# RAHNER'S THEORY OF DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT

Though subtitles and similar devices are lacking, Fr. Rahner's approach to a theory of development in this essay[1] is refreshingly systematic and progressive. The exposition moves through three distinct stages: (1) an introduction, stating the question and cautioning against an aprioristic procedure (39-43); (2) a first and generic attempt to close with the problem in terms of certain "essential features" of development (43-48); (3) a further and more particularized investigation into the nature of doctrinal "explication" (48-77).

Our own plan, then, is to begin with an objective presentation of Fr. Rahner's position, and according to the order he himself has followed. Having done this, we will offer some suggestions by way of a critical evaluation. As indicated in the programme, however, we would like to institute in the critical discussion a comparison between Fr. Rahner's theory of development and kindred observations from the recent writings of Fr. Bernard Lonergan. Time, of course, will not permit an equally extensive exposition of Lonergan's thought. And our concern at the moment is primarily with Rahner. Nevertheless, at least in the writer's judgment, the ideas of these two contemporary theologians on the point of development are so clearly complementary, a comparison between them might prove to be a rather neat way of undertaking a critical evaluation of Rahner's distinctive contribution.

## I. RