

IV. THE INTERPRETATION OF DOGMAS IN HISTORY

THESIS:

(a) Il condizionamento storico delle formulazioni dogmatiche, che non impedisce la loro verità e validità permanente. (b) L'esperienza spirituale e il "sensus fidei" tra gli altri fattori dello sviluppo dogmatico (DV 8; LG 12). (c) Principi ed orientamenti dell'interpretazione adeguata dei dogmi.

I. The formulation of dogmas -- historically conditioned by the concepts and by the language of their time.

A. History of the term "Dogma" (Ladaria)

1. **In ancient Greek times**, the word dogma had **two** different meanings: opinion or decree/decision. In ancient Christian literature, the second meaning prevailed. However, it was a **neutral** term insofar as it was applied to all types of teaching, including the doctrines of the Church. In the Latin world, it was even applied to heretical teaching.

2. **Vincent of Lerin** was the first to use the term "dogma" to mean explicitly Catholic doctrine--divine doctrine that must always be held by the Church. However, in the middle ages, the term dogma continued to signify doctrine, whether Catholic or not. In the Middle Ages, the equivalent notion to the modern term "dogma" was "**articulus fidei**" ("Those truths are articles of faith immediately revealed by God, of fundamental importance for the faith and life of faith, and they bring ultimate hope and to the beatific vision of God in eternal life.")

3. **The Reformation** gave the impetus to a precision of the term "dogma" to mean that which the Church proposes that the faithful believe throughout the world.

Vatican I made it clear that Dogma is a truth that must be the object of divine and catholic faith: that which is contained in the word of God written or transmitted either through a solemn declaration or by the ordinary universal Magisterium. Two elements highlighted by Vatican I:

a. Material element: what is to be believed is contained in the word of God written or transmitted. Dogma must refer back to Revelation: that which refers back to either God or man's salvation.

b. Formal element: it must be proposed by the Church as part of revealed truth. The Magisterium must always refer back to the "deposit of faith" (no new elements of Revelation). However, it must be remembered that dogmas are explicated in times of crisis or uncertainty.

4. **Key point:** Dogmas are not the proclamation of truths that were **not held** before but the explication of the truth always held as part of the Church's patrimony but elaborated now clearly and with reflection in answer to question, crisis, etc.

5. **ITC: 1990 definition:** "*Dogma: in the strict sense, is a teaching in which the Church proclaims a truth of Revelation definitively and in a way that is binding for the universal Church, with the result that denial of that teaching is rejected as heresy and anathematized.*"

B. Structure of a Dogmatic Statement (Ladaria)

1. Two poles: Dogma is an affirmation of faith: the Church's response to divine Revelation. It also proposes, with all the limits of language, to expound the truth, to affirm something really determined concerning God and man's salvation.

2. Ecclesial Character: The language must be the community's language. Dogmatic statements make sense only within the context of the ecclesial community in which it is verified.

3. Dogmatic formulations, therefore, are always provisory in the sense that they go towards a mystery that defies full articulation and expression. This is testimony to the eschatological nature of the Church and Christian Faith. As such, dogma must be open to the future.

C. Dogma seen in relation to Past, Present, Future (Alfaro)

1. Verbo Memorativa: (remember the past) (Retrospective)

Within the community of God's work in history in Jesus Christ; with an *original formulation*. This is anamnesis that is precised later. This overcomes the limits of history. It is a foundational memory.

Dogma are born in memory given at the beginning. SS. was the prime announcement to the events of Jesus Christ.

2. Verbo Demonstrativa (witness to the present): (Introspective)

The act of interpreting or overcoming the limits of human words by going beyond doctrinal formula to the *salvific grace that operates today*.

1. It is not just linguistic formula and its overcoming. Rather, faith cannot rest just with formulations. Dogma must invite men to experience God. Thus, we must at times go beyond correct doctrinal formulations to articulate communion with God.

3. Eschatological Word: (invited to see salvation- future): (Prospective)

We look to the time of a definite Revelation of the Son and to eschatological fulfillment. (This is the *reditus* of Thomas). God will fulfill his salvific plans. *Dogmas must orient us to the future*.

D. Distinction between Formula and Meaning (Wicks)

1. Context of Dogma: Precision of Faith's Contents

a. The scope of the endeavor is to clarify the complexity of data that is pre-existent within which "dogma" has its context and meaning. Dogma is related to: (a) divine Revelation; (b) Gospel; (c) the rest of the New Testament.

b. Dogma: gives precision to the reading of the SS and gives precision to specific contents of it.

c. Thus, dogma is part of the "Apostolic deposit" and in the "Church's confession of faith". It is a definitive manifestation; it is an article of faith confessed by the Church. It is a compilation of data within which a theological reflection emerges.

2. Distinction between Formula and Meaning:

[Sullivan's distinction: propositions do not change but statements do]

a. There is a **duality** between **formula** and **sense/meaning**. One must recognize the sensibility of the intrinsic duality between the formula in history and the sense/meaning.

1. There is not a Nestorian separation between formula and meaning but the equilibrium of Chalcedon. It is announcing in a particular way the “res intesa”.

2. Thus, we may look at the specific dogma of Nicea, sacraments in Trent, Church in Vat. II and see novelty of terms but also continuity with both the data of biblical Revelation and Revelation. Thus there is a relationship between **specific doctrine and mystery** .

3. *Mysterium Ecclesiae* (CDF- 1973):

a. Article five: makes the distinction between formula and meaning. It addresses the questions that have arose concerning the historical nature of Revelation.

1. It recognizes that the pronouncements of faith depend in part upon the expressive power of language used at a particular time.

2. Sometimes dogmatic expressions are **incomplete (but never false)** and in later broader context receives a fuller expression.

3. Dogma arise usually to **solve** certain questions or removing errors.

4. Even though the truths the Church teaches through her dogmatic formula are distinct from the changeable expressions of a given age and can be expressed without them, nevertheless it can sometimes happen that these truths may be enunciated by the Magisterium in terms that bear **traces** of such conceptions.

b. The Magisterium’s dogmatic formula are valid and remain valid for those who understand them correctly. The meaning of dogmatic formulations remains forever true, even when it is expressed with greater clarity or more developed way. Thus, it rejects any notion that dogmatic formulations cannot signify truth; or that they signify truth in only an indeterminate way.

NB: See *Mysterium Fidei* on the use of language, i.e., *transubstantiation*.

E. Fundamental principles on the development of Dogma: (Ladaria)

1. Any categorical expression of Revelation is formulated according to the conceptual frameworks, language and culture of the times.

Both Scripture and the formulations of the tradition which we call doctrines are articulated in historically conditioned formulations.

2. In theology today, we speak of the “Incarnational” principle,

Namely that God has chosen to reveal himself to us within the human framework in such a way that *quid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur*. The Incarnation is the paradigm by which we understand all the ways in which God’s living Word has come to us. Interestingly, just as certain pagans were one time scandalized by the Incarnation (that the immutable God should be subject to changeability), so too, some today might be scandalized by timeless truths that are subject to the changeability of their formulations.

3. It follows from the indefectibility of the Church that the Church has had a total possession of the truth (LG 12)

DeLubac speaks of the “whole of dogma” which has been present at the beginning, although its expression of that truth has never been absolutely perfect (absolutely encompassing the Mystery). Though dogmatic formulations reflect the very limitations of human language, they express the timeless transcendent truths about God and the salvation of

mankind. There are **no new additions** to the deposit of faith (cf. LG 25: “They [the bishops and Pope] do not allow that there could be any new public Revelation pertaining to the divine deposit of faith.”) In this regard, the tradition has always separated the formulation of belief from the truth that is believed. (Cf. Thomas, “Actus credentis non terminatus ad enuntiabile sed ad rem.”)

4. If doctrines are so limited by virtue of their linguistic expression, why bother having doctrines in the first place?

One must always remember the **ecclesial** character of faith -- it is through language and language alone that we can reach a common confession of faith. **Unity** is both a gift and a task in the Church (cf. UR 4). Unity as a gift may be seen in the presence of scripture, the common and united witness of the New Testament which has perdured throughout the ages. Dogma, as that systematic reflection upon and interpretation of the Scriptures, must likewise reflect the unity of faith which Scripture requires.

5. Since the meanings of words can change over time, it may be necessary to substitute those terms with others which are more current and comprehensible.

a. Linguistic updating

b. Our understanding of the reality deepens and that our words reflect that deeper understanding. The development of doctrine bears witness to the **eschatological** nature of faith -- we see now in a mirror dimly, but one day we shall see face to face.

II. The teaching of Vatican II concerning the “sensus fidei” on the experience roused by the Holy Spirit in believers (L.G. 12; D.V. 8); how to explain their function in the development of dogma.

A. Overview:

1. Vatican II speaks of two senses of the faith:

a. “spiritual experience” of DV 8.2

b. “discernment” of LG 12.

2. Point: dogmatic development is the consequence of the logical development from the Incarnation of the Word. Dogmatic development occurs because of history and its context; because the Church is a pilgrim people.

3. What is the *sensus fidei*? What role does it play in dogmatic development? What interior element (spiritual) exists as a factor of dogmatic development?

4. Key: Must establish an equilibrium between social forces in dogmatic development and this interior spiritual factor. It is clear, however, that the source of this interior factor is the Holy Spirit (1 Jn. 2:20-27).

Five General Characteristics of Sensus Fidei:

1. Tied to the indefectability of the Church (LG 12)

2. Given to the whole Church (DV 8), & hierarchy (LG 12)

3. Two senses: faculty (LG 12) and knowledge (DV 8)

4. It is an active faculty (LG 12)

5. Limitations and dangers (not a consensus, etc.)

B. Two uses of “Sensus Fidei” (LG 12 and DV 8)

1. Sensus Fidei as a Faculty (LG 12)

“The Holy people of God shares also in Christ’s prophetic office. It spreads abroad a living witness to Him, especially by means of a life of faith and charity and by offering to God a sacrifice of praise, the tribute of lips which give honor to his name (cf. Heb. 13:15). The body of the faithful as a whole, anointed as they are by the Holy One (cf. Jn 2:20, 27) cannot err in matters of belief. Thanks to a **supernatural sense of the faith** which characterizes the people as a whole, it manifests this unerring quality when, “from the bishops down to the last members of the laity,” it shows universal agreement in matters of faith and moral. For, by this sense 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 Thes 2:13). *It clings without fail to the faith once delivered 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.”

[Wicks on LG 12: Sensus Fidei is not equal to spiritual experience as described in DV 8. In a strict sense, it is different here.

Sensus Fidei is a faculty of discernment before the theological formulations that are already seen. Sensus fidei judges these formulations as either true or false.

Point is that we need to affirm **both** sense of **sensus Fidei**

- a. DV 8: as an **impetus** to arrive at formulae from devotion and adoration
- b. LG 12: as a **faculty** to judge truth of theological formulations]

2. Exegesis on LG 12:

a. Definition (in three parts):

1. **The sense of faith is described as “supernatural”** because it is “aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth.

2. **The sensus fidei refers to the instinctive sensitivity and discrimination which the members of the Church (as a body) possess as a whole.**

3. **In matters of faith where there is universal agreement.** It characterizes the People of God as a whole, belonging to all, and is therefore linked to the **indefectibility** of the Church as a whole.

b. Effects of Sensus Fidei: (both a negative and a positive sense):

1. **Negative sense:** based on Indefectibility:

a. **By this gift, God’s people accept not the word of men but the very Word of God.**

As we have seen, the foundation for speaking about the development of dogma is the distinction between human articulations which are culturally and linguistically conditioned, and the Word of God which is permanent, unchanging, transcendent. The sensus fidei is the charism of distinguishing, as it were, the permanence of God’s Word in their human expressions.

b. **It clings without fail to the faith once delivered by saints**

Indefectibility is a characteristic of the Church’s **Apostolicity**. The Church will always recognize the primacy of that Apostolic witness as normative for Christian belief. Nothing can ever be accepted as an article of Christian faith which is in contradiction with this original witness.

