

APOLOGETICS

REASONS FOR HOPE

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The Defense of Dogma

In today's world especially since the advent of Modernism, it is insufficient to simply define the authority of the pope and leave the faithful to follow his teachings. It is unfortunately fashionable to deny that Church teachings are to be taken literally, fashionable in other words, to retain the precise wording of dogmatic formulations while interpreting them in purely symbolic or metaphorical terms. Therefore, a further defense is necessary, a defense which is at times technical, but nonetheless indispensable: it is the defense that Church teachings mean what they say. And in order to appreciate the ways in which dogma is under attack today—some of them quite subtle—and to meet those attacks, we must begin by taking special pains to be fully clear about exactly what dogma is.

Presumably, the reader is familiar with the classical definition of 'dogma' as "the object of divine and Catholic faith." This "object" is further defined as consisting of "all those things which are contained in the written or traditionally handed-on Word of God and which are proposed by the Church, either in a solemn judgment or in her ordinary and universal magisterium, as

obligatory for belief because divinely revealed.”(1) Propositions obligatory for belief on this basis are also called *credenda*. To complete the classical definition, it must be added that these propositions are immutable and that they are or bespeak mysteries. Their immutability consists in the fact that, despite the changes and advances of human knowledge, it is never legitimate to give dogmas a new meaning different from how the Church has always understood them.(2) Their character as mysteries consists in the fact that dogmas are truths which cannot be fully grasped by the human mind, so as to be proved true on the basis of our natural knowledge.(3) After all, if we could prove them true on this basis, we should not need to believe them, and God would not have needed to send first the prophets and last His Son in order to reveal them. But as the Gospel says, “No man has seen God; the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, has revealed Him.” Thus the mysteriousness and immutability of dogmas are consequences of their supernaturality.(4)

The complexity of elements in this classical definition imposes a formidable task, if one is to understand it fully. One needs to consider dogma in at least seven relations, which may be enumerated as follows:

- in relation to human language
- to the act of faith
- to the teaching-Church proposing
- to the learning-Church obeying
- to the various and changing human cultures and philosophies
- to the explicit contents of Scripture and Apostolic tradition
- to theological reasoning and theological conclusions

The last three of these relations will concern us more fully in the next chapter, devoted to the development of doctrine. In the present chapter, we concentrate primarily on the first and second relations and on some aspects of the third, fourth and fifth.

Odd as it may seem, the most crucial question to get straight is the relation of dogma to human language. When God reveals a thing which the Church will subsequently proclaim as a dogma, what exactly is it that He reveals? Is it a meaning, an

understanding, a concept, a proposition or a sentence? Alternatively, I open a handbook of Church teachings (say, my copy of Denziger) to the decrees of the Council of Trent; I run my finger down the page and stop at one of the canons. I tap my finger on the page and say, "This is a dogma." Do I really mean that the printed sentence is a dogma, or that what it means is a dogma?

To some readers the answer may seem obvious, and to others the question will seem pedantic. Neither attitude is at all justified.

Consider first what a difference it makes how the question is answered. If what God reveals, when He reveals a dogma, is an actual sentence, and if what is printed in my Denziger is a dogma just because (according to the judgment of the Church) it is a Latin equivalent either of a sentence God revealed or of one of its entailments, then it follows that God in some sense actually *speaks*, that He chooses and uses one of our languages to *dialogue* with us, and that, as a result, it is literally correct to say that there are revealed usages, revealed figures, metaphors, similes and analogies; it will be possible to understand and expound *dogmas* by going to the grammars and the dictionaries; and it will be these linguistic usages which can never be changed. On the opposite showing, if what God reveals, when he reveals a dogma, is a meaning (either an extra-linguistic reality or else a non-linguistic mental entity, such as a nexus of concepts), and if what is printed in my Denziger is a dogma just because (according to the judgment of the Church) it *expresses* a meaning which God revealed, then it follows that He communicates realities or "ideas" but leaves it up to man, guided, perhaps, by the Holy Spirit's inspiration or assistance, to put those realities or ideas into words; there will be a difference between dogmas themselves (what the church means) and dogmatic formulas (the sentences which the Church says to convey her meanings); and it will be the meanings which are immutable, while all the usages, figures, and analogies can be changed as culture and consciousness change. What is expounded with grammar book and dictionary will be these mutable formulas, and not the revealed *datum* itself. That *datum* will be expressible in a plurality and diversity of formulas; and if the creation of these formulas is the work of human understanding, all dogmatic

formulas will be products of theology rather than objects of faith; a pluralism of theologies will be intrinsically possible, and that pluralism will extend to the very wording of the Creed.

If the magnitude of the difference is now clear, consider why neither answer is an easy or obvious choice.

If the sentence in my copy of Denziger is a dogma, is the sentence in your copy another dogma, numerically distinct from the first? Are there then as many dogmas as there are printings and utterances? Moreover, since a sentence is always a sentence of some language, is the sentence in Latin a different dogma from its translation in German? If not, mustn't the dogma itself be neither the Latin sentence nor the German sentence but the proposition or meaning which both express? Furthermore, if dogmas are sentences and hence linguistic entities, what language did God "speak" in revealing the New Testament? Greek? Then do we attribute to God the run-on sentences of Paul's Greek? Does God like Matthew produce Greek with a heavy semitic flavor, as though between the Testaments He had not quite shaken the habit of speaking Hebrew? And besides, if the revealed *data* are sentences, does this mean the Church can only repeat, and perhaps translate, but dare not even paraphrase for fear of infidelity?

Now try it the other way. Suppose a dogma is not a sentence but the meaning which various sentences (in the same and different languages) may express. Fine, but what is the meaning of 'meaning'? What exactly *is* a meaning? Does meaning ever perfectly survive translation? How do I know that different sentences actually express the "same" meaning? Isn't such a claim often open to debate? And what are the criteria of resolving such a debate? Furthermore, if God revealed meanings and left it up to man to express what He meant in words, how do I know that the words capture the meaning? Do I take it on faith? Fine, but faith in *what*? Is it faith in what the Church *says*, when she teaches the dogma of divine inspiration, or when she teaches that some new dogma is the meaning of Scripture? Well, but what the Church *says* is another sentence, whereas the dogma is what she means. How do I know that the sentence I read in Denziger, or in

L'Osservatore Romano, captures the meaning which the Church means? If I ask the Church what she means, I get back on Vatican stationery another sentence, and so I have to ask again, and so on *ad infinitum*. Furthermore, if dogmas are meanings, why does Vatican I say that it is forbidden to give dogmas a new and different meaning? How can I give a meaning another meaning? Isn't that a contradiction in terms?

Yes, as a matter of fact, it is. Therefore the wording of *Dei Filius*, Canon 3 (see above, footnote 2), resolves the question at hand quite decisively. Difficult as it may seem, a dogma *is* a sentence. And odd as it may seem, this conclusion is vital to orthodoxy.⁽⁵⁾ Let us take a moment now to see how it can be defended, a little bit of what it entails, and what the consequences of denying it might be.

First of all, it is helpful to distinguish between a sentence-type and a sentence-token. The difference is easy to understand. The difference is easy to understand. What you have just read is not a type-setter's mistake; it is two sentence-tokens of the same sentence-type. Because dogma is obviously a sentence-type, it is not multiplied as its spoken or written tokens are multiplied.

Second, if the Church proposes a dogma in Latin, she proposes a Latin sentence-type. A German or English translation of that sentence is not another dogma, but precisely, a translation of the one dogma. One and the same dogma can be paraphrased in its own language or expressed in other languages in just the same sense in which we say that a sentence can be paraphrased or translated. We *judge* paraphrases and translations to be acceptable or unacceptable by comparing them to the "original"—that is, to the standard sentence-type which is, in a *privileged* sense, the dogma. If the paraphrase or translation is acceptable, we do not hesitate to call it "the dogma" as well; but we call it so in a looser sense. We call it so, not because the translation has been proposed by the Church, as a sentence, in its own right, but because it *means* the same as what the Church has proposed. We may now turn to the problem of meaning.

It is difficult to take a single step forward in sound philosophy, until one has mastered a distinction which was well-known to the

Schoolmen but quite forgotten between the Renaissance and the end of the 19th Century, when it was revived and sharpened by Gottlob Frege. I allude to the distinction between sense and reference, both of which enter into what we ambiguously call "meaning." (6) What we usually call a meaningful sign both stands for something (reference) and conveys something about what it stands for (sense). The "Morning Star" stands for an object in the sky, the planet Venus. Thus Venus is called the referent of "the Morning Star". Its sense, on the other hand, is the understanding which it conveys, namely, that its referent shines in the A.M. Note that two signs such as "the Morning Star" and "the Evening Star" may have the same referent but *differ* in sense (which is why identity statements and equations can be informative). St. Thomas often described this situation by saying that the two signs were "identical in the real but different in notion" (*idem in re sed differunt ratione*). If among the furnishings of the world there is no item for which the sign stands, then it fails to refer; it has sense but no referent, and hence no reference.

We can use this distinction to understand the roles of subject and predicate in a sentence; thereupon we shall be able to see what might be meant by the "referent" of a proposition as a whole and what might be meant by such a thing's "sense". (7) It will then be possible to understand the central mistake of Modernism.

