H. KÜNG, *Wahrhaftigkeit*, Freiburg i. Br. 1968, pp. 108ff.

(7) S. PFÜRTNER, *Pathologie de l'Eglise catholique*, in « Concilium » 73, 23-35; P.C., 5, first section.

(8) P. VAN BUREN, *The secular Meaning of the Gospel* 2, London 1965, p. 84.

perience (9). If the propositions of the Creed are to have a meaning to modern man, they must be understood as referring to certain aspects of his life, that is: Christians should live and act in such a way that something analogous takes place to what is expressed in dogmas. Propositions about God should be understood as sentences about facts of human life, for instance as conveying the intention to live according to the *agape* (10). If such a reinterpretation is not possible, theology should simply drop a number of hitherto admitted dogmas (11).

#### *Objection 5:*

Hegel, Dilthey and others have shown that man is an historical being and that his thought is influenced by the stage of development of the epoch in which he lives. Truth, rather than being a set of propositions, is the appearance of reality at this moment. (12) In the ultimate analysis all ideas and propositions are relative. Truth is the product of man, who each time is lifted up higher above himself (13). In this line of thought the body of dogmatic truths becomes problematic. The assumption of ever true statements does not seem to do justice to the historicity of man's life: in fact ideas, theories and moral attitudes appear to be the product of man's experience and man's life. If man constantly evolves, there is no place for a body of unchangeable dogmas. Man's very being is history: the precepts and rules which direct his life are a product of his own insight and experience. The Church too lives in history and possesses revealed truth in a dynamic way. She cannot produce ready-made formulae applying to all situations. In fact, life repeatedly leaves behind past forms; an ideology which may inspire man in one century becomes an illusion in a subsequent period (14). When it is recognised that dogmas are a product of history, the dream of earlier theologians that the doctrine of the Church will crystalize in ever more numerous and more precise formulae, vanishes (15). The gospel will only then be announced in the proper

(9) Cf. A. J. AYER, *Language, Truth and Logic*, chapter 1.

(10) R.B. BRAITHWAITE, *An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief*, Cambridge 1955. See also G. Ph. WIDMER, *Sens ou non-sens des énoncés théologiques*, in *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* » 1967, 644-665; F. FERRÉ, *Language, Logic and God*, New York (Harper and Row) 1961.

(11) D. COX, *The Signification of Christianity*, in « *Mind* » 59 (1958), pp. 21 off.

(12) Cf. his *Geschichte der Philosophie*, Einleitung A 3. According to Dilthey thought is contained in the matrix of life and cannot go beyond it (« *Hinter das Leben kann das Denken nicht zurückgehen* »): *Die geistige Welt*, I 11.

(13) Cf. Hegel's *Differenz des Fichterschen und Schellingschen Systems*

(14) W. PANNENBERG, *Grundfragen systematischer Theologie*, in *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, Göttingen 1967, 237-251; J. ORTEGA Y GASSET, *El tema de nuestro tiempo*, in *Historia como sistema*.

(15) Cf. M. HEIDEGGER, *Gelassenheit* (1959), p. 37; K. RAHNER, *Schriften zur Theologie* IX, Zürich 1970: « *Der Pluralismus in der Theologie und die Einheit des Bekenntnisses in der Kirche* », p. 28.

way, when its message is understood by modern man and engenders faith, hope and love. But faith is not present in its purest form when one hands on a set of dogmas out of relation to the historical situation of contemporary Christians (16).

#### *Objection 6:*

Holy Writ, together with Tradition, transmits the Word of God to man (17). Dogmatic formulae are based upon Holy Scripture either as restating what is explicitly said there, or as a systematic presentation of revelation and as inferences from what is explicitly contained in it. Now the world of the Bible is a mythic world. Bultmann has shown that certain basic patterns of its thought (a divine man, logos, the world of angels and devils, descent into hell, resurrection and ascension) are typical myths (18). However, dogmatic formulae use and define material explicitly or implicitly contained in Holy Scripture. It would therefore seem that dogmas must be understood on the basis of our understanding of the Bible (19). If, for instance, the mariological dogmas propose an image of the mother of Jesus which differs from that which we get while reading the N.T., we must understand these dogmas not as statements of factual truth, but as having a typological sense. The interpreter of dogmas should indeed let himself be guided by what was held before the dogma in question was defined. Since dogmas are a reinterpretation of revelation, we are quite free in our own way of understanding them (20). In particular, dogmas should be stripped from their mythological presentation. A criterium in deciding upon new formulae is the extent to which these will be useful in our construction of the future city of man.

#### *Objection 7:*

In his opening address to the Second Vatican Council, His Holiness Pope John XXIII, while stressing the need to express the Christian message in a way which agrees with what our time requires, makes a distinction between the truths contained in Christian doctrine on the one hand and the manner in which they are formulated on the other hand (21). Apparently the formulae are not the essence of the dogmas and hence can be changed. Some theologians in fact hold that we must make a distinction between the assent of faith and the terms in which it is expressed (22). The former concerns absolute and immutable truth, whereas the terms

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(16) W. KASPER, *Geschichtlichkeit der Dogmen*, in « Stimmen der Zeit » 1967, 401-416, p. 416.

(17) *Dei Verbum* 10.

(18) *Das Evangelium des Johannes*, Göttingen 1941; *Die Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, pp. 162ff; *Offenbarung und Heilsgeschehen*, München 1941.

(19) See P. SCHOONENBERG, in *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 1968, p. 295.

(20) See B. VAN IERSEL, *ibid.*, pp. 324-325.

(21) *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Vaticani II*, vol. I, p. 172.

(22) « Études » 1946, pp. 5-21. See also *Humani generis*.



and the representations which correspond to them, may change. Does not St. Thomas himself write that the act of faith is directed to the reality which is signified and not to the terms of the articles of faith (23)?

The formulae of faith are a human expression of revelation and as such are typical of a particular way of thinking (24). Hence not too much importance should be attached to them. They are but epiphenomena at the surface of Church life; what really matters is religious experience.

The Church does not want to define certain philosophies. For this reason many formulae might be reinterpreted in the light of present day ideas, while their substance would still be preserved. For example, the canons 1-4 of the Decree on Original Sin of the Council of Trent use terms like « propagation » to explain that all men are born in a situation of sin. A more modern way of saying this would be to use expressions like « solidarity ». In a similar way one might wonder what the Fathers of this Council really wanted to say when they defined transsubstantiation. They certainly did not define scholastic ontology (25). It would seem that what they defined is that in the Eucharistic celebration the religious truth of bread and wine are changed (26). As a last example one might quote the definition of the infallibility of the Pope of Rome, when he speaks with supreme authority as the head of the Church. The Fathers do not appear to have examined all the implications of the assumption of infallible doctrine. Hence we may assume that the infallibility defined must be understood in this sense that the magisterium of the Church proposes, in each period of history, the message of Christ in a way which is most convenient to the people (27).

#### *Objection 8:*

Over the past hundred years the view that dogmas are only the expression of religious feeling, has repeatedly been proposed (Schleiermacher, A. Sabatier) (28). In its most modern form this explanation is given again by C. Jung: dogmas like that of the Trinity, the Divinity of Christ, of Mary taken up into heaven, must be explained with the help of archetypes. In all these dogmas the spontaneous activity of the psyche is at work (29): almost the entire life of the collective unconscious has been channelled into the dogmatic archetypal ideas and flows along like a well-controlled stream in

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(23) « Actus autem credentis non terminatur and enuntiabile, sed ad rem » (S. Th. II-II 1, 2 ad 2).

(24) We may see this, for instance, in the various ways in which the Eastern Church and Western Church have expressed the procession of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Unitatis redintegratio* 17).

(25) Cf. L. GODEFROY, in *Dict. de théol. cath.* 5, 1349.

(26) C. VANNESTE, in « Collationes Brugenses et Gandavenses » 2 (1956), 322-355.

(27) This is the thesis of A. HOUTEPEN, *Onfeilbaarheid en Hermeneutiek*, Brugge 1973.

the symbolism of creed and ritual (30). In this psychological perspective, the objectivation of psychic contents into dogmas is not quite harmless. Although dogmas do in fact protect the mind against the unknown forces of religious experience, they may be instrumental in the drying up of this same experience. Hence Christians should not pay too much importance to these formulae, — a phenomenon which does indeed seem to happen in our days (31).

### *Objection 9:*

Dogmatic formulae are frequently the result of a theological dispute and constitute a reaction of the Church against certain dangerous developments. The definitions give an answer to questions which, at a given moment, were felt to be important. Dogmas use conceptions current in a certain time and have a « Sitz im Leben » (32). Often dogmas had the task to defend the Church, and Christians were led to believe that there exists an authority which can tell them what to do and not to do, what to believe and not to believe (33).