2. Positive Active sense: Through this instinct of faith, the people of God continually make progress in the understanding and expression of the mystery of salvation.

c. Penetrates it more deeply by accurate insights

The witness through the centuries that the *lex orandi* becomes the *lex credendi*; the penetration comes not through a logical deductive process but through a life of prayer and interiority of the entire People of God. Thus, in LG 12: “Through the intimate understanding of the things they experience.”

d. Applies it more thoroughly to life

The growth in the Church’s social teaching comes as the People of God as a whole translate the Gospel message into an orthopraxis.

e. The relationship of the *sensus fidei* and the magisterium.

The passage from *Lumen Gentium* “All this it does under the lead of a sacred teaching authority to which it loyally defers.” says that the *sensus fidei* is exercised in union with that teaching office of the Church whose responsibility of office it is to “religiously preserve and faithfully expound” (LG 25; see also DV 10) the deposit of faith.

However, the relationship of the *sensus fidei* to the magisterium ought not to be seen in terms of the latter exercising a kind of “policing” of the former. For, in a sense, the magisterial teachings are themselves in some way recognized as legitimate articulations of the faith when those teachings are received by the whole Church. This is not to say that the magisterium cannot exercise an a priori infallibility; in other words, the magisterium does not need as a condition for its infallible pronouncements the latter reception of the Church. Nor does this mean that the magisterium needs to consult the faithful before making a teaching. However, as the deposit has been handed to the whole Church, and as the magisterium is directed to “listen to it devoutly” (DV 10), and thus it draws from the faith consciousness of the entire Church. So, the response of the faithful to the teaching of the magisterium has the effect of **closing a circle**; from the faith of the Church, to the official teaching, back to the faith of the Church. When the magisterium expresses the Church’s faith in new terms, the role of the Holy Spirit is to assist the faithful to recognize their traditional faith in the new formulation given it by the dogmatic definition. (Rahner’s analysis *fidei*)

3. *Sensus Fidei* as “*Intelligenza Spirituale*” (DV 8)

And so the Apostolic preaching, which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books, was to be preserved by a continuous succession of preachers until the end of time. Therefore, the apostles, handing on what they themselves had received, warn the faithful to hold fast to the traditions which they have learned either by word of mouth or by letter (cf. II Th. 2:15), and to fight for the defense of the faith handed on once and for all (cf. Jude 3). Now, what was handed on by the apostles includes everything which contributes to the holiness of life, and the increase of faith of the People of God; and so the Church in her teaching, life and worship perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is, all that she believes. ***This tradition which comes from the apostles develops in the Church with the help of the holy Spirit.** 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 gift of truth.** For as the centuries

succeed one another, the Church constantly moves forward toward the fullness of divine truth until the words of God reach their complete fulfillment in her.”

[**Wicks on DV 8:2:** Spiritual experience spoken of here is an “**Intelligenza**” based on the work of the HS and rooted in community’s prayer and devotion of one engaged in the faith life of the Church. This is “the light of faith” that is called “spiritual experience”.

The result is that we can go beyond words and expressions articulated because the Holy Spirit can instruct us by this experience

The dynamic is from interior, believer is brought to the devotion to Christ, as in the time of Nicea, whom they adored. Thus it is a dynamic that leads from adoration and devotion to expression.]

4. Exegesis of DV 8: (Vorgrimler)

a. Context: Tradition.

Tradition is not a set of propositions handed on from one generation to the next but the Living faith of the Church (all that she herself is, all that she believes) -- the many-layered yet one presence of Christ throughout the ages which is handed on in the teaching life and worship of the Church.

b. Principle: assistance of the Holy Spirit.

c. Growth in our understanding of the tradition happens:

1. Theology: language of observation: “through the contemplation and study made by believers”

2. Sensus Fidei: language of lived experience: “through the intimate understanding of spiritual things they experience” (its believing, praying and loving relationship with the Lord). Hence, we can talk about a “self-enlarging stream of spiritual experience.

As such, it is not itself a doctrine (fides quae) but fides qua. “Sensus Fidei is this capacity to recognize the intimate experience of adherence to Christ and to judge everything on the basis of this knowledge.” As such, it does not invent new truths or simply deduce new conclusions from existing doctrines but is involved in “transconceptualization” and “objective comprehension.”

3. Magisterium: language of proclamation that calls for action: “and through the preaching of those who have received through episcopal succession the sure gift of truth”. (Certainly the magisterium acts as one element in the process of discerning the presence of the deposit in the believing teaching Church).

d. Church as eschatological pilgrim people: In the development of doctrine, the Church manifests itself to be an eschatologically pilgrim people, moving toward a fuller and more comprehensive understanding of the truth, until someday we see face to face.

III. The continuity of the dogmatic assertions within the newness of their understanding and expression throughout the centuries. (NB: Principle of continuity = SS).

[Ladaria: speaks of development of dogma and not evolution, because the later implies truths revealed previously hidden. The point is that the truth is always full. It is not that we know more. The evolution of dogma has not followed a determined a-prior line.]

Three Key Factors:

A. Scripture as Foundation and norm:

Scripture itself, as the first written articulation of the central event of Revelation, Jesus Christ, provides us with both the foundation for speaking of “development of doctrine” as well as the norm which guarantees continuity in that development.

1. Foundation: Material and development: Who is Jesus Christ? The New Testament does not present us with a doctrinally homogenous formulation. Beyond even the development in belief within the pre-Easter community of disciples and the post-resurrectional Church, there is also a development within the post-resurrectional Church:

a. Development in linguistic expressions reflecting the various cultures in which the Gospel is proclaimed. the Jewish Messiah -- the Gentile Son of God. Both mean the definitive agent of salvation.

b. Development reflecting different philosophical frameworks -- functional categories to ontological ones.

c. Development in understanding the reality itself; the failure of the Jewish mission and the delay of the Parousia are the situations which force deeper reflections and further insights concerning the person of Jesus. The one who is to come is now the Lord reigning triumphant.

2. New Testament Canon as a Norm:

From this example, we can see in Scripture the elements of dogmatic development: nothing new is added to what has been revealed -- the newness is in our understanding and articulation of the Mystery. The establishment of the New Testament Canon is also the establishment of a norm, by which we can measure the developments of other articulations of the deposit (traditions). The New Testament is the “**unnormed norm**” precisely because it is the **original testimony** to the event of Revelation, expressed in the Apostolic witness of the early Church, even though it is not the event itself of Revelation.

B. The primacy of Apostolic Experience:

The Apostolic Church participates in a certain way with the irrepeatability of Christ: it is for this reason that it is not just first in time but it is “**original**”. The Church has declared that Revelation is closed with the death of the last apostle. How have dogmas developed? How ought they develop in a way that is consonant with this principle of continuity? It is difficult to make a blueprint that will apply to future situations, since development is the work of the Holy Spirit.

1. Development in literal way;

One possible approach to see continuity from Apostolic origins in a rather literal way: Here, the attempt is to trace all articulations of faith to as early an age as possible. (Carolingian Divines in the Anglican Church attempted this -- an apologetic against the Church of Rome which obviously departed from the faith of the apostles)

2. Development in logical terms:

In the past, some have thought of development strictly in terms of a logical process (rational deductions from previously established premises in syllogistic method); such an understanding of development is seen as too limited. (cf. Marin Sola, Spanish theologian of the 1920's) Even though most today would say that the logical understanding of development is

too narrow, we still must affirm that there is a **real** connection between what is affirmed today and what has always been affirmed.

