

A NOTE ON THE CRITIQUE OF DOGMAS

The appearance of a new comprehensive study of dogmatic development, Jan Walgrave's *Unfolding Revelation*, along with other recent work in this field,¹ makes it appear that now more than ever development of dogmas is an accepted theologoumenon in Roman Catholic theology. The noted Newman interpreter, Walgrave, sees this as only just, since the demands of historicity and those of tradition (theologically and hermeneutically considered) are equally satisfied by the right sort of notion of development.²

This hegemony of development thinking is confirmed and illuminated historically by Mark Schoof, in his insightful survey of Catholic theology from 1800 to 1970. He rightly insists that the elaboration and eventual victory of an acceptable theory of dogmatic development is a central theme of the history of Roman Catholic theology up to the Second Vatican Council, and that this controversy served as the battleground on which progressive theologians gained their "freedom for a new understanding of the Gospel."³ As he points out, the relatively narrow domain of ecclesiastically promulgated dogmas was understandably treated much more cautiously than the general theme of historicity of doctrines and practices not defined as dogmas.⁴ After all, the main issue in those circumstances concerned the legitimacy of *any* other theological approach besides that of Neo-Scholasticism. It is not to be wondered at if such champions of historical consciousness in the doing of theology spared dogmas properly speaking from any criticism that would seem to border on the destructive.

And yet, just as the greater part of practicing theologians of the Roman Catholic persuasion are rejoicing that the notion of development

¹ Jan Walgrave, *Unfolding Revelation: The Nature of Doctrinal Development* (Philadelphia, 1972). Other recent Catholic works that I have in mind here are Herbert Hammans, *Die neueren katholischen Erklärungen der Dogmenentwicklung* (Essen, 1965); Karl Rahner and Karl Lehmann, "Kerygma und Dogma," in *Mysterium salutis* 1, 622-703 and 727-87 (tr. *Kerygma and Dogma*; New York, 1969); *Concilium* 21: *Man as Man and Believer*, ed. Edward Schillebeeckx (New York, 1967); Winfried Schulz, *Dogmenentwicklung als Problem der Geschichtlichkeit der Wahrheitserkenntnis* (Rome, 1969); Georg Söll, *Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte* 1/5: *Dogma und Dogmenentwicklung* (Freiburg, 1971). Finally, Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York, 1972), discusses history and the historicity of doctrines (chaps. 8, 9, 12 and *passim*) and of dogmas (esp. pp. 319-33) as a problem at the core of theological methodology; cf. also Bernard Lonergan, *Doctrinal Pluralism* (Milwaukee, 1971).

² Walgrave, *op. cit.*, pp. 334, 348.

³ T. Mark Schoof, *A Survey of Catholic Theology 1800-1970* (New York, 1970) pp. 157-227.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 199 (of Congar), 205 (of H. Bouillard, but see n. 14 below), and 209 (of Schillebeeckx and Rahner).

has at last opened the door to a thoroughgoing confrontation with the historical aspects of Church teaching and tradition, some others, as yet few in number, are expressing doubts about the whole paradigm of development. To this other group, "development" of Church doctrine is an inadequate category precisely because it cannot do justice to the history of doctrines and dogmas with its zigs and zags, regressions, lapses, reversals, and new departures.⁵ The model of development as applied to tradition is seen as a typical eighteenth- and nineteenth-century progressivist category (characteristically not accepted in the Church until the twentieth century); it encourages one to think of a quasi-organic evolution which advances steadily toward perfection.⁶

An especially notable example of this search for a better model than "development" is that of Jean-Pierre Jossua, O.P., the biographer of Yves Congar and a prominent theologian in his own right. His contribution to *Concilium* (Vol. 51)⁷ tries to summarize in a few pages what he had written earlier on the subject, and sacrifices intelligibility to brevity. One must go back to his fuller original article.⁸ Jossua notes that the old fixist idea of the immutability of doctrines, which would be modified only by way of increasing penetration and precision, has given way. But what has replaced it, the notion of development in doctrinal tradition, most often carries with it the implicit idea that the history of Church doctrines (in the Catholic Church, of course) represents a progress in the understanding of the faith which could be written with a capital P, a Christian March of Mind with the best overtones from the Age of Reason, a "diachronic transposition" of the fixist insistence upon immutability which amounts to nothing more than a historicist variation on Bossuet's old theme of

⁵ Cf. Yves Congar, "Church History as a Branch of Theology," *Concilium* 57 (1970) 87, and still more recently his *Ministères et communion ecclésiale* (Paris, 1971) pp. 32 and 246. The philosopher Henri Gouhier was the first Catholic to reject the theory of development explicitly, to my knowledge. As an alternative, he proposed a model borrowed from Bergson, that of repeated mental reinvention or successive imitations of a given; cf. his "Tradition et développement à l'époque du modernisme," in *Ermeneutica e tradizione*, ed. E. Castelli (Rome, 1963) pp. 75-99. Leslie Dewart's first book on the problem, *The Future of Belief*, appeared seven years ago (New York, 1966).

⁶ In their varying ways the following authors have clarified the matter of dogmatic continuity and discontinuity: Anselm Atkins, "Doctrinal Development and Dialectic," *Continuum* 5 (1968) 3-23; Gregory Baum, *The Credibility of the Church Today* (New York, 1968) pp. 141-76, and *Man Becoming: God in Secular Experience* (New York, 1970) pp. 162-197; Avery Dulles, *The Survival of Dogma* (Garden City, 1971) esp. pp. 185-203, with the pregnant concluding remark: "Flexibility is not the antithesis of structure, but the condition of preserving it in a changing world."

⁷ Jean-Pierre Jossua, "Rule of Faith and Orthodoxy," *Concilium* 51 (1970) 56-67, esp. 59-64.

⁸ J.-P. Jossua, "Immutabilité, progrès ou structurations multiples des doctrines chrétiennes?" *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 52 (1968) 173-200.

semper eadem.⁹ Common to both the fixist and the developmental approach is the unwillingness to recognize *change*, because this seems tantamount to repudiating the identity and continuity of Christian tradition.

Jossua himself proposes another way of articulating what goes on when Christian discourse evolves. He wishes to keep equally distant from the discredited theories of essential invariancy (Scholastics and Bossuet), more or less total alienation from origins (liberal Protestants), vital but unrestricted change (later Loisy), and the idea of irreversible and cumulative progress (inherent in most development talk). In the notion of "structure" and "structurings" of which recent philosophy and social sciences have made so much use, there seems to lie a usable additional option.¹⁰

In contrast to most other discussions of structural analysis in theology (as far as I can gather), Jossua keeps his distance with polite determination from any particular philosophical elaboration of the structure concept. He insists that he is just adopting it in the ordinary (metaphorical) sense that is reminiscent of constructions such as houses and machines, gardens and squares. Any theological doctrine can be looked upon as a "structure," formed as it is by the mind of man working with the language at hand. One may postulate *structuring elements* drawn from a given cultural milieu and *structured elements* arising from the faith experience. In the case of a religious tradition of Christianity's duration and spread, the faith experience is propagated from milieu to milieu and its structured expression undergoes modifications in each setting.¹¹

With this distinction between structured (faith) elements and structuring (cultural) elements Jossua seems to be providing another approach to that factor of theological discourse which has led authors to recur constantly to the vague couplets content/form, intention/expression, substance/vehicle, absolute/relative, kernel/husk, and the like. Such contrasts reflect the awareness that an isolated sentence or text cannot be elevated to the status of pure and eternal truth itself, but they remain

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 173-75; cf. "Rule of Faith," p. 59. The contrast with Bossuet has been classically presented in a book by Owen Chadwick, very pertinent to our theme, *From Bossuet to Newman: The Idea of Doctrinal Development* (Cambridge, 1957); cf. also Walgrave, *Unfolding Revelation*, pp. 130-34.

¹⁰ See Henning Schröer, "Struktur und Ordnung als theologische Leitbegriffe," in *Dogma und Denkstrukturen*, eds. Wilfried Joest and Wolfhart Pannenberg (Göttingen, 1963) pp. 29-55, for a concept of structure based on Dilthey and widely adapted in the social sciences. Then there is French structuralism, for which see Günther Schiwy, "Structuralism," in *Sacramentum mundi* 6, 183, and the same author's *Structuralism and Christianity* (Pittsburgh, 1971). *Concilium* 86 (1973; ed. Claude Geffré) takes up the structuralist challenge to humanism.

¹¹ Jossua, "Immutabilité," pp. 175-83; "Rule of Faith," pp. 59-61.

very elastic and problematical as a schema which one might use to make the history of dogmas or of doctrine more intelligible.¹² Though the distinction of content and form has done good service in the hands of sensitive theologians, the conditions under which it is fruitful might appear less arbitrary if put in the framework of a system of structures.

Since the problem of development has to do with the diachronic aspect of structures, Jossua devotes most of his attention to it. After one has examined a series of structurings in the same matter, certain concrete insights begin to emerge as to the distinction between the structuring and the structured elements that were present. One can never isolate the given, revelational elements in a clinically pure state, of course, but when certain elements only play a part in one or another structure and their subsequent absence cannot be counted as a loss, then one may cautiously assume that they were cultural structuring elements rather than a part of the datum of revelation. Conversely, if what Jossua terms an *idée-force* shows its independence of any particular structure by turning up consistently in many of them over a long period of time, it must be considered as closely related to the faith experience itself (his examples: the gratuity of God's gift in a whole succession of medieval treatments of grace; or the humanness and otherness of Christ, classically structured in terms of two natures).¹³

In an indirect fashion, of course, the faith experience embodied in a tradition exerts its own reciprocal structuring effect on the language and concepts of a culture—a factor which is not to be ignored. In the main, however, the revelational element will be most evident only in a certain *proportion* preserved and observed among the varying elements of several successive structurings. One will not look for an unchanging core of expressed meaning, but for a relational proportion in highly variable formulations. Not even the structured element need be thought of as immutable, since it is structured variously according to the spiritual perception with which it is experienced.¹⁴

Having stressed the relative diachronic separability of structured and structuring elements, we must now bring to mind the even more characteristic property of the concept of structure, which is the affinity for perceiving complex wholes synchronically. Perhaps this is where the geniality of Jossua's effort will be seen, in that he takes the troublesome

¹² Cf. Josef Nolte, *Dogma in Geschichte* (Freiburg, 1971) pp. 199–203 and 213–15.

¹³ Jossua, "Immutabilité," pp. 189–91. Compare Jean-Marc Laporte, "The Dynamics of Grace in Aquinas: A Structural Approach," *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 34 (1973) 203–26.

¹⁴ Jossua, "Immutabilité," p. 181; "Rule of Faith," p. 60: "the fluid nature of the *datum*." Henri Bouillard anticipated this view of dogmatic continuity as preserved in a proportion of notions to each other in 1944; see Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, p. 187.

content/form distinction firmly in hand and embeds it in the concept of structure. This prevents the fissures implied in the dichotomy of content and form from becoming definitive and ending in divorce. Structure, as such, implies no opposite term, as form does, but rather a dialectic of relations uniting differences into a harmonious whole. Given this stress on the dialectical, the relational, the proportional, and the integral, the concept of structure seems suitable to mitigate to some extent the extreme and arbitrary manipulation of the content/form schema, which has marred its use in the past.¹⁵

Jossua himself does not advert to this parallel between his proposal and the customary use of the distinction between content and form in theology. Instead, he illustrates the usefulness of his structural approach by outlining the typology of *partial* structures (a subsidiary doctrine, for instance), theological *systems* (the work of a teacher or of a school), and *encompassing* structures (a structuring which underlies a whole culture or epoch). Theological tradition can be illuminated in its complicated history by observing how a particular structure emerges from the experience of faith in one perspective, is taken over into another, becomes perhaps an element in a system which undergirds it in quite a new way, loses meaning with the decay of its structuring elements, and, maybe, survives as a model to later theologians of the proportion their forebears felt it necessary to preserve between certain perduring ideas used in the exposition of the faith. "The discontinuity of structures is not opposed to a homogeneity of meaning, for the transcendence of the latter in relation to its formulations is emphatically brought out; however, as between the formulas themselves, which are shaped by distinct contexts, the constancy can only be a certain proportion which permits the continued identity of what is signified."¹⁶

Above all, this way of approaching the history of one's theological tradition enables the student to appreciate fully the large measure and kind of discontinuity which is there. In its optimism, progressivist talk about dogmatic or doctrinal development misses what is essential to historical phenomena: one social construction being supplanted by another, insights failing to find acceptance, ideas falling into oblivion, rediscoveries.¹⁷ Of course, there are developments (in the plural) in the history of Christian tradition and theology; but development (in the singular)

¹⁵ Schröer, "Struktur und Ordnung," pp. 31, 36, 46, has worked out these connections and contrasts.

¹⁶ Jossua, "Significations des confessions de foi," *Istina* 17 (1972) 53; cf. "Immutabilité," pp. 183-94.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 175. John W. O'Malley, "Reform, Historical Consciousness, and Vatican II's Aggiornamento," *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 32 (1971) 590, states the case even more emphatically in the context of Church reform.

does not provide a suitable theory to make the identity of then and now intelligible. A theory of successive structurings is simply a more satisfactory and less tendentious way of speaking about and investigating the phenomena. Nor does it prejudge the issue with regard to the continuity which scholastics and "traditionalists" tend to magnify all out of proportion. The study of history itself provides some safeguards against seeing only transformations and no abiding resemblances among the successive structurings of Church tradition.¹⁸

Jossua does not hesitate to treat of dogmas, strictly so called, in the same conceptual framework. He succeeds in neatly distributing the authority which attaches to dogma with the aid of his schema of structured data and structuring cultural elements. Thus a dogmatic statement, like all doctrinal statements, is a structure that results from the Church's thinking, judging, and decreeing at a particular juncture. As such, it has the *Church's* authority behind it. The structured element, which is (must be) a matter of revelation and faith, but which can never be expressed without entering into combination with nonfaith structuring elements, enjoys, of course, the authority of *God's* Word. The Church's action in dogmatizing a certain proposition assures the faithful that God's Word is present in the conjoint structure, but allows for a distinction between the dogmatic statement and the Word of God set forth therein.

Therefore it is intelligible how a dogma's meaning is permanent. In the first place, it is permanent because, if the same question is again posed in the same structuring in which Church authority faced it, the answer would always remain the same. Secondly, when one must prescind from or alter the original terms because the system of references is no longer identical, one can still say that the structured element remains true, though now transformed by new modes of discourse and accessible only through other formulations, such as long historical explanations.¹⁹

A difficulty for those concerned about permanence is, of course, that there is no ready criterion available, once the structuring categories have

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p 598 That this is not a peculiarly Catholic concern is shown by a great deal of discussion about theological hermeneutics. Particularly relevant are the recent contributions by Georg Kretschmar, Maurice F. Wiles, and Ragnar Holte in *Tradition in Lutheranism and Anglicanism* (Minneapolis, 1972), this is the 1971/72 issue of *Oecumenica: An Annual Symposium of Ecumenical Research* edited in the Institute for Ecumenical Research at Strasbourg by Gunther Gassmann and Vilmos Vajta. One should not overlook Maurice Wiles's earlier work, *The Making of Christian Doctrine* (London, 1967), nor those of Jaroslav Pelikan, *Development of Christian Doctrine* (New Haven, 1969), and Norman Sykes, *Man as Churchman* (Cambridge, 1960). George A. Lindbeck, *The Future of Roman Catholic Theology* (Philadelphia, 1970) p 101, proposes a "decision theory" of dogmatic validity which departs from the developmental model but seems to be compatible with Jossua's terminology.

¹⁹ Jossua, "Immutabilite," pp 194-97

shifted,²⁰ to ascertain whether the faith affirmation contained in a given dogma is being maintained or not. When and where new terms have come into use or old ones have acquired new meanings within a changed thought world, the utility of dogmas as *Sprachregelungen*, that is, the disciplinary, communitarian value of dogmas which Karl Rahner rightly underscored,²¹ is drastically reduced. Such an inner limit on the appeal to Church authority, which Newman had already noticed in a neglected work of his old age,²² is also evident to Jossua. The latter stresses that there is no short cut to determining what the element of revelation in any given dogmatic structure is, although he has recourse in the end to the faith of the community and the apostolic authority which acts within it.²³

But perhaps Jossua's analysis will bear being taken a step further. If a dogma claims assent as being an appropriate (and presumably at the time of its proclamation a necessary) formulation of an aspect of the eschatologically valid²⁴ Word or gospel, then this claim is not totally removed from the reach of historical investigation within the ongoing tradition. None of our experienced reality has yet been delivered from the transitoriness of history. This being so, it is proper to inquire, without expecting to find a definitive answer, what a given dogmatic statement meant in its context and, secondly, what element of revelation it structured. Such an investigation would be part of the contribution which theological science makes to the process of handing on the truths of the faith. The

²⁰ What I miss in Lonergan's discussion of the permanence of dogmas, *Method in Theology*, pp. 324-33 and elsewhere, is the clear recognition that culturally determined concepts remain an ingredient of a doctrine, even after it has been promoted to dogmatic status; see n. 34 below. Moreover, the operative idea of revelation does not seem to be consistent; cf. James P. Mackey, "Divine Revelation and Lonergan's Method in Theology," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 40 (1973) 10-13. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "History and Meaning in Lonergan's Approach to Theological Method," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 40 (1973) 103-14, notes analogously that Lonergan keeps the problem of context at arm's length from his discussion of "meaning" in chap. 3 of *Method*.

²¹ Karl Rahner and Karl Lehmann, in *Mysterium salutis* 1 (Einsiedeln, 1965) 693-97; cf. Rahner, *Schriften zur Theologie* 5 (Einsiedeln, 1964) 68-72. Nolte, *Dogma in Geschichte*, pp. 207 and 222, takes this aspect of dogmatic discourse as the starting place for his discussion of what he calls a pragmatic-functional view of dogma, with which he is sympathetic.

²² See John Henry Newman, Preface to the third edition of *Via Media* (London, 1877) pp. xlvii-xlviii, where he deals with the objections to Roman Catholicism that he had made in *The Prophetic Office of the Church* (1837). Cf. John Coulson, "Newman on the Church—His Final View," in *The Rediscovery of Newman: An Oxford Symposium*, eds. J. Coulson and A. M. Allchin (London, 1967) pp. 131-43.

²³ Jossua, "Immutabilité," p. 199. In his more recent "Signification des confessions de foi," p. 54, he states explicitly that there can be nothing in principle irreversible about credal formulations.

structural approach, intelligently handled, would help to avoid the shoals both of extremist criticism and of dogmatism.

Dogmatic discourse has its own irreplaceable functions and its attendant limitations. It is the merit of Josef Nolte's new book, *Dogma in Geschichte*, to have worked out the legitimate and illegitimate uses of dogma systematically. Dogmatism is a habit which throws up obstacles to faith and knowledge, while overanxiously trying to shield them. Since, as the name itself (from Kant) suggests, upholders of dogma are especially prone to dogmatism, research into the faith meaning of individual examples of dogmatic discourse in the Christian tradition would be well advised to be on the lookout for this distorting factor, which is rooted in the human condition. Nolte himself does not provide a history of any dogma, but he does suggest that a schema of decline in the quality of dogmatic discourse from the New Testament to the present is supported by historical research. In other words, dogmas have increasingly suffered from dogmatism, forthright speaking has increasingly yielded ground to inflexible insistence on received positions.²⁵

All this comes to bear most strongly on the recent Mariological and papal dogmas, which consequently have the greatest suspicion of ideology about them.²⁶ In a special way, of course, this line of reasoning insinuates a critique of the dogma on dogmatization, the infallibility decree of 1870.²⁷ Thus it is that the brunt of current theological criticism falls on the absolutizing "irreformabiles ex sese" of the infallibility definition.²⁸

The possibility suggests itself that certain structurings have even been so inept and wide of the mark in their explicit signification that they should be discarded, not revised. *Scripta manent*; decrees, however, should be allowed to lapse if their interpretation requires acrobatics in

²⁴ "Eschatologically valid" is Walter Kasper's rendering of the predicate "true" as applied to the gospel message; cf. his *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes* (Mainz, 1965) pp. 99-109.

²⁵ Nolte's *Dogma in Geschichte* is accurately described in the subtitle as an "attempt at a critique of dogmatism in the propounding of the faith." For his view of the increasingly "dogmatic" style of Church teaching, cf. pp. 13, 50-52, 117, 157, 254-56, and 265.

²⁶ On ideologies and their critique, one can profitably consult the contributions of Rahner and Heinz Robert Schlette in *Concilium* 6 (1965) and those of Edward Schillebeeckx in *Concilium* 83 and 85 (1973). I have not yet been able to procure Schillebeeckx' *Glaubensinterpretation* (Mainz, 1971), but see Mark Schoof, "Dutch Catholic Theology: A New Approach to Christology," *Cross Currents* 22 (1973) 422-23.