In recent years Christians have become very sensitive on this question of a sort of super-power granted to the Pope and the Bishops. They also feel that faith is too complicated: Jesus himself did not speak in dogmas and taught only two commands. Hence dogmatism should be transcended, and the function of dogmas should be reduced to that of signposts for Christians under way. In view of the fact that our ideas have become so different from those held by Christians in the past, certain theologians even say that dogmas should be forgotten or that they have ceased to be dogmas (34).

The same idea is also expressed in a slightly different way thus: There exists a gulf between the language of the Bible and of dogmas on the one hand and the thought of modern man on the other hand. Dogmas are an answer to specific problems of a past period. They have to be « translated » so that modern man can understand them (35).

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(28) *Versuch einer psychologischen Deutung des Trinitätsdogmas*, in *Gesammelte Werke* 11, 119-218; *Transformation Symbolism in the Mass*, in « *Erasmus Jahrbuch* » 1940-1941.

(29) *Psychologie und Religion*, *Ges. Werke* 11, pp. 46ff.

(30) C. JUNG, *Psychological Reflections*, Princeton 1970, p. 48.

(31) Cf. N.J. DEMERATH, *Program and Prolegomena for a Sociology of Irreligion*, in « *Actes de la Xe Conférence internationale de sociologie religieuse* », Rome 1969, 168.

(32) Cf. F.K. MAYR, *Philosophische Randbemerkungen zum Verständnis des Konzilsdekrets von Konstanz*, in « *Zeitschrift für kath. Theologie* » 90 (1968), 129-161; P. FRANSEN, in « *Tijdschrift voor theologie* » 1968, pp. 333-337.

(33) B. SESBOUË, *Autorité du Magistère et vie de foi ecclésiale*, in « *Nouvelle revue théologique* » 1971, 327-359; Y. CONGAR, *Du bon usage de « Denzinger »*, in vol. *Situations et tâches présentes de la théologie*, Paris 1967, 11-133.

(34) J. NOLTE, *op. cit.*, p. 133, speaks of an « Exodus aus unhaltbaren Propositionen »; H. HAAG, *Biblische Schöpfungslehre und kirchliche Erbsündelehre*, Stuttgart 1966, simply declares that some dogmas have ceased to be dogmas.

(35) Cf. P. SCHOONENBERG, in « *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* » 1968, p. 301.

*Objection 10:*

K. Rahner has drawn attention to the fact that a considerable number of Christians are hardly interested in certain seemingly less important dogmas (36). We might speak here of central dogmas and of those of the periphery. The Decree on Ecumenism of the Second Vatican Council seems to recommend that Christians resort to a distinction of truths according to a certain hierarchy. In fact, in this way mutual understanding is greatly facilitated and when dogmas on which Catholics and Protestants disagree are relegated to a secondary position, a sort of *de facto* unity can be realised.

W. Kasper argues that a reduction of dogmas to simpler affirmations is possible: the dogma of the Trinity affirms nothing else but that God reveals himself in Christ as the One who is; the dogma of original sin is the negative formulation of the fact that salvation lies in Christ; the dogma of infallibility signifies nothing else but that the concrete Church with her sacraments and ministry is in substantial agreement with her origin; mariological dogmas are « a typological exemplification » of Christ's reality, — a sort of a mirror in which we see what God wants to do for us (37).

CENTRAL PART  
REVELATION, DOCTRINE AND DOGMA

Revelation has been expressed in language. This linguistic expression of God's message can be examined by means of the methods of analytical philosophy. One could also study it from the point of view of historicism or of existential phenomenology. However, in a Christian study of the expression of revelation, we must begin by accepting God's message. This does not mean that we must renounce the use of our critical sense or that we have to submit blindly to something which cannot be checked at all: there are facts and explanations which make the Christian message eminently reasonable and credible. The message itself is so sublime and beautiful that it appeals to the deepest desires of the human mind. Yet the ultimate step concerning revealed truth is submission in faith to God who calls us. We must listen to the Word and assent to what is proposed. We are given a doctrine and there is an authority which teaches us this doctrine.

The Church holds that the doctrine she brings is the unchanging Word of God, which is handed down from generation to generation.

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(36) K. RAHNER, *Strukturwandel der Kirche*, Freiburg i.Br. 1972, and his address to an audience of 2000 Evangelical Christians in München (6-XI-72), where he introduced the term « die Dritte Konfession », i.e., those Christians to whom confessional differences no longer have any meaning.

(37) W. KASPER, *Einführung in den Glauben*, pp. 96-98.

It is proposed as the very message of Christ and will be proposed until the end of time. This message is nothing else but the self-revelation of God and of his will to bring man to eternal life.

In view of the purpose of this study we must successively examine (a) revelation, (b) revelation as a doctrine, (c) revelation as dogma.

a) *Revelation.*

God is hidden from man's eyes, but in his goodness he revealed himself in several ways to the Jewish people, in particular to privileged persons — the patriarchs, the prophets and Moses — who brought his message to their fellowmen. The very core of this message is the unveiling of God's hidden being and of his love for Israel, which is elected to live in an intimate community with God (1).

The favoured term by means of which this message is described is « word ». Holy Scripture speaks of the « Word of God » which is addressed to man and the contents of revelation are likewise connoted by the term. « Word » is indeed eminently suitable to signify God's revelation. When man speaks he manifests his thought; likewise God manifests his being and his holy will by means of an instrument, as, for instance, the representations in the mind of the prophet (2).

This self-revelation of God to the Jewish people prepared the event which constitutes the fulfilment of his promise and the centre of history, viz. the incarnation of the eternal Word of God. God « sent His Son, the eternal Word, who enlightens all men, so that He might dwell among men and tell them the innermost realities about his Father (John 1, 1-18). Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, sent as « a man to men », « speaks the Word of God » (John 3, 34) and completes the work of salvation which His Father gave Him to do (cf. John 5, 36; 17, 4). To see Jesus is to see his Father (John 14, 9). For this reason Jesus perfected revelation by fulfilling Himself: through His words and deeds, His signs and wonders, but especially through His death and glorious resurrection from the dead and final sending of the Spirit, He confirmed with divine Testimony what revelation proclaimed: that God is with us to free us from the darkness of sin and death, and to raise us up to eternal life » (3).

The doctrine the Church teaches is, she claims, this very same message, which was revealed to the apostles and first disciples of Jesus. The term « revelation », then, is used in the first place to describe this intervention of God by which he manifests his being

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(1) Cf. W. EICHRODT, *Offenbarung und Geschichte im A.T.*, in « Theologische Zeitschrift » 4 (1948), 321-331.

(2) S. Th. II-II, 173, 3.

(3) II Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum* 3.

and his saving will to men, but it also came to to be used to denote the very contents of this message (4).

In this process of auto-manifestation of God a supernatural light is needed by man, in order to grasp and understand this message (5). This inner illumination of the mind of the patriarchs, prophets and apostel makes them see the sense, i.e., the supernatural significance of the events, words and deeds which they observe and hear.

Man does not have to rediscover time and again whatever science and arts his ancestors possessed: he receives the patrimony of wisdom and technical experience from those who lived before him. In a similar way Christ ordered the apostles and his disciples to teach all men what he taught them. « This commission was faithfully fulfilled by the apostles who by their oral preaching, by example and by ordinances, handed on what they had received from the lips of Christ, from living with Him and from what He did, or what they had learned through the prompting of the Holy Spirit. The commission was fulfilled, too, by those apostles and apostolic men who, under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit, committed the message of salvation to writing. But in order to keep the gospel for ever whole and alive within the Church, the apostles left bishops as their successors, « handing over their own teaching role » to them. This sacred tradition, therefore, and sacred Scripture of both the Old and the New Testament are like a mirror in which the pilgrim Church on earth looks at God, from whom she has received everything, until she is brought finally to see Him as He is, face to face (cf. 1 John 3,2) (6).

As the above text and numerous testimonies of Holy Scripture indicate, the revelation of God and his plan of the salvation of men in Christ, was closed with the apostles and disciples: Christ has opened the road to the Father, He has reconciled mankind to God. The glorification of redeemed mankind has begun in his own resurrection. Hence Christ is the only foundation of our faith, the only source of grace (1 Cor. 11, 23; 1 Cor. 3, 11; Gal. 1, 8; Hebr. 12, 1-2; 1 Tim. 6, 20). He revealed whatever His Father gave Him to communicate to us (John 15, 15); this message must be handed on to others (Matth. 28, 19). The *Letter* of Jude 3 invites us « to fight hard for the faith which has been once and for all entrusted to the saints ». The fathers of the early Church were convinced that their task was only that of faithfully preserving the truth entrusted to them (7). This certitude which the Church has that the full revelation has been given to her by the apostles, was expressed by the Second Vatican Council: « The Christian dispensation, therefore,

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(4) In the Middle Ages the contents of revelation were usually signified by the expressions *sacra doctrina*, *veritas salutis*, etc. In the course of time, however, r. also came to mean the *object* revealed. See DS 3011; 3020.

(5) Cf. *S. Th.* II-II, 173, 2 ad 8; *C.G.* 3, 154 (without this illumination of the mind there is no revelation).

(6) *Dei Verbum* 7.

(7) Cf. *St. IRENAEUS*, *Adv. haer.* I, c. 10.

as the new and definite covenant, will never pass away, and we now await no further new public revelation before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Tim. 6, 14 and Tit. 2, 13) » (8). « In His gracious goodness God has seen to it that what He has revealed for the salvation of all nations would abide perpetually in its full integrity and be handed on to all generations » (9).

From this it becomes clear that there is no new revelation in its active sense. It would be wrong to hold that the answer of present day Christians to the message of salvation forms part of revelation. Such a dialectical interpretation of revelation, which would make it an event in the life of every Christian to which he himself would have to give a form and a meaning, is to be rejected.

In the case of the apostles this was different: revelation was not just a briefing about certain new things they had not known before: rather it was a spiritual process in which, while in contact with the Old Testament, with Jesus, his words and deeds and the events of his life, they perceived — owing to a special prophetic illumination given to them — the supernatural sense and meaning of the message of salvation. Their conceptions formed part of revelation as its substrate in which and by which it could be expressed.

The treasure of revelation is not like a set of rules codified many centuries ago and devoid of life. It is a living tradition which, in the succeeding generations of Christians, through the power of the Spirit, is kept always fresh and alive (cf. John 16, 12). Listening to this revelation is far from being a mechanical assent to some unintelligible propositions: it is the beginning of a journey of discovery of the world of God. We receive the gift of faith and the Spirit, which is poured out in our hearts, and will lead us to understanding and fill us with joy.

#### b) *Revelation as kerygma and as a doctrine.*

Revelation is supernatural knowledge about God and his love for man in Christ. This knowledge must be given to us; it is only on the basis of this knowledge that our mind and our being can be effectively united with God.

The apostolic preaching of the mystery of salvation was full of life and vigour, because it was sustained by a most profound personal experience. It would be a mistake, however, to think that this kerygma was alive because it was not yet formalised in propositions and that, on the other hand, the message became petrified and lifeless when expressed and fixed in dogmatic formulae. The kerygma of the apostles and their first successors was not a spontaneous talking, on the spur religious emotion, about the events of Jesus' life and death, but it was an authentic announcing of his

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(8) *Dei Verbum* 4.

(9) *Ibid.* 7

message, destined for all men, and from the earliest beginnings of the Church this kerygma was expressed in specially coined formulae (10). We find these formulae — an outline of the later creeds — already in the N.T. writings. For this reason one must say that the process of the formulation of the faith began during the period in which the NT books were written. These so-called pre-symbola had a great importance in the life of the Church.

The kerygma was presented as true, i.e., as the authentic announcement of the message of Jesus and of the will of God; it brings certitude and imposes on the hearers of the apostles the obligation to obey. In fact, their very message was called « the truth » (1 Tim. 6, 5; 2 Tim. 2, 18; 3, 8; 4, 4; Tit. 1, 14) and thus the later use of the term « dogma » to express objectively true doctrine and the subjective obligation to believe, was anticipated (11). Jesus himself calls the Word of His Father (John 17, 17) and Himself (John 14, 6) Truth. In doing so He indicates that revelation must be understood intellectually. In fact, the apostolic preaching relied less on people's enthusiasm than on their intellectual assent to the message. It was this assent which was solicited and which must be followed by a conversion of the entire man.

This kerygma is also described as a doctrine (Matth. 7, 28; Mc 6, 2; John 6, 16; Acts 2, 42). St. Paul calls himself a « teacher ». In the Pastoral Letters the term doctrine even occurs 15 times. In the early Christian centuries this stress on the intellectual aspect of the message of salvation was very conspicuous. This was not because instruction was highly appreciated in the hellenistic world where the gospel first spread. Rather the first generations of Christians noticed that the terms *didasko* and *didaskalia* expressed very well two aspects which they felt to be essential for the kerygma: its intellectual content and its authoritative transmission (12).

Over against arbitrary interpretations of the kerygma, St. Irenaeus stressed the objectivity of the message: « Jesus did not speak to them in conformity with their original conceptions, nor did He answer according to the ideas of those who questioned Him, but He spoke according to the doctrine of salvation »; « The Church in the entire world, which has its origin from the apostles, perseveres in one only and identical doctrine concerning God and His Son » (13). St. Thomas summarizes a secular tradition when he writes that revelation was given to man in the manner of a certain doctrine « per modum cuiusdam doctrinae » (13a).

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(10) H. SCHLIER, *Zur Grundlegung des Dogmas im Neuen Testament*, in vol. *Die Zeit der Kirche. Exegetische Aufsätze und Vorträge* 3, Freiburg 1962, pp. 206-232, p. 214. See also P. MEINHOLD, *Der Verkündigung Jesu*, in « *Zeitschrift für kath. Theologie* » 89 (1967), 121-138.

(11) Cf. G. SÖLL, *Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, Bd. I, fasc. 5, p. 124.

(12) Cf. K. H. RENGSTORF, in *Kittel's Th. W.N.T.* II 148.

(13) *Adv. haer.* III 5, 2. and 12, 7.

(13a) II-II 171, 6.

c) *Revelation as dogma.*

The Christian message and revelation came also to be signified by the term « dogma ». In the hellenistic world « dogma » denoted opinion, more especially philosophical opinion, decision, ordinance. In the climate of Stoic thought it acquired the connotation of the doctrine in conformity with which one must shape one's moral life (14). In this same line of the development of its meaning St. Paul uses the term to signify religious doctrine (Eph. 2, 15; Col. 2, 14). In the early Christian centuries the expression « dogmata of Jesus » came to be used indiscriminately with doctrine or teachings. In later ages « dogma » then got the sense of Christian revealed truth as proposed by the Church and as distinguished from what is not revealed. As the conclusion of a longstanding evolution of the term, the First Vatican Council used it in the definition of papal infallibility (15). Dogma is that truth which is revealed and as such formally ascertained and defined by the Church: « All those things are to be believed by divine and catholic faith which are contained in the written or transmitted Word of God and which are proposed by the Church, either by a solemn judgment or by the ordinary and universal magisterium, to be believed as having been divinely revealed » (16). Dogmas, then, are propositions in which a revealed truth of the faith is enounced; they are absolutely true and oblige the Christians to assent to them with the assent of faith; they are, however, propositions made by the Church in the course of time. The dogmas are the answer of the Church to God's self-communication and show that the Church understood the meaning of the initial message of salvation. They are an attempt to attain as well as possible the full extent of the message of revelation. Dogmas bind the faithful together into a community of believers in the same creed (17).

Dogmas signify the immutable truth of God's innermost being and his indefectible faithfulness in his saving love for mankind (1 Cor. 1, 9; 1 Thess. 5, 24; 2 Thess. 2, 3; 2 Tim. 2, 13). In this way dogmas also become the starting point for jubilant thanksgiving and praise of God's marvelous deeds (18).

In uninterrupted continuity with the Apostles, the Catholic Church understands her doctrine of faith as identical with the initial kerygma and, therefore, as infallibly true; yet it is also alive, grows more explicit and shows new facets. Those who are outside the Church, see a problem here: on the one hand dogmas which

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(14) M. ELSE, *Der Begriff des Dogmas in der alten Kirche*, in « Zeitschr. f. Theologie und Kirche » 61 (1964), 421-438, p. 426.

(15) DS 3073.

(16) DS 3011.

(17) See K. RAHNER, *Was ist ein Dogma?*, in *Schriften zur Theologie* V, 54-81.

(18) L. SCHEFFCZYK, *Satzwahrheit und Bleiben in der Wahrheit*, in vol. *Zum Problem der Unfehlbarkeit*. Antworten auf die Anfrage von H. Küng, herausgegeben von K. Rahner, Freiburg i.Br. 1971, 148-173, esp. 166ff.



demand assent, appear as an unwarranted encroachment on one's own freedom to understand the gospel as one thinks fit; on the other hand they seem to be the result of human, dynamic and evolutionistic handling of the deposited truth.

While it is impossible to discuss the question of the development of Christian doctrine (which moreover is an extremely difficult problem) in the framework of this article a few observations must be made which shed light on the question so as to allow us to conclude the argument. If revelation itself took place in history and stretched out over many centuries until it was closed at the death of the last apostles or disciples, it is obvious that the understanding of this revealed doctrine will also show a historical dimension. In the second place, it must be noticed that all the dogmas are connected with and are aspects of the plan of God to save man in his only Son Jesus Christ. Hence dogmas do not form a sum of hardly related truths, to which now and then an item could be added. All dogmas speak of the saving will of God and have a deep inner unity. In some cases it may be difficult to show by means of analysis that a dogma is contained in the original message, in as far as this is given to the Church in Holy Scripture. Yet the Church knows and becomes aware, by the light of faith and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, that a particular truth, as, for instance, the assumption of Mary to glory, belongs to what God revealed. The Second Vatican Council describes this as follows:

« For, by this instinct of faith which is aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth, God's People accepts not the word of men but the very Word of God (cf. I *Thess* 2, 13). It clings without fail to the saints (cf. *Jude* 3), penetrates it more deeply by accurate insights, and applies it more thoroughly to life. All this it does under the lead of a sacred teaching authority to which it loyally defers » (19),

« For, there is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down. This happens through the contemplation and study made by believers, who treasure these things in their hearts (cf. *Lk* 2: 19, 51), through the intimate understanding of spiritual things they experience, and through the preaching of those who have received through episcopal succession the sure charism of truth » (20).

Full certitude that a particular doctrine is revealed by God is given to the faithful when it is proposed as such by the Church. For, by divine institution, it is the task of the pastors of the Church alone,

« the successors of Peter and the other Apostles, to teach the faithful authentically, that is with the authority of Christ shared in different ways; so that the faithful, who may not simply listen to them as experts in Catholic doctrine, must accept their teaching given in Christ's name, with an assent that is proportionate to the authority that they

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(19) *Lumen gentium* 12.

mean to exercise. For this reason the Second Vatican Council, in harmony with the First Vatican Council, teaches that Christ made Peter a perpetual and visible principle and foundation of the unity of faith and of communion » (21); and the Supreme Pontiff Paul VI has declared: « The teaching office of the bishops is for the believer the sign and channel which enable him to receive and recognize the Word of God ». Thus, however much the Sacred Magisterium avails itself of the contemplation, life and study of the faithful, its office is not reduced merely to ratifying the assent already expressed by the latter; indeed, in the interpretation and explanation of the written or transmitted Word of God, the Magisterium can anticipate or demand their assent » (21).

As has been said before the dogmas are proposed by the Church which is independent from the psychological modalities of the thought of the Fathers who defined these dogmas and of the way of thinking of the faithful who believe them:

« Difficulties arise also from the historical condition that affects the expression of Revelation.

With regard to this historical condition, it must first be observed that the meaning of the pronouncements of faith depends partly upon the expressive power of the language used at a certain point in time and in particular circumstances. Moreover, it sometimes happens that some dogmatic truth is first expressed incompletely (but not falsely), and at a later date, when considered in a broader context of faith or human knowledge, it receives a fuller and more perfect expression. In addition, when the Church makes new pronouncements she intends to confirm or clarify what is in some way contained in Sacred Scripture or in previous expressions of Tradition; but at the same time she usually has the intention of solving certain questions or removing certain errors. All these things have to be taken into account in order that these pronouncements may be properly interpreted. Finally, even though the truths which the Church intends to teach through her dogmatic formulas are distinct from the changeable conceptions of a given epoch and can be expressed without them, nevertheless it can sometimes happen that these truths may be enunciated by the Sacred Magisterium in terms that bear traces of such conceptions.

In view of the above, it must be stated that the dogmatic formulas of the Church's Magisterium were from the very beginning suitable for communicating revealed truth, and that as they are they remain for ever suitable for communicating this truth to those who interpret them correctly » (22).

It must be insisted upon that the concepts, signified by the terms used in the propositions of faith, have an objective content which is independent from the psychological modalities of the

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(20) *Dei Verbum* 8.

(21) *Declaratio «Mysterium Ecclesiae»*<sup>2</sup>, «Acta Apost. Sedis» 1973, 396 ff.

(22) *Ibid.*, 5.

thought of the Fathers who defined these dogmas and of the way of thinking of the faithful who believe them :

« The Church, therefore, with the long labor of centuries, and not without the help of the Holy Spirit, has established a rule of language and confirmed it with the authority of the councils. This rule, which has more than once been the watchword and banner of orthodox faith, must be religiously preserved, and let no one presume to change it at his own pleasure or under the pretext of new science. Who would ever tolerate that the dogmatic formulas used by the ecumenical councils for the mysteries of the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation be judged as no longer appropriate for men of our times and therefore that others be rashly substituted for them? In the same way, it cannot be tolerated that any individual should on his own authority modify the formulas which were used by the Council of Trent to express belief in the Eucharistic Mystery. For these formulas, like the others which the Church uses to propose the dogmas of faith, express concepts which are not tied a certain form of human culture, nor to a specific phase of human culture, nor to one or other theological school. No, these formulas present that part of reality which necessary and universal experience permits the human mind to grasp and to manifest with apt and exact terms taken either from common or polished language. For this reason, these formulas are adapted to men of all times and all places » (23).

What the Church defines is the sense of the proposition as she understands it, that is the objective intellectual contents signified by the sentence. This sense will often imply the analogous use of the terms, viz. in those cases in which the dogma defines a supernatural mystery. The sense defined by the Church always remains the same and remains true for ever, as was explicitly taught by the First Vatican Council :

« That meaning of sacred dogmas... must always be maintained which Holy Mother Church declared once and for all, nor should one ever depart from that meaning under the guise of, or in the name of a more advanced understanding ». The Council moreover condemned the opinion that « dogmas once proposed by the Church must with the progress of science be given a meaning other than that which was understood by the Church, or which she understands » (24).

The terms in which the dogmas are stated, have been chosen with great care and not without the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This does not exclude that the dogmas may not always be readily understandable to modern man or to people living in a different culture and that they may need explanation :

« For this reason also it often happens that ancient dogmatic formulas and others closely connected with them remain living and fruitful in the

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(23) Enc. *Mysterium fidei*, TL pp. 14-15; see also the *Credo of Paul VI*, nr. 5.

(24) DS 3020; DS 3043.

habitual usage of the Church, but with suitable expository and explanatory additions that maintain and clarify their original meaning. In addition, it has sometimes happened that in this habitual usage of the Church certain of these formulas gave way to new expressions which, proposed and approved by the Sacred Magisterium, presented more clearly or more completely the same meaning » (25).

It must also be noticed that in the Eastern and Western Church different formulae have been proposed which, without mutual contradiction, express each an aspect of a particular mystery, as, for instance, the mode of the procession of the Holy Spirit. The Second Vatican Council observes on this point :

« However, the heritage handed down by the apostles was received in different forms and ways, so that from the very beginnings of the Church it has had a varied development in various places, thanks to a similar variety of natural gifts and conditions of life » (26).

After having drawn attention to the historical aspect of the formulation of the revealed truth, we must return to the central thesis of our study: dogmas as proposed by the infallible magisterium of the Church unfold the richness of God's love, preserve the mind from aberrations and subjectivity, bring us closer to the eschatological fulfilment of our present life, when faith will be turned into vision. « Let the treasure of revelation entrusted to the Church increasingly fill the hearts of men » (27).

#### ANSWERS TO THE OBJECTIONS

##### *Answer to the first difficulty:*

When one carefully examines the texts of the N.T. on faith it becomes evident that, far from being just a feeling of confidence in and sympathy for Jesus, faith is also described as an assent, as an acknowledgement of Jesus's words, his deeds, his message. Faith means to accept the witness of Jesus and his disciples. St. John repeatedly uses the expression *pistèuein òti* (1). Also for St. Paul faith comprizes the assent to the kerygma. Ever since its origin christianity demanded true faith from its converts. Now true faith is faith in and according to the apostolic teaching. The N.T. already presents in *nucleo* the later dogmas (2).

If in the course of the ages the Church rejected so sharply deviations from the true faith, she did so because she had the abso-

(25) *Mysterium Ecclesiae*, 5.

(26) *Unitatis redintegratio*, 14.

(27) *Dei Verbum* 26.

(1) Cf. John 8, 24; 11, 42; 13, 19; 14, 10; 16, 27+30; 17, 8+21.

(2) See H. SCHLIER, *Kerygma und Sophia*. Zur Neutestamentlichen Grundlegung des Dogmas in *Die Zeit der Kirche*, Freiburg i.Br. 1956, 206-231.

lute certitude that her Creed, her articles of faith and her understanding of them, express the object of faith, God's plan of salvation.

The Church has likewise always conceived evangelisation as the transmission of a doctrine rather than as the communication of a personal experience.

Faith which is cut loose from its object, revealed truth, becomes a blind sentiment and destroys itself, because it no longer knows what and in whom it believes (3).

A Christian can only save the world and help mankind, if by faith he first places himself within the saving will of God. It must moreover be remembered that faith concerns something which wholly transcends this material world, and for the acquisition of which we must give up everything else. The « folly » of the gospel consists precisely in the fact that it makes us live for something which is not of this world.

*Answer to the second difficulty:*

Against Bultmann, and those who follow him, it must be observed that B. interprets Christian revelation in the function of personal experiences. In this way the historical truth of Jesus' life and message loses much of its value. Revelation would not bring us any objective truth concerning Jesus and God. Now this position not only conflict with the explicit convictions of Christian tradition, but also with sound philosophy. In Bultmann's position it is very difficult to see why just Jesus is so important or why he saved mankind through his death and resurrection. Revelation is emptied of its contents and, in the last analysis, becomes an intra-wordly event (4). This interpretation is confirmed by the fact that recently some authors — apparently in a similar line of thinking —, voiced as their view that christianity might be able to do without assent to the existence of Jesus of Nazareth (5).

Over against gnostic and modernistic theories the Church maintains that revelation is not a mystical influence in the mind of each would-be believer, who would then be free to express his religious experience in a way best suited to him at the moment (6). The reason for this is clear: the modernistic position destroys the objectivity and authenticity of revelation and of tradition; it destroys christianity as an historical religion; it creates a dichotomy between personal thinking and feeling and its expression in language.

It is true that order that revealed truth may be, there must be those who receive it and transmit it. Yet differently from what the objection seems to say, in this receiving of revelation a feeling

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(3) Cf. L. SCHEFFCZYK, *Glaube als Lebensinspiration*, in « Münchener Theol. Zeitschr. ». 1972, 131-150.

(4) L. MALEVEZ, *Jésus de l'Histoire et interprétation du kérygme*, in « NRth » 1969, 785-808, p. 795.

(5) Cf. STRAETER, *Die neue Theologie in Holland*, Regensburg 1970, pp. 14 ff.

(6) Enc. *Pascendi*. Cf. DS 3481; Decr. *Lamentabili*, DS 3420.

of agreement of some existential truth with one's own life is not what really matters: there must be the assent of faith, which is the result of an elevation of man's mind by grace. If the supernatural illumination of the human recipient of revelation would be missing, there would only be human knowledge and no self-manifestation of God (7). Now this revelation took place in the past and was closed at the end of the apostolic age.

The proposed interpretation of revelation is apparently influenced by phenomenology, as taught by M. Merleau-Ponty. According to M.P. man is not an impartial spectator; his ideas are only true for himself and during a limited time; there is no absolute truth, for the point of view of the human individual influences his knowledge (8). If this line of thinking, which apparently satisfies a need for greater subjectivity, is applied to faith, God becomes a God-for-me and truth is, at least partly, a product of man's subjectivity. This phenomenology is one of the greatest threats to Christian faith ever: human reason no longer is willing to admit truth proposed in the name of another, and the creed of the Church is being replaced by a number of propositions which are thought to express what really lives in the community; when a truth « pleases » or « appeals » to a particular congregation it will be admitted (9). Paul VI has time and again warned against the most serious dangers of this sort of subjectivity (10). The answer of Christians to this great challenge must be openness to being, submission to truth, obedience to those who authentically propose revealed doctrine. Given man's weakness and the force of sentiments and passions, the body of revealed truth proposed by the infallible magisterium of the Church is one of the most precious gift which mankind could receive.

#### *Answer to the third difficulty:*

That dogmatic formulae do not express the fullness of the mystery of faith has been known ever since the beginnings of christianity. St. Paul writes that faith only allows us to see the glory of God as in a mirror (2 Cor. 3, 16). Early Christian authors and Fathers upheld that God's essence cannot be known by man in this life (11). Saint Basil, St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Cyril of Jerusalem stated against Eunomius that even by faith God's being cannot be fully known. St. Augustine draws attention to the poverty of our language which hardly succeeds in expressing what we inwardly think

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(7) K. RAHNER, *Ueberlegungen zur Dogmentwicklung*, in *Schriften zur Theologie* IV, 51-99.

(8) *Phénoménologie de la perception*, 128; 453. Cf. his *Le primat de la perception*, in « *Bulletin de la Société franç. de philosophie* » 41 (1947), p. 120.

(9) Cf. M.-J. LE GUILLOU, o.p., *Le mystère du Père*, Paris 1973, pp. 151-165.

(10) *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, VI, pp. 990-994 (Disc. of Wedn. Oct. 30, 1968).

(11) Cf. ST. JUSTINUS, *Dial.* 127, 2; CLEM. ALEX., *Strom.* II 2; ST. IRENAEUS, *Adv. haer.* IV, 20, 5.

(12). Similar voices can be heard in the Christian Middle Ages (13). The First Vatican Council affirmed that the mysteries of God surpass our mind so much that they remain hidden as if they were covered by a veil (14).

However, this does not mean that absolutely true propositions are not possible. In Christian philosophy things have been created by God and thus have an essence, since they were conceived by Him. In the process of knowledge they give their intelligibility and truth to our intellect, which in this manner can form judgements which are absolutely true (15). Likewise it is held in Christian theology that the enuntiations of the faith retain, in the course of the ages, the same sense, even if certain terms may fall into disuse and may become unclear to the general Christian.

In accordance with this, it must be held that dogmas have a specific content, which must be believed. It would be wholly insufficient to say that dogmas are true in as far as they are not wrong (16). The N.T. speaks of propositions in which we must believe and not only of the person of Jesus, with whom we must remain united (17). The self-communication of God to man is addressed to the human mind as a specific message. Man would not be able to think about the message of salvation and give account of it, if he could not seize and express it in a judgement. The Church must know who is Christ in whose truth she is to remain. To this effect the dogmas are necessary. Repeating a fine definition by St. Isidore we may say that the propositions of faith are a « perception of divine truth which tends toward it ».

The objection speaks of the danger of dogmatism. It does in fact happen that people are dominated by prejudice or ideologies. It is superfluous to dwell upon this deplorable weakness of man. The early Christians knew of the power of preconceived theories. Ps. Clemens speaks of a *pròlepsis ouk orthè* which prevents man from seeing God's will (18). In the *Letter to Diognet* 2 the reader is invited to purify himself from whatever obstructs his understanding of the arguments, advanced in favour of the Christian message. However, dogmas are entirely different from being a sort of straight-jacket of thought. By faith we are invited to enter into a new realm; a window opens upon God's being, but in the obscure twilight of a

(12) *De Trinitate* IX, 7, 12.

(13) Cf. St. Thomas' words, at the evening of his life « videtur mihi ut palea », with regard to his intellectual work. GUTTMUNDUS OF AVERSA, *Epist. ad Ergastum*, PL 149, 1507: « verba mortalia quasi nihil ut naturam divinitatis explicare sufficerent ».

(14) Cf. the Const. *De Fide catholica*, cc. 2 and 4.

(15) *De veritate* 1, 2. - J.-P. SARTRE takes the opposite position: for him there is no essence of things because there is no creator. See his *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*, p. 22.

(16) H. FRIES, *Das missverständliche Wort*, in vol. *Zum Problem der Unfindbarkeit. Antwort auf die Anfrage von H. Küng*, p. 227.

(17) Cf. Mathew 22, 16; Marc 12, 32; Rom. 9, 1; 10, 10; 1 Cor. 15, 3-5.

(18) *Homilia* A.

new day we would lose our bearings if we did not have the dogmas to guide us and to teach us. They form the basis for our intellectual activity in this new world. They are an invitation to a never-ending penetration of the treasure of revelation and an admiring love of God. The dogmas contain God's plan of salvation, God's thinking. Submission to dogmas is submission to truth and the forsaking of one's own preferences.

The Second Vatican Council presupposes as selfevident that there are dogmas in the Catholic Church and that these are believed in. Since at the time of the Council no dogma was questioned, the Fathers felt that it would be better to explain the dogmas in terms more readily understandable to modern man than to seek to define new dogmas. If in this post-conciliar period certain dogmas come to be doubted, the Magisterium will not hesitate to reassert them and, if necessary, to clarify certain points by new definitions.

With regard to the question of pluralism it must be noticed that the unity of mankind and the communion of thought are presupposed by Jesus' command to go and teach all peoples. The changing circumstances in which man lives, as well as his own individuality, may lead him to consider the revealed message from an angle which differs from that of former generations. Yet, except perhaps for some isolated cases, this will not lead to a so-called reformulation of dogmas: most dogmas concern truths so intimately connected with man's deepest problems and are formulated in such a general way, that these formulae will always remain (19).

A Christian may not contradict the creed of the Church on any of this points. However the case of Christians of good will who feel doubts concerning one or another point of the faith must be distinguished from an open denial or disavowal of the dogmas. This can happen not only because the mysteries of faith are so far above reason that they can provoke dissent, but also because the ideas and systems of value dominant in modern society, are very different from the world of faith. Instead of an organic unity between faith and man's natural way of thinking, there often is a rupture and faith is juxtaposed to other convictions. K. Rahner is of the opinion that for certain Christians subjective doubts concerning certain points of the official doctrine of the Church may be almost unavoidable and therefore, as he writes, legitimate (20). This position, however, seems extreme. We should rather say that it is the duty of a Christian to adapt his thinking to that of the Church and, if necessary, to take even a heroic stand in defence of his faith.

#### *Answer to the fourth difficulty:*

Some authors, influenced by analytical philosophy, want to do

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(19) Internationale Theol. Kommission, *Die Einheit des Glaubens und der theol. Pluralismus*, Einsiedeln 1973, pp. 61-62.

(20) *Der Glaube des Christen und die Lehre der Kirche*, in «*Stimmen der Zeit*» 1972, pp. 3-19.



away with part of the dogmas and retain only those which have some reference to man's experience. In answer to this objection we must first make a concession: human knowledge is derived from sense experience and the intellect cannot think without uninterrupted reference to the contents of sense knowledge. Yet the intellect forms general concepts which contain the intelligible contents of all things of a given class; it formulates laws of being and can even infer the existence of causes which as such do not fall under sense experience (God, the spiritual mind of man). In the latter case, however, we only reach knowledge of the existence of such causes; we cannot really get to know their essence. Thus we must, for example, admit that God is beyond our thinking about him. At the level of supernatural faith there is real contact with God but it takes place in the darkness of our defective and analogous way of knowing. In the act of faith the process of knowledge begins so to say in God himself: He chooses among man's concept and experiences, certain ones which He knows express something of the mystery of his being. His being and his will to save man are revealed under the veil of these concepts. By faith we touch God himself through the intermediary of this revealed language. If we take a proposition like « I believe in God, Creator of heaven and earth, of all visible and invisible things », we must notice that this is not just a proposition about the beginning of the world, of which a metaphysician might also be convinced. It is in the first place an assent of the mind to God, a listening to God, who speaks to us: we believe in God's love; God creates out of sheer goodness and wishes to bestow on man far more than man could ever hope for. Such a proposition of faith, therefore, is related to the entire message of salvation and introduces the believer into a new experience, a new relationship with God, which will find its fulfilment in heaven. A proposition like « I believe in Jesus who arose from among the dead on the third day according to Holy Scripture », does have its foundation in the Easter experience of the Apostles, but it goes beyond a mere restating that Jesus was seen by them. It is faith in resurrection as man's salvation and as a fulfilment of God's promises; it is faith also in a new creation in which we are invited to partake. A proposition like « the Blessed Mary, Mother of Jesus, has been preserved from any contagion of original sin » (21), is based upon God's revelation, which the Church finds signified by such texts as Genesis 3 and Luke 1. This part of our creed clearly exceeds our present experience, for we can only dimly suspect what it is to be free of sin. Yet it gives us a joyous indication of what perfect salvation will be, by directing our attention to this shining example of what the working of God's grace achieved in Mary.

The above instances show the peculiar character of dogmatic propositions as related to experience: (a) propositions of faith use

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(21) Cf. the *Credo of Paul VI*, n. 14.

(22) Cf. Conc. Later. IV, DS 806e

words which are taken from man's general daily experience or which reflect this experience (in the case that the terms are of a more philosophical nature). These words are used in an analogous way to express the mystery of God's will, who decided to save us, his creatures, because of Jesus, His only begotten Son. The created concepts are wholly inadequate to express the mystery of God (22), yet through their intermediation God allows us to touch, in the darkness of faith, his own being and his love. We experience that, owing to this vision of faith, the world and human destiny make more sense to us. Apparently our language and our thought become instruments to express a truth which is far beyond the immediate signification of the terms. God's Word gives them a new meaning. Our words and concepts can lend themselves to this use because they are God's creatures and thus are apt to be taken up into the order of salvation.

(b) The propositions of faith all contain a truth which shall be fully revealed to us in our vision of God in heaven. They are an anticipation of a coming experience.

(c) All the propositions of faith go back, in the last analysis, to the original message of the apostles, that is, to a human experience of those men who witnessed the events through which God revealed himself and who received a message to hand it on to others. Hence there cannot be a reduction of the propositions of faith to mere intra-worldly experiences of contemporary Christians, as Bonhoeffer, Bultmann and Tillich appear to say.

(d) It is not surprising that each Christian does not have an immediate experience of these events of salvation nor receive a personal revelation of them himself. We may see here an analogy with what happens in human society: we are born in a certain community and receive a certain language, as a house we did not build ourselves; we also receive the « language of faith ». We may dwell in this house and get acquainted with all its rooms; we may even furnish and adorn it; it provides us with a living-space which is not a mere subjective construction nor a reflection of our own thinking. When the message of salvation is handed on, a *language* of salvation is transmitted at the same time, which finds its expression in the writings of Holy Scripture, in particular in the N.T., in liturgy and in theological thinking. Christianity in based upon the presupposition that there in such a unity of men that all can open themselves to this language of faith. It is obvious that this process of listening to the Word will be facilitated when people living in a particular culture have been prepared for the message by a process of spiritual evolution which makes them more apt to desire salvation.

In conclusion we say that dogmatic language, because of its particular nature, combines several seemingly opposed characteristics: it is both indicative (stating facts) and functional (tied to an attitude of will); it is convictional but also adorative. To those, however, who do not have faith, it seems only mythical since it pro-

poses things of which we have no evidence; to others, who reduce christianity to one among the world religions, the language of the creed is religious in the sense of a-rational. But to those who received the gift of faith it is eminently rational and true.

It will have become evident that the nature of dogmatical propositions can only be adequately understood at the level of supernatural faith, and not from the mere standpoint of the science of comparative religion, of ethics, ethnology or linguistical philosophy.

*Answer to the fifth difficulty, i.e., the alleged historicity of human thought:*

The answer to the objection comprizes a philosophical and a theological consideration.

(a) To a certain extent it may be true that modern man — especially in the Western world — experiences the historicity of his being and feels that he is himself constructing his own truth, which is valid only now. The question which really matters is what to make of this way of thinking or feeling. A critical reflection shows that relativism concerning the truth or error of statements is simply impossible, for, in case we think that there are no absolutely true propositions, we already assume one (or even more than one) in the very judgement by which we formulate this conviction. A sceptic would have to seek refuge, like Pyrrho, in *aphasia* (23). The theory of the relativity of our knowledge goes against the grain of thought itself which tends to become certitude. We see an interesting example of this in Hans Küng's book « Unfehlbar? »: the author doubts about the possibility of affirming wholly certain propositions, yet he seems entirely sure of his own theories.

To be of value, thought must possess certitude. No one cares for mere opinions if they do not help him to reach some certitude.

The possibility to grasp and to know the truth stated by people living in other periods of history, must also be admitted. When reading the opening pages of Plato's *Phaedrus*, we can follow Socrates and Phaedrus in their discussion as they were sitting near the streamlet Ilyssus and we can grasp their argument. We must perhaps do some historical research in order to see all the implications of their discussion, and certain details may escape us, but it is beyond question that we can understand the real issue and subscribe or not to Plato's doctrine of love and of the nature of the soul. Our present moment seems to become enlarged and extended so as to merge with the intelligible contents of a discussion held 2400 years ago. We grasp the universal meaning of what was said; this universal meaning as such is apparently subtracted to becoming. A most telling proof for this grasp of the real thought of someone who lived more than fifteen hundred years earlier is the case of

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(23) SEXTUS EMPIRICUS, *Pyrr. Hypotyposeon* I, 192.

St. Thomas who had a most perfect understanding of what Aristotle meant.

The operations of the human mind apparently show an aspect which is supra-temporal; things and events have an intelligible content which can be grasped even after their concrete appearance in time has been dissolved.

There cannot be any doubt, therefore, that the immaterial mind is able to reach beyond the moment of time in which it now exists: it makes scientific assertions which, if true now, remain so for ever, as do statements about historical facts — like the battle of Salamis and the war in the Pacific. But one might perhaps object saying that man's spiritual mind is specifically the same, but that reality changes in the course of time, and that therefore there is no continuity in the contents of the thought of man living now and of those in the past. To this we answer that the Christian doctrine of creation excludes such a view: things and their truth have been created in conformity with their plan in God's mind. The world is not a product of chance: God made it and had a plan of what he made (24). « Were we presented with nought but a Heraclitean flux, would a work of creation be even imaginable? » (25). This doctrine of creation does not exclude development, growth and changes, but it excludes that man is a stone or matter anti-matter. There is a flagrant opposition between a historicism which would make everything relative and the metaphysical positions presupposed by Christian faith. Because things have their essences a truly certain knowledge is possible, and as such this knowledge is not subject to the fleeting movement of time.