If I point to an object and say "This is green," I am conveying something about that object (its being *green*) and I am also indicating which object I wish to convey this sense about (namely, *this*). It is not hard to see, therefore, that the function of a subject term is primarily its reference, while that of a predicate is primarily its sense. It is the duty of the subject to lead our minds to the *thing* which the sentence is about, while the predicate's duty is to convey some understanding about that thing. We might put the matter this way: the sense of the predicate-term is about the referent of the subject-term. This is important because innumerable philosophers between about 1500 and 1900 erroneously maintained that the predicate was about the "concept" or sense of the subject term. 'Man is mortal' was supposed to

indicate a nexus between the concept of man and the concept of mortality. (This is where the idea of 'proposition' as a supra-linguistic entity came from.) In judgment theory such a doctrine is called conceptualism. It is thoroughly false because, when I judge that man is mortal, I am not making a Venn diagram in my head; I am talking about Tom, Dick, and Harry, the *referents* of 'man'; they are the ones who are mortal, not the concept of man. What sense would it make to say that a concept is mortal? Moreover, the usability of a sentence like, "This is green," proves that one can make a complete propositional claim with a subject-term which has no concept at all. Therefore, clearly, the predicate is affirmed of the referent of the subject term, not its sense.(8)

With conceptualism eliminated, it is easy to see that two things are absolutely unalterable if a sentence is to continue making the same statement: the referent of the subject and the sense of the predicate. And the same two things, of course, determine the verifiability and falsifiability conditions.

In the light of these distinctions, it is possible to gain some insight into the theologically vital problem of re-interpretation (or "re-conceptualization" as it is often called today for no good reason). Consider what the Church did in re-interpreting the Old Testament. The early Church took sentences of the Old Testament which once made statements about OT realities and applied them to Christ or one of His mysteries. Hence a Christian doctrinal sentence, interpreting the Old Testament sentence, was acquired by typological exegesis. The OT sentence was given a new referent; the sense of its subject became a metaphor for the new referent; and the sense of the predicate was spiritualized so as to be affirmable of the new referent.(9) Thus the Old Testament sentence came to make a new statement, whose truth or falsity depended on conditions quite different from those on which the truth or falsity of the original statement depended. For example, it is literally false that the Ark rode out a universal flood; but it is typologically true that Baptism is a universal means of salvation by water (1 Peter 3:20-21). It is the Christian interpretation, of course, to which inerrancy attaches; this alone is the saving truth intended

by God.(10)

The fundamental question which decides the legitimacy, not just of this or that typology, but of such exegesis in general is this: is it *right* to make the text figurative? If so, a plurality of possible referents is admitted in advance, hence a plurality of propositional senses. If not, the only referent legitimately assignable to a sentence is the one suggested by historical and grammatical considerations.

Now, although the Church recognizes that at least some sentences of Scripture are legitimately taken as figurative language, she vigorously denies that her own dogmas are anything of the kind (e.g., Denz.-Sch. 3426, 3441), and she strictly forbids her theologians to treat them that way. It is one of the most fundamental metalinguistic principles of Catholic doctrinal discourse that its object language is fixed in sense and referent (in fact, I would argue that this is the very point infallibly defined at Vatican I—see above, footnote 2). To violate this principle is to practice the modernist hermeneutic. Modernism is the first purely metalinguistic heresy. Its project is to leave the whole object language of Christianity standing (in other words, not to change a comma in the creed) while somehow changing the meaning of it all (principally by altering its falsifiability conditions).(11) As soon as that hermeneutic is practiced, an assertion of this sort, "The Virgin Mary is a symbol of women's rights," ceases to be social comment and becomes serious theology.

A ridiculous example? To be sure, but methodologically identical to two recent proposals by E.J. Yarnold, S.J. concerning the modern Marian dogmas. In a much-publicized sermon, given at St. Mary's Church, Oxford, on March 7, 1971, Fr. Yarnold argued that the essential theological sense of the Immaculate Conception might be this: "That the grace of God requires human cooperation, provides the conditions which make the human response possible and fruitful, and results in sanctification, so that the holiness of the church will be verifiable in the lives of its members, and will overflow from member to member." And the theological sense of the Assumption, Yarnold thought, might be this: "that all that is truly of value in human existence continues

after death, when it is transformed in heaven.”(12)

No longer the Blessed Virgin herself, the referent of the Immaculate Conception becomes God’s grace as actively received by men and fruitful among them; the subject-term of the dogma, ‘Mary’, is thereby made a metaphor for this grace; the predicate, “was preserved immune,” *etc.*, which makes little sense as affirmed of grace, is cashiered in favor of other predicates (some of them apparently intended to reflect the force of adverbial phrases in the original). With sense and referent altered, there is no philosophically coherent way to claim that the dogma still makes the same statement or preserves the same affirmation.

Similarly in the case of the Assumption: the referent becomes that which is truly valuable in human existence (whatever that may be). ‘Mary’ is again a metaphor. The predicate, “was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory”, is attenuated into “continues after death and is transformed in heaven.” Again, with sense and referent altered, the dogma makes a new statement.

In both cases, the verifiability and falsifiability conditions are new. Just as no spatio-temporal contingency about Noah’s ark falsifies the dogma of baptism, so also no event or experience in the life of the historical Mary either confirms or falsifies the two “Marian” dogmas!

To Fr. Yarnold’s credit, however, he makes no pretence of continuing the same meaning. He writes: “Many doctrines have two levels: the symbolic level and the theological level... Certain doctrines, formulated in historical or quasi-historical terms, can have an ulterior sense which could be expressed without these terms. Let us call the historical formulation the symbolic sense, and the ulterior sense the theological sense.”(13)

Thus, without argument or apology, Yarnold assimilates the case of “many doctrines” to the case of figurative Old Testament sentences, as though their metalinguistic properties were identical, specifically, as though a plurality of legitimate referents could be assumed in both cases. In this way, a dogma becomes for him a purely material sentence, capable of being taken figuratively, hence open to a typological exegesis which becomes its *theological* sense.

Exactly the same metalinguistic operation—performed this time upon the doctrine of Our Lady’s virginal motherhood—provides the sub-surface problematic of Fr. Raymond Brown’s well-known essay on the virginal conception of Jesus.(14)

Brown concedes the dogmatic status of the virginal conception: “I think that according to the usual criteria applied in Roman Catholic theology the virginal conception would be classified as a doctrine infallibly taught by the ordinary magisterium.”(15) But he goes on to ask whether the historical fact of such a conception might not need to be re-evaluated in the light of the better-understood data now controlled by biblical scholars. The bulk of Brown’s essay (what may be called the surface problematic) is an audit of these data, pro and con; and the result of the audit is rather elusive. Apparently Brown thinks there is no direct, positive evidence in favor of the historicity of the virginal conception at all. The only two reasons for thinking such an event must have occurred are negative in character, namely: the *idea* of a virginal conception would not have been easy to invent (as no genuine parallels have been discovered yet), and the only plausible alternative, given the New Testament and early Jewish evidence against an established marital situation, is an “unpleasant” one.(16) At any rate, it can safely be said that the “objective evidence”, as Brown sees it, is not weighted decisively for or against the historicity. Hence it is insufficient to indicate a reversal of the Church’s constant tradition. *But: the question must remain open.* Here is where the real difficulty with Brown’s position (and its sub-surface problematic) comes into view.

Brown takes a very different stand from previous generations of Catholic scholars and from most (I think) of his contemporaries. These other scholars would hold three things:

(1) the teaching abundantly attested in the ordinary Magisterium is a teaching precisely of the historical fact of virginal conception;

(2) this teaching is attested to in such a way that it can safely be said to have been infallibly proposed by the ordinary Magisterium;

(3) therefore, the evidence against the Church’s teaching, which a purely critical exegesis of the biblical and parabiblical

data can adduce, can be totaled up in different ways by different scholars; but, no matter what its total, it can neither overthrow the dogma nor alter the meaning which has always been assigned to it.

Brown's position is peculiar in that he admits (2) and can be read as accepting (3);(17) but he denies the applicability of (3) to the present case by casting doubt on (1). He thinks the dogma *about* the virginal conception might have a theological meaning which does not include the *fact* of such a conception. He writes: "The purpose of my inquiry is to determine which is the most responsible of these various attitudes, all of which rightly accent the theological import but disagree on the underlying historical fact (the manner of the conception)." (18) So the "theological import" is separable from the fact. What is the "theological import"? Brown answers:

The silence of the rest of the New Testament enhances the **possibility** of the theologoumenon theory whereby sometime in the 60's one or more Christian thinkers solved the Christological problem by affirming symbolically that Jesus was God's Son from the moment of his conception. According to the theory, they used an imagery of the virginal conception whose symbolic origins were forgotten as it was disseminated among various Christian communities and recorded by the evangelists.(19)

Even Matthew and Luke, says Brown, were interested in the virginal conception "as the idiom of a Christological insight;" (20) and elsewhere he speaks of "the underlying beliefs that have been formulated in terms of virginal conception." (21) In other words, Brown quietly assumes what Yarnold asserts: "Certain doctrines, formulated in historical or quasi-historical terms, can have an ulterior sense which could be expressed without these terms." (22)

Is this a fair charge? Have I attributed to Brown a theory which he merely quotes and considers tenable, but does not adopt? No, because it is this quiet assumption, and this alone, which enables Brown to insist that the question is not "foreclosed." "I am simply asking," he writes, "whether for Catholics a modern evaluation of the evidence is irrelevant because the answer is already decided through past Church teaching." (23) The question is rhetorical, of course; Brown's sub-surface problematic could not exist without a

negative answer. Then how is the negative answer to be secured? By the same separation of fact and theologoumenon: "The question that has arisen today is whether theologians were correct in their assumption that the virginal conception [that is to say, the *fact* of it] was universally and consistently proposed for belief by the Church..."(24) But how, realistically, can there be any doubt? How can the Church's plain words not include the fact? Brown responds: "The Church has an insight into revelation (through a type of spiritual connaturality)...But it is not clear how this principle applies to a question of biological fact such as is involved in the virginal conception."(25) In other words, Brown wishes to leave open the possibility that the Church's charism of insight into the meaning of revelation *may* not apply to, or reach to, the historical facts underlying the inspired account but perhaps stops at the theological *meaning* of the account. If so, the Magisterium deals exclusively in "meanings" and the exegetes are free to determine the "facts." It would seem that Brown has not only assumed the metalinguistic theory espoused by Yarnold—he has used it to suggest a new solution to the dilemma of Church authority vs. free research.

In sum: if Brown's question is really open, so that a re-interpretation is possible at least in principle (and even if it would not be justified in this particular case as a matter of fact), it will still follow that authentic and even infallible teachings of the Church are not fixed in sense and referent. Take the proposition, "Christ was born of the Virgin Mary." Its logical subjects are 'Christ' and 'Virgin Mary', between whom the relational predicate 'born of' is affirmed. The predicate has a unique sense by virtue of its contraction to these two subjects: it means the virginal being-born of the God-man. But if the proposed re-interpretation is possible in principle, then it is possible for one of the referents to be altered. No longer the extra-propositional Mary who was in fact a virgin, the one referent will become simply the woman Mary. Thereupon part of the subject-sign, the title "Virgin," becomes a metaphor for the divine sonship of the child, and the predicate loses its specific sense. All it now means is that the child *naturally* begotten of this woman is Divine. Altered in sense and referent,

the sentence no longer makes the same statement and no longer involves the same affirmation. Hence, to accept Brown's problematic as legitimate is identically to accept Yarnold's theory of the metalinguistic properties of dogmas.

It is vital to see that the Yarnold-Brown hypothesis is on this metalinguistic level. For, considered purely as object-language, their substitute-statements are unexceptionable; they contradict or trivialize absolutely nothing among the object-language dogmas of our system. The difficulty emerges *only* when one makes the metalinguistic claim that these proposals *could be the theological sense* of certain pre-existing dogmas. It is *this* claim which conflicts with the requirements of orthodoxy, as laid down in the canon of Vatican I (Denz.-Sch. 3043).

To tie together our discussion so far, the fact that dogmas are sentences turns out to be a blessing in disguise. Sentences are publicly available objects, belonging to known languages, whose interpretation is not a mystery but the burden of every elementary education. Sentences signify in ways which are well understood today, thanks to the magnificent modern work (much of it reviving Medieval insights) on the philosophy of language. A defender of Catholic orthodoxy can use that work straightforwardly to expose the incoherence of recent attempts (among which those of Brown and Yarnold are only glaring examples) to "reconceptualize" traditional dogmas while still trying to claim some faithfulness or continuity with Catholic teaching. If dogmas were not sentences but mysterious, invisible entities called "meanings," whose adequate expression by any given sentence would be problematic, I have no idea how the Modernist and Neo-Modernist hermeneutic could be confronted by the Church and repulsed.

Now the question arises, how do the theologians who practice this hermeneutic think they get the right to do so? What counter-theory do they propose to the account of dogma which I have given above? Do they all deny that dogmas are sentences?

Some do and some don't. Those dissident theologians who deny that dogmas are sentences turn dogmas into mysterious entities or meanings, which alone are revealed. Then the Church's defined prose is merely an attempt to "express" these

revealed data in dogmatic *formulas*. The difficulties of this position have already been noticed in passing. Meanwhile, those dissident theologians who admit that dogmas are sentences avoid the consequences of that admission by insisting on the basis of a "new" theory of revelation, that revelation is not dispensed in dogmas. They say in other words, that dogmas are not what is revealed. In that way, the revealed *datum* is not itself the sentence-dogma which "expresses" our grasp of it, and all the comforts of the former position are regained.

Put the matter this way. There are *two* identity statements which I have been trying to defend: What is revealed = dogma, and dogma = linguistic entity or sentence. Some dissident theologians deny the first of these identities, and some deny the second. The result of either denial is pretty much the same. We Catholics profess certain credal formulas (which of course are sentences) but according to the dissidents the revealed datum is not such a formula; it is either the referent or the sense of such a formula. If what is revealed is the referent of our formula, it will be said that God reveals "realities" rather than truths.(26) If what is revealed is the *sense* of our formula, it will be said that God reveals "meanings" rather than formulas. I cannot be more precise about these positions because the theologians who hold them are not precise. None of these men (so far as I have been able to discover) has a coherent theory of meaning, of reference, or of sense; hence none of these options is clearly appreciated; all are hashed and mashed together.

Fortunately there is no need for us to follow the labyrinthine details. It suffices to confront a simple question: How can a disidentity between 'dogma' and 'what is revealed' be maintained? The answer is by way of a new conception of the act of faith, and thus of the revelation which is the object of faith. One observes that we believe God, not propositions. What God reveals is Himself, not "truths." As Avery Dulles writes:

Once revelation is rightly understood as a Divine action, it is obvious that there can be no absolute equation between the word of God and the words of men. But there can be a paradoxical or dialectical identity between the two.(27)

Never mind what an 'identity' which is not an 'equation' might be. The original context provides no reason to believe that Dulles knows what he means either. The term to look at is 'Divine action.' What kind of action on God's part can revelation be, if its effect is not to allow us to say that God has revealed that *p*, where *p* is a declarative sentence in human words? Plainly, whatever that act is, in Dulles's view, it cannot be a speech act. But a speech-act on God's part is precisely what the dogma of the Church, and the whole traditional conception of theological faith, require.(28)

To see why this is so, it is necessary to pass on to our next major topic, the relation of dogma to the act of faith.

Theological faith is different from ordinary belief or opinion in that ordinary belief can be represented as a two-sided relation. It involves just a person, call him '*a*', and a proposition or sentence, call it '*p*'. Thus *a* believes that *p* is synonymous with '*a* opines that *p*.' There is no necessary connection with a human or divine witness (call him '*b*') on whose authority *p* is accepted. Theological faith, however, involves crediting a witness as well as a proposition. The act of faith has to be represented as a three-sided relation, thus: '*a* believes *b* that *p*.' Traditionally stated, faith is a habit founded on the testimony of another; hence God's actual testifying is the motive or *ratio formalis sub qua* of faith.

Perhaps this analogy will help. Faith is *a*'s extension of credit to *b*, only this credit is not the right to make transactions with my money but the right to make assertions which I will accept. The repayment is not in dollars but in truth. The acquisition of truth is a cooperative venture. I cannot get all I need on my own (I can't be an expert on everything); I have to trust others. Thus faith involves a disposition in *a* and (hopefully) a veracity in *b*. But the disposition in *a* cannot exist unless *b* has made assertions, or *a* at least thinks that *b* has made assertions, veraciously. Veracity is thus the virtue which makes a witness or consultant a true witness. In technical terminology, veracity is distinguished into *first* and *second* act, which is roughly the difference between disposition and its exercise. Veracity "in first act" is a disposition to use language scrupulously so as to state what is the case, or at least to avoid any use of language inconsistent with that purpose. Thus

veracity need not exclude figures and allegories but must exclude deliberately misleading statements as well as false ones.

There are, of course, cases in which deliberate use of misleading language is morally justified and hence is not a lie. But such uses of language are not speech acts which count as exercises of veracity (veracity in second act). They may be exercises of diplomacy or mental reservation *consistent* with veracity-in-first-act, but they are not veracity itself in second act. In other words, veracity in exercise is always a *disclosure* (revelation) of one's true state of mind. This is why, traditionally, God's act-of-revealing has been understood as God's veracity-in-exercise. This divine veracity in second act, called the *ratio formalis sub qua* (or formal object *quo*) of supernatural faith, is the ultimate reason why we believe what God says, namely, because Subsistent Truth is saying it.

Note, then, that the analysis of faith involves propositions or sentences not merely as such but as imbedded in speech acts, that is, as assertions. Faith responds to propositions *as asserted* by the one believed. In other words, the "object" of belief, integrally taken, is *the state of affairs that b asserts p*. It is this state of affairs which I either count or refuse to count as an instance of what draws credit (or falls under my disposition to extend credit). It is this state of affairs to which faith is a response, though the response itself terminates simply at accepting *p* as true.

Thomistically speaking, the state of affairs that *b* asserts *p* is faith's formal object *quod* under its formal object *quo*. The formal object *quod*, taken in isolation, is *p* itself, and the formal object *quo* is *b*'s act of asserting (taken as an exercise of veracity).⁽²⁹⁾

From this analysis, one can see how stupid it is to say, "We believe God, not propositions." One may as well say, "We teach the child, not the subject," or "We doubt you, not what you say," or "At the concert, we listened to the players, not the notes."

But if one does say such a stupid thing, what does "believing God" any longer mean? We have seen that in the traditional, theological sense, God cannot be said to be believed, unless He can be said to *make assertions*.

Now what if, as Dulles and a good number of recent

theologians seem to suppose, God's acts in history do not include speech-acts? Well, He might still be said to 'reveal Himself' but only problematically so, and the response to revelation could hardly be faith; it would have to be opinion. The scheme would be this: (1) the attribution of an historical occurrence to an invisible agent, (2) the claim that this agent is God, (3) the assumption that this historical occurrence is a signal or discloses the will, nature, message, teaching or 'personality' of the invisible agent, (4) the claim that a certain description of the occurrence in human language expresses what the agent intended to do, or at least intended man to understand about that occurrence. None of these attributions and claims would be in any sense verifiable, and Christianity would become a mere "interpretation", a culturally conditioned best-guess at what certain mysterious events (*e.g.*, the life of the historical Jesus) portended.