²⁷ Nolte, *op. cit.*, pp. 83, 115-18, 133, and 256, refrains from a detailed analysis of infallibility in terms of dogmatism and refers to Küng's *Infallible?* (n. 31 below).

²⁸ Cf. Victor Conzemius in *Die päpstliche Autorität im katholischen Selbstverständnis*, ed. Erika Weinzierl (Salzburg, 1970) pp. 77-79; René Laurentin, "Peter as the Foundation Stone in the Present Uncertainty," *Concilium* 83 (1973) 100, 106.

order to reconcile them with undeniable realities of Christian existence. As an example, I would offer the tortuous hermeneutics which Père Chenu put himself through in explaining the bull *Unam sanctam* (A.D. 1302; *DS* 875) of Boniface VIII, which he felt constrained to treat as an irreformable dogmatic pronouncement.²⁹ Only ten years later, such an approach would hardly be deemed necessary. One could argue analogously that certain subsidiary but dogmatic assertions of Vatican I, e.g., concerning the dogmatization of Peter's jurisdiction over the whole Church or of the pope's Petrine succession (*DS* 3058, 3064), might be historically mistaken. One would then be able to understand them as based on well-known cultural influences affecting the Church of 1870, i.e., on particular historical factors which tended to diminish rather than heighten the ability of the Council to structure the *depositum fidei* in an illuminating fashion.³⁰

Part of the background to these reflections is the current discussion of the doctrine of the infallible magisterium of the pope³¹—more precisely, the reception given Hans Küng's *Infallible?* by Catholic theologians. From Karl Rahner's reaction it is quite clear that his idea of Catholic theologizing does not allow for calling into question the obvious meaning of a defined dogma. The authors named in my first footnote never envisage such a possibility either. It is not a matter, with these theologians, of objecting to Küng's exaggerations, or even his tone, or his oversights, as seems to be the case with Congar, Fries, Dulles, Lehmann, and Mühlen.³² Rather, Rahner in the concrete application, and Lonergan, Walgrave, *et al.* in their general approaches, see in Küng's attack on a dogma a violation of rules which are part and parcel of the Catholic theologian's com-

²⁹ Marie-Dominique Chenu, "Unam sanctam," *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* 10 (2nd ed., 1965) 462; cf. Brian Tierney, *The Crisis of Church and State 1050-1300* (Englewood Cliffs, 1964) pp. 182-83.

³⁰ Cf. Paul Misner, "Das I. Vatikanum in der Sicht eines Protestantens," *Orientierung* 35 (1971) 161-62; Victor Conzemius, "Why Was the Primacy of the Pope Defined in 1870?" *Concilium* 64 (1971) 83.

³¹ Hans Küng, *Unfehlbar? Eine Anfrage* (1970), translated as *Infallible? An Inquiry* (Garden City, 1971); *The Infallibility Debate*, ed. John H. Kirvan (New York, 1971). Brian Tierney, *Origins of Papal Infallibility 1150-1350: A Study on the Concepts of Infallibility, Sovereignty and Tradition in the Middle Ages* (Leiden, 1972), raises the question from another angle.

³² Responses from Congar, Fries, Lehmann, Mühlen, Rahner, Ratzinger, and others, along with the text of episcopal statements from Germany, France, and Italy, are found in Karl Rahner (ed.), *Zum Problem Unfehlbarkeit: Antworten auf die Anfrage von Hans Küng (Quaestiones disputatae* 54; Freiburg, 1971). See also Avery Dulles, "The Theological Issues," *America* 124 (April 24, 1971) 427-28, and Hans Küng and Karl Rahner, "A 'Working Agreement' to Disagree," *America* 129 (July 7, 1973) 9-12. The Declaration of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith dated 24 June 1973, sections 2-5 (cf. text in *Origins* 3 [July 19, 1973]), clearly sides with Rahner (and Lonergan) on this point.

munity of discourse. A Catholic may describe difficulties in the way of accepting an official dogma and admit defeat in dealing with them qua apologist or fundamental theologian; but he may not call them into question in a way which amounts to saying "Show me!"