(b) It follows that on the level of faith propositions which always retain their truth, are possible. In this sense the dogmatic formulae are supra-temporal. This is also the firm conviction of the Church. Ever since the beginnings of the Church the permanence of the message of faith was stressed (26) and it was solemnly defined by the First Vatican Council: « Hinc sacrorum dogmatum is sensus perpetuo est retinendus, quam semel declaravit sancta mater Ecclesia nec umquam ab eo sensu altioris intelligentiae specie et nomine recedendum » (27). In the Constitution on Revelation, nr. 8 the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, while dwelling on the fact that progress in the further understanding of revelation is possible, refer nevertheless to the text of the First Vatican Council quoted above, thereby indicating that they presupposed the permanence of the same sense of the dogmas. The identity of revealed doctrine to be preserved and to be handed down to the next generation of men, does not exclude, rather demands, that this doctrine is proposed to the faithful in a language which they can more easily understand.

(24) S. Th. I 15, 1.

(25) E. GILSON, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*, N.Y. 1940, p. 243.

(26) Cf. Math. 28, 20; Gal. 1, 8; Hebr. 1, 2; 12, 2; 2 Tim. 1, 13; 3, 10.

(27) DS 3020. Cf. also the Decretum *Lamentabili* of 1907.

It is the task of theologians to find this language which renders the precise sense of the dogmas.

It is obvious that dogmas are historical in the sense that they are also, accidentally, the reflection of the way of thinking of the Church which defined them and of the circumstances which surrounded their definition. History is not a power opposed to dogma, but is the soil in which dogma grows and develops. This is the logical consequence of the Incarnation and of the Sacramental order. As was explained in the central part of this essay there is dogmatic development, but there is no change of meaning of what the Church once believed and defined.

In view of the past history of the Church it is unlikely that there will never more be any new dogmas, as some theologians suggest. Rather the Church's insertion in history makes it likely that, as in the past, she will have new opportunities to define new dogmas.

*Answer to the sixth difficulty:*

The objection raises some interesting problems. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council dealt with this question in the Constitution on Divine Revelation: « The words of the holy Fathers witness to the living presence of this tradition, whose wealth is poured into the practice and life of the believing and praying Church. Through the same tradition the Church's full canon of the sacred books is known and the sacred writings themselves are more profoundly understood and unceasingly made active in her » (28).

From this text it appears that on the one hand. Holy Scripture is the norm of the faith of the Church, but that on the other hand the Bible was born in the midst of the community of faithful and that in this way the faith of the Church influenced its composition. In fact, the faith of the Church, although it is itself submitted to Holy Scripture, is decisive for the determination of the sense of the text. This is obvious in questions such as that of the primacy of Peter and his successors, of the ministry, of the special place of Mary, etc. From this it follows that the mere scientific study of the text of Holy Scripture is no guarantee and provides no ultimate criterion for finding revealed truth. For this reason it seems impossible to try to bring about the unity of the various Christian Churches only by means of a scientific interpretation of Holy Scripture.

A very important illustration of what was said above is given with the text of Genesis 3 on the sin of Adam. In a scientific interpretation of the text it may perhaps be defended with some plausibility that Adam is only a symbolical figure and signifies man's general condition, or a collectivity of men. Yet the Church maintains that at the origins of mankind a sin was committed and that this sin of a single individual, who lived in a state of privilege, was transmitted and is transmitted by generation to each individual

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(28) *Dei Verbum* 10.

who is born. The Church, therefore, has a fuller understanding of the text than can be reached by scientific exegesis. Likewise, if some scholars would hold that the New Testament references to Jesus' resurrection do not imply the physical reality of the event, they understand the texts differently from the Church and thus fail to see the real meaning of the inspired Scripture.

As to Bultmann's theory of the so-called mythological conception of the world, which as he thinks would pervade the writings of the New Testament, it must be pointed out that there is no question of such a total opposition between the view of the world expressed in the N.T. and that of modern men. In our answer to the previous difficulty the supratemporal aspect of man's thought was underlined, hence there cannot be such a total discontinuity and rupture between two mentalities as Bultmann claims there is. In the second place it must be noticed that certain events like the virgin birth of Jesus and his resurrection, were no less difficult to believe in for the people of those days than for us. That certain expressions of Holy Scripture are figurative was known to the early Church and there is no reason to speak here of the need to demythologise these propositions in our own days. It must also be kept in mind that what Bultmann calls the mythological mentality is far from being as primitive as he assumes it to be. Rather, this way of thinking is a permanent aspect of man's way of grasping reality. Bultmann's position depends on a rationalism which is an unlawful narrowing of man's perception of reality (29). A consistent demythologisation along the lines stipulated by Bultmann would lead to a sort of anticonfession of faith: « ... I believe in Jesus Christ, who is not born from all eternity of the Father; who is not born of a virgin; who suffered under Pontius Pilate and died, but not in expiation of our sins; who was buried but did not rise from the dead; who did not ascend to heaven and does not sit at the right hand of the Father » (30).

With regard to the position of Van Iersel to the effect that the interpretation of dogma is dependent on Holy Scripture, it has already been pointed out that Holy Scripture must be read within the Church. The doctrine of the Church is *the* interpretation of Holy Scripture, while it also nourishes itself by the same Holy Scripture (31).

#### *Answer to the seventh difficulty:*

If it is true that there is a distinction between the formulae of dogmas and that which is expressed by them, this does not mean that formulae are irrelevant or accidental. The assent of faith de-

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(29) Cf. M. ELIADE, *Images et symboles*, Paris 1952. See also K. GOLDAMMER, in « Theologische Literaturzeitung » 1953, pp. 752 ff.

(30) Cf. H. SASSE, *Flucht vor dem Dogma. Bemerkungen zu Bultmann's Entmythologisierung des Neuen Testaments*, Bleckmar 1965.

(31) S. Th. II-II, 5 ad 3.

mands that there be an enunciation to which it assents (32). If the enunciation of faith would not have its own particular signification (i.e., if the terms would not have a specially intended meaning), all the articles of faith would flow together in confusion. Faith would no longer be distinguished from a mystic feeling of surrendering to the unknown. This would be against man's dignity and responsibility. God will only propose faith to man in a form adapted to man's intellectual life (33). Above all it would be against the economy of salvation which has a particular structure, described in the articles of the Christian creed and in the dogmas. The terms of the dogmatical formulae signify the realities of man's salvation according to God's will, and hence they make true propositions and are indispensable.

The objection furthermore states that dogmas are a human expression of revelation, and hence without much value: Against this we say that some of the terms used have been taken from Holy Scripture, other have been consecrated by their use and admission by Tradition. In fact the formulae of the dogmas are the result of ages of prayerful meditation on the contents of revelation and were defined under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (34). The terms used in these formulae signify concepts which express a true knowledge of created things; we cannot replace them without thereby exposing the formulae to a relativistic interpretation (35).

It is understood that the Church does not define any particular philosophies, but in her definitions she may use terms used in philosophy, when she judges that these terms aptly express an objective fact of reality, which she wants to state. For this reason the term « transsubstantiation » is used because it indicates that « that which is bread » is changed into the Body of Christ. The Fathers of Trent certainly wished to define the ontological conversion of bread and not just a change in the religious sense of bread. The

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(32) With regard to the text of St. Thomas quoted in the objection (II-II, 1, 2 ad 2) it must be noticed that St. Thomas does not say that the terms of the enunciation of faith are irrelevant: he argues that the object of faith is expressed in the form of an enunciation because of the structure of man's mind. This object is God himself and something composed as the human judgements would intimate (composition of a subject and its attributes). The same is stressed once more in the ninth article of the same question on the symbola of the faith. To signify better that the reality to be attained in the act faith is God himself the symbola use the form « I believe IN... », instead of being a simple statement of fact. *De malo* 6, art. 1, ad 14; I-II 17, 6.

(33) Cf. L. MALEVEZ S.J., *L'invariant et le divers dans le langage de la foi*, in « NRT » 1973, 353-366. Explanations which underestimate the importance of the terms in the propositions of the faith are likely to have been influenced by the intuitionism of Bergson. See M. LABOURDETTE and M.-J. NICOLAS, *L'analogie de la vérité et l'unité de la science théologique*, in « Revue thomiste » 1947, 417-466.

(34) Encycl. *Mysterium Fidei* (« AAS » 1965, p. 758).

(35) See E. SCHILLEBEECKX, *Humani Generis*, in *Theologisch woordenboek* II. Cf. also the important text of the declaration *Mysterium Fidei*, quoted in the central part of this essay.

Fathers of the First Vatican Council were perfectly aware of what they were defining by the infallibility of the Pope, for in the Constitution on Catholic Faith they defined that the dogmas of faith always retain the sense which was once acknowledged and is now acknowledged by the Church. From these examples we learn that it is not the task of individual theologians to suggest new and hazardous interpretations of what dogmas might mean. Their sense is that intended by the defining Church and exposed by the Magisterium.