Needless to say, Christianity cannot be reduced to such a best-guess. It is not a human interpretation, but God's own interpretation—God's own languaging—of His nature and His acts. Therefore the novel account of faith and dogma which we have been considering collapses. A correct analysis of dogma in its relation to faith and hence to divine revelation confirms the conclusion reached earlier: because faith is response to a speech-act, God's revealing act must be speech in some sense, and what is revealed and believed (a dogma) must be a sentence.

Of major recent theologians, the one whose conception of dogma comes closest to that defended here is John Henry Newman. In the first seven sections of his recently rediscovered paper on the development of Catholic dogma, written in 1847 for the Roman theologian Perrone, Newman mentions "dogma" exactly twice, once at the beginning and once at the end.⁽³⁰⁾ At the beginning, Newman says that the revealed Word of God (or deposit of faith), considered precisely "in itself or objectively" is "in the form of dogma". Then at the end, he says that the whole Church's grasp of Christianity is "objective" insofar as it has passed "into dogmas". What does this reiterated connection between objectivity and dogmaticity mean to say?

There is little room for doubt (and the thesis is a bold one): it

means that Christianity, as it exists in human minds, is assimilated to the perfect form in which it exists in the Divine Mind precisely *by being reduced* to clear, definite, and irreformable dogmas.

In other words: insofar as the Christian discourse has been expressed dogmatically and thus fixed definitively, that discourse and what God said are one and the same immutable thing.

The event of dogmatization, then, according to Newman, is an achievement which marks not merely the end of a controversy but rather the apex of the Christian's intellectual assimilation to God in this life—an assimilation which is both inner assent and verbal agreement. Dogmatic Christianity *qua* dogmatized is the exact and common language of God and man.

NOTES AND SUGGESTED READING

- 1 Cf. Vatican Council I, Dogmatic Constitution "Dei Filius", chapter 3; the text is in Denziger-Schoenmetzer, 3011.
- 2 *Ibid.*, canon 3: Si quis dixerit, fieri posse, ut dogmatibus ab ecclesia propositis aliquando secundum progressum scientiae sensus tribuendus sit alius ab eo, quem intellexit et intelligit Ecclesia: anathema sit; Denz.-Sch., 3043, cf. 3020.
- 3 *Ibid.*, canon 1: Si quis dixerit, in revelatione divina nulla vera et proprie dicta *mysteria* contineri, sed universa fidei dogmata posse per rationem rite excultam e naturalibus principiis intelligi et demonstrari: anathema sit; Denz.-Sch., 3041, cf. 3015, 3016.
- 4 Denz.-Sch. 3004ff.
- 5 The author hereby *abjures* some earlier writings in which he identified dogmas as *propositions* and propositions as the meanings of sentences. Most glaringly wrong in this connection is the commentary of mine on *Mysterium Ecclesiae*, published by the Wanderer Press in 1974, especially pages 45ff. Correction of this mistake would actually strengthen the case being argued there, but it would also require more alterations than I can now take time to specify. In any case, the brochure in question is emphatically *not* recommended to the reader's attention since it was published, apparently, without ever having been *proofread* by anyone; it is so full of gross errors as to be in many places unreadable. A full list of *errata* has never been released by the publisher, and, if released, would be almost as long as the "text". Meanwhile, without the author's knowledge or consent, much of the same commentary has been republished by a British

journal called **Christian Order**.