3. Development in experiential terms (Blondel, Newman, Rahner):

Revelation is not primarily propositional but experiential. After all, the apostles themselves had a more “global” experience of the Revelation in their living and active relationship with the heart of that Revelation, Jesus Christ. According to Rahner, conceptual development follows upon pre-conceptual experience, namely the self-communication of God to a created mind. The experience of Christ is made universally available to all through the universal outpouring of the Holy Spirit (hence, the anonymous Christian). The experience of Christ comes to be gradually conceptualized, but the experience itself is never surpassed (for this reason we affirm that the experience and knowledge of the apostles is not inferior to our own. We also say that their experience was so unique and insuperable that the Apostolic Church is an obligatory point of reference for us, and why the written record of that Church, the New Testament, is the *norma normans non normata*).

a. The experiential approach recognizes the continuity between what is expressed and what is the preconceptual lived encounter with the truth. Individual and particular articulations of that truth are judged according to the whole of Revelation as it has come to be expressed in the unified body of doctrines of the Church. Continuity implies, therefore, that not only is one single deposit of faith, but that there is a unified body of dogma.

b. The experiential approach also sees that there are different contingent factors, outside forces, philosophical trends, etc., which have intervened and influence the dogmatic development.

C. The role of the Holy Spirit.

In DV 8, the deepening of insight is through the power of the Spirit working corporately in the life of the Church. The same Spirit who inspired the articulation of Revelation continues to be an illuminating force in the life of the Church, allowing us to see in the contingent in the non-contingent, in the words of men the Word of God. A divine utterance has no meaning unless directed toward a divine hearing.

“Interpretation of Dogma” (ITC: 1990).

It enumerates many factors that explain dogmatic development. They are called principles to guide hermeneutics. It envisions the key problem for modern hermeneutics to be: **relationship between truth and history.**

A. First Imperative: Principle of Integration and Context

Key criteria of Interpretation:

a. Development and Scripture: Criteria of Origin: (Apostolicity)

To see dogma as a component of faith/cult/testimony of the Church (within the “paradosis” of the Church) and to see it as a particular testimony of the Church that extends its life.

b. Development and Tradition: Criteria of Communion:

To see the Church as a “corporate reality of faith”. The “believing I” is not equal to the sum of individuals but is a reality that is a single community. Thus, we are inserted into this corporate reality and we appropriate this communal richness.

1. Dogmas: are the expression of faith of this corporate reality that are referred to God. Dogma has the job to promote and help propagate the life of the Church and the coming of the Parousia by giving guidance and clarity.

2. Theologian's job: is not just to integrate one dogma with other doctrines but also within a richer context (cult and prayer offered by the Church). The sacraments recognize the dignity of each person (as part of the testimony to faith).

c. Development and Contemporary Criticism: Anthropological Criteria & Magisterial Criteria

Man is not the measure but the point of reference for the interpretation of faith and also of dogmas.

See attached schema.

B. Second Imperative: to overcome linguistic limits to dogmatic expressions:

a. Every dogma has an historical genesis. These formulations mediate transcendental truth in categorical terms. We must be aware of the limits of the capacity of each formulation to speak of the reality it addresses and to see the limits of an historical formulae's ability to see transferred to other ages.

b. Result: not to become apophatic but to see the true limits .

Appendix: Mary is the model, the prototype of the one who contemplates the mystery of faith in her own heart: an idea that was initially used by Newman in his Oxford University Sermon 15 to understand the notion of the development of doctrine. His notion includes seven principles:

1. preservation of type: preservation of basic form
2. continuity of principles
3. power of assimilation
4. logical sequence
5. anticipation of the future
6. conservative action upon the past
7. chronic vitality

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