*Answer to the eighth difficulty:*

The argument advanced against the objectivity of revelation and of dogmatic formulae is characteristic of the orientation of modern thought, which, to a considerable extent, moves within the context of man's subjectivity. The modernists held that « revelation cannot be put into us from outside; it can be occasioned, but it cannot be caused by instruction » (36). If this line of thinking would be true, it would be meaningful to resort to Jung's explanations which would allow us to discover some sense and beauty in the numerous dogmas. But over against this sort of attempts at re-interpretation, Christians cannot but stress the objectivity of revelation, without which it is just a beautiful dream and an illusion. Now when God reveals, something takes place in the world of men, viz. an occurrence in the prophet's mind which is a supernatural intervention owing to which the prophet or apostle understands the sense of the event he sees, of the words he hears, of ideas he has, in relation to God's love for mankind. It is in this way that the Apostles were given the revelation of the meaning of Jesus' death (37). The modernists appear to exclude this specific intervention of God. It should moreover be noticed that the so-called religious sense to which they resort in order to explain the genesis of Christian dogma, is a category of reality which subtracts itself from scientific research.

The doctrine of revelation does not say that revelation is necessarily an abrupt or violent invasion of man's mind. The ordinary perception of events and the mechanism of man's sensitive and intellectual life are in most cases an integral part of it. Nor is there any contradiction with man's intellectual life which is based upon patient seeking and verifying. The mind is of such a nature that it desires to know the universal truth and thus it does have a capacity towards the knowledge of God's mystery and of the order of salvation.

The explanations given above provide an answer to Jung's theory of the origin of dogmas: the contents of revelation are objective facts. It is possible that a psychologist discovers that certain dogmas show an analogy with the contents and basic structures of the con-

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(36) G. TYRREL, *Scylla and Charybdis*, p. 306.

(37) ST. THOMAS, *De veritate* 12, 3 ad 11.



scious or unconscious life of the mind. It may not be impossible that what Jung calls the archetypes did facilitate awareness and formulation of certain dogmas. However, when Jung does not want to consider (perhaps, does not want to admit) the objective meaning of dogmas and their basis in revelation, he locks himself up in the subjectivity of psychic facts (38).

*Answer to the ninth difficulty:*

Many priests, educators and social workers have noticed that there is a gap between the doctrine of christianity and its exigencies on the one hand and the pattern of life and thought of the younger generation on the other hand. But do we have to infer from this that Christian doctrine has to go into the melting pot because it belongs to another period of history? At first sight the vast mass of Christian dogmas (39) may appear as too much of a challenge, as too much Greek intellectualism to modern man. Moreover there has taken place a shift of interest: in the days of the Council of Trent Christians were very much preoccupied with such questions as whether certitude concerning their own personal salvation may be had, but nowadays questions of social justice and personal freedom are in the centre of people's preoccupations. Hence many dogmas look stale and lifeless, because they do not interest any more (40).

In this connection we most notice that there is no obligation to know and to study all dogmas in order to be saved. As J.H. Newman has pointed out, a Christian may approach the dogmas in a more intellectual way or in a more « real » way, in the sense that he uses them as his inspiration in daily life (41). In this second way all those Christians of good will, who have no theological training, can certainly discern the sense of the dogmas. If the often abstract language in which the dogmas have been formulated, seems far removed from modern life, it is the task of catechetics to make Christians see the value and meaning of the treasure of Christian doctrine for contemporary men.

It is doubtlessly true that heresies, theological controversy and other external factors have led to the formulation of many dogmas (42). Yet if Christ is present in his Church and if the Spirit guides her, must one not believe that these heresies had a special function

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(38) Concerning the epistemological difficulties which beset Jung's theory of archetypes one may consult L. GILLEN, *Das Unbewusste und die Religion nach C.G. Jung*, in « Theologie und Philosophie » 1967, esp. pp. 494-500.

(39) In this connection one may point out that no one can say exactly how many dogmas there are.

(40) Cf. G. WIDMER, *Sens et non-sens des énoncés théologiques*, in « Revue des sciences phil. et théol. », 1967, 644-665.

(41) Cf. NEWMAN'S *Grammar of Assent*, chapt. 5, 3 and his *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk on certain Difficulties felt by Anglicans*, II.

(42) Some dogmas, however, have been proposed as the result of a long process of meditation, devotional development and study.

in bringing about more clearly the true doctrine? The accidental origin of certain dogmas, therefore, does not detract from the lasting value of their substance. This becomes even clearer if one carefully reads the Acts of certain councils like that of Trent: the only thing the Fathers were concerned about was to render account of the catholic faith on certain points of doctrine, as this faith lived in tradition and in the actual Church. Hence the dogmatic formulae faithfully reflect the faith of the Catholic Church of all times.

If the expression of this faith as to certain points of doctrine has become difficult to modern man, would it not be necessary to seek the cause for this in the fact that modern man might have adopted certain ways of thought and attitudes which do not favour the admission of faith or man's better interests at the level of personal and social life? (43). What is called for would then be a conversion of man, rather than a change in the doctrine of the Church. We are encouraged to think so by the example of Christ himself who did not change his teaching when he noticed that certain disciples did not want to follow Him. Nor did He forsake his intention to give up his life for the redemption of many, when He was challenged on this point by Peter.

*Answer to the tenth difficulty:*

It is certainly typical of our age that less attention is paid to subtleties in the field of doctrine and more attention is given to living fraternity and communion. In certain countries a number of Christians seem indeed willing to bypass doctrinal differences to bring about a practical union with their brethren in Protestant churches. When this desire remains within certain limits and is prudently guided, it may be greatly helpful to bring about that unity of the Church in truth and love which is demanded by Christ. In the dialogue with our separated brethren the use of the distinction between more central dogmas and doctrines which lie fore at the periphery of faith may be helpful. Special attention for the central It will also help to understand better certain basic structures of the order of grace, which underly the entire catholic doctrine.

It would be wholly wrong to make use of this so-called hierarchy of dogmatic propositions in order to relegate some of them to forgetfulness (44). The Second Vatican Council reminds us that all dogmas have to be believed by the same divine faith with which we

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(43) Cf. R. GUARDINI, *Die Sinne und die religiöse Erkenntnis*, Mainz 1950, pp. 36 f.: « Wir nehmen unsere heutige Erkenntnissituation als ob sie die natürliche und wesentliche wäre. Wir müssen unsere Erkenntnissituation als Ergebnis einer Geschichte sehen, die voll Schuld ist und Bekehrung fordert. Wir müssen die Situation ändern, indem wir ihre Voraussetzungen aufarbeiten. Die Bekehrung, welche das erste Wort Christi ist, bezieht sich nicht nur auf unsere Sitten, sondern auch auf das Erkennen ».

(44) See Prus xi, Encycl. *Mortalium animos* (« AAS » 1928, pp. 10-15).

believe the Incarnation and the Redemption (45). The true sense of the expression is that the uncreated Truth, when revealing itself to man in this life, is necessarily known not in one single intuition, but by means of a variety of concepts and judgements and that some of the dogmatic propositions are more fundamental and that others are derived from them or related to them (46). There is a certain order in the presentation of revealed truth, which is that of the articles of the creed (47).

As to the view according to which the contents of the dogmas can be reduced to a few simple propositions, it must be observed that in as far as the real sense and the proper truth of dogmas are so denied, this reduction is illegitimate and contrary to faith. The dogmas must be believed in according to the sense they have for the Church which defined them; this sense remains always true (48).

#### EPILOGUE

A careful examination of the attempts made in the past ten years to attenuate, to change or even to reject a number of the dogmas of the Catholic faith reveals some common underlying facts and tendencies: a lack of interest in the supernatural and a this-worldly attitude; supreme value is attached to one's own experience and to sense perception over against objective statements; modern man seeks what he can use now and what agrees with his wishes and evaluations; the conviction that nothing is definite and that laws and principles ought to be changed in the course of time; a reluctance to admit as binding a doctrine imposed by others, worse, by bishops of past ages who had no inkling of the life of modern man; the acceptance of pluralism in doctrine as the normal situation of mankind; extreme subjectivism.

The teacher of Christian doctrine will encounter these attitudes as so many obstacles. By appropriate and patient explanation some of them can probably be overcome. It is also to be expected that modern man, seeing the impoverishment of culture and the effects of subjectivism, will reach again a greater esteem for objective order, tradition and authority. Such a change of mentality would certainly be helpful to rediscover the immense treasure of wisdom and light contained in the doctrine of faith of the Church. Yet that conversion of man necessary to believe in divine revelation and to believe those sent to transmit it to us, will be the work of the Holy Spirit who will renew the face of the earth.

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(45) DS 3011.

(46) Declar. «*Mysterium Ecclesiae*».

(47) Cf. *Directorium Catecheticum Generale* 1971, n. 43. See also C. CARDONA, *La Jerarquía de las verdades y el orden de lo real*, in «*Scripta theologica*» 4 (1972), 123-144.

(48) I Vatican Council, Const. *De fide cath.*, chapt. 4.