- 6 Gottlob Frege, "On Sense and Reference" in Peter Geach and Max Black, eds., **Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege** (Oxford, 1970) 56-78. Since Carnap, it has also been common to call sense 'intension' (with an 's') and reference, 'extension'.
- 7 There is nothing wrong with the word **proposition** so long as we take it as a synonym of 'declarative sentence'. That is how I shall use it henceforth, unless the context makes it clear that I am talking about that curious doctrine that a proposition is a pure nexus of concepts and hence not a linguistic entity.
- 8 When I speak of **subject** here, I mean **logical subject**, not the grammatical subject only. For example, the logical subjects of "John hit Arthur" are 'John' and 'Arthur', of whose bearers a relational predicate ('hit') is affirmed. The grammatical distinction between nominative and accusative expresses here the direction of the relation. Scholastic metaphysics was quite aware that every transitive act founds a relation, but scholastic logic failed to take this metaphysical insight as clue to correct logical analysis.
- 9 On the modification of a predicate's sense through "contraction" to its subject and the consequent rise of analogically related senses, see James F. Ross, **A New Theory of Analogy**, in **Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association** (1970) 70-85, and the same author's "Analogy and the Resolution of Some cognitvity Problems" in **The Journal of Philosophy** 67 (1970) 725-46.
- 10 Cf. Vatican II, **Dei Verbum**, para. 11.
- 11 Object language is the language that one uses to talk about things. Metalanguage is the language one uses to talk about language. When one talks about propositions, e.g., to say that they are true, or figurative, or immutable, that's metalanguage. When one talks about things, e.g., to say that Christ was virginally conceived, that's object language.
- 12 E.J. Yarnold, **The Marian Dogmas and Reunlon**, in **The Month** (London, June, 1971) 179.
- 13 **Ibid.**
- 14 Raymond E. Brown, S.S., **The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus** (N.Y., 1973) 21-68.
- 15 **Ibid.**, 35.
- 16 **Ibid.**, 65-66. Brown's handling of the total data of the problem has been severely criticized by Fr. Manuel Miguens, OFM, in **Marian Studies** 26 (1975).
- 17 Brown can also be read as denying (3). For instance: "The wide acceptance of the virginal conception stems from its being presented as part of the Christian heritage both in the Bible and in Church pronouncements. **Yet this unanimity does not foreclose the question; for**

modern theological insights make it necessary to qualify the authority both of the Bible and of Church teaching..." (p.31, emphasis added). Whatever this particular passage may mean, I think the whole tenor of Brown's essay supports the more benign interpretation adopted above—namely, that Brown accepts (3)—and this interpretation has the additional charm of making Brown's overall position a good deal more sophisticated than it would be otherwise.

- 18 Brown, 28f.
 19 *Ibid.*, 61.
 20 *Ibid.*, 28.
 21 *Ibid.*, 67.
 22 Yarnold, *loc. cit.*
 23 Brown, 38.
 24 *Ibid.*, 36.
 25 *Ibid.*, 37. Note how closely Brown skirts the 23rd proposition condemned in *Lamentabili*: "Exsistere potest at reipsa existit oppositio inter facta, quae in sacra Scriptura narrantur, eisque innixa Ecclesiae dogmata; ita ut criticus tamquam falsa reicere possit facta, quae Ecclesia tamquam certissima credit" (Denz.-Sch. 3423). Brown holds that opposition is exactly possible between the fact and the **prima-facie** dogma (its "symbolical" formulation) but escapes censure by claiming that what the Church really believes may be the underlying "theological sense". Thus Brown stands or falls, not on his New Testament scholarship, but on this theory of dogma.
 26 In many cases it is not wrong to say that God **manifests** the referent of our formula and thus **in another sense** "reveals" the referent. God manifested His salvation at the Red Sea. He manifested His Word in the flesh. Christ manifested the resurrection. He manifested the Church by founding it. He manifested the Sacraments by instituting their visible rites in the Church. Every one of these manifested objects is the referent of one or more dogmas, and in every case the verb "manifested" is often replaced by the verb "revealed" in Catholic usage. What is vital to understand is that there are thus **two** usages of "reveals", the strict usage defined at Vatican I, and the loose usage in which 'reveals' is a synonym of 'manifests' and hence can take referents of dogmas as its objects. The present essay is devoted exclusively to the strict sense. What is afoot today in many dissident theologies is an attempt to take the loose usage as the only genuine one and thus overthrow or eliminate the strict sense entirely.
 27 Avery Dulles, S.J., *The Survival of Dogma* (Garden City, 1971) 182.
 28 Cf. Denz.-Sch. 3004, where revelation is defined as *locutio Dei*.

Needless to say, the claim that God speaks has to be understood in such a way that it does not involve gross anthropomorphism. All it means is that, in revealing a truth to a human being, God does not

simply infuse an impressed or expressed species but gives the very phantasm in which, and by conversion to which, the integral act of human judgment is accomplished. This phantasm is the revealed sentence. By abstraction from it and conversion to it, the human recipient of revelation performs with understanding the judgment whose existence is the revelation as actually terminated. In other words, God's act of revealing terminates at human understanding (for where there is no understanding there is no revelation) but it does so *via* human language. The language (sentence) in this unique case is given by God rather than formulated by man.

On the phantasm and conversion to it in Aquinas, see **Summa Theologiae** I, q. 84, a.7; In **Boethii de Trinitate**, q.6, a.2 ad 5. On the verbal or linguistic character of the phantasm in many cases, especially in the higher intellectual domains, see F.D. Wilhelmsen, "La theorie du jugement chez Maritain et saint Thomas d'Aquin" in **Table Ronde**, March, 1959, 34-56.

- 29 Teresius Zielinski, O.C.D., **De Ultima Resolutione Actus Fidei**, Rome 1942.
- 30 Long forgotten, this paper was first published as "The Newman-Perrone Paper on Development", ed. Rev. T. Lynch, **Gregorianum** 16 (1935), pp. 403-444.