But are dogmas untouchable in this way: in principle, above question? No theologian, to be sure, believes that he can dispense with the historical research which hermeneutically reconstructs for us the original meaning of a conciliar document in its setting—and this research is still capable of surprises which will alter theologians' views as to the meaning of a given dogma. But beyond that: when the historian has got his interpretations as straight as may be, and when the theologian has succeeded in translating this faithfully into the language of his own particular period and culture, is the dogma thus carefully preserved and stated not subject to question? Critical approaches are not wanting: one can compare the dogma with other stages or trajectories in the Christian tradition, or even with other dogmatic pronouncements; one can institute an evaluation in the light of biblical theology; one can avail oneself critically of the difference between what dogmatic formulations can rightly aim to do and what this particular formulation evidently is calculated to do. One can ask: does the dogma in question broaden or narrow Christian vision? Does it open the believer to past, present, and future or close him off from (one of) these arenas of God's action? Does it safeguard the unity of the Church or imperil its basis? Does it respect history, as it must respect other determinants of the human condition,³³ or does it attempt to defy it? Does it reflect pathological symptoms of a Catholicism unready to face up to its responsibilities, or rather Christian concern for the other? Does it attempt to canonize a certain thought-world and thus trench on the catholicity of the Church, or does it function as a corrective to dangerous common assumptions among Christians of its day?³⁴

All such questions, with their greater or lesser but surely not negligible relevance, can only be posed in an inhibited or surreptitious manner, un-

³³ Such as matter and the body; cf. Albert Görres, "Pathologie des katholischen Christentums," in *Handbuch der Pastoraltheologie* 2/1 (Freiburg, 1966) 307.

³⁴ Though Lonergan has analyzed as well as anyone in the world the drawbacks of an oversystematized theological tradition that is hostile to history, he seems to rule out the suitability of such questions being asked of *dogmas*, even those born of the "classical" mindset. The only account he appears to give of failure to appreciate and accept dogmas is failure to undergo called-for conversions; cf. *Method*, p. 330. With all his emphasis on the *cumulative* nature of positive changes in human tradition, he seems unable to envisage a reversal or shelving of a dogma as anything but a disastrous possibility. The corrective for this in his own methodology is that he recognizes, just as Jossua and others do, that a simple appeal to Church authority in these questions is no absolute or sufficient criterion. Rather, they are to be taken up in the demanding functional specialties of dialectics and foundations.

less one frankly takes the further step and allows the possibility of error on the part of the dogmatizing Church. Efforts have been made to recognize this³⁵ and even to get at the root of the evil which has led the Church to overestimate its capabilities or rather misjudge its teaching mission.³⁶ This raises the question of continuity or identity in Christian tradition in an acute degree,³⁷ but fears that it necessarily involves the end of dogma and tradition are not the best counselors. An altered view of dogma, if it is more exact for making more modest claims, can only redound to its rehabilitation. Since, however, the possibility of error (equated with change and novelty) was the difficulty which the hypothesis of doctrinal development was framed to meet,³⁸ the approach suggested here seems to be preferable to development talk. Historical clear-sightedness is better aided by an alternative model in terms of successive structurings of Christianity's theological and dogmatic tradition.³⁹

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³⁵ Cf. O'Malley, "Reform," p. 599.

³⁶ Certainly one of the most ambitious attempts to come to grips with this basic dysfunction of the contemporary Church is that of Heribert Mühlen, *Entsakralisierung* (Paderborn, 1971).

³⁷ This is a large question, which cannot be dealt with here; cf., e.g., Pelikan, *Development of Christian Doctrine*, pp. 31-33 and 64-66 (apropos of Dewart), and Wiles in *Tradition in Lutheranism and Anglicanism*, pp. 142-43. The latter points out the fact that what we are discussing here is the inevitable corollary of the problem that historico-critical work on Scripture presented to the churches. Theology seems to have coped with the scriptural problem to a satisfactory extent. Tradition is a much vaster subject, and even more delicate for Catholics, than Scripture.

³⁸ Cf. Nicholas Lash, "Faith and History: Some Reflections on Newman's 'Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine,'" *Irish Theological Quarterly* 38 (1971) 224-41, esp. 229 and conclusion.

³⁹ In a study which is to appear in the *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 28 (1973), Gustave-Pierre Léonard also advocates an alternative to the homogeneous-development model of history of dogma, although his alternative seems not to involve a structural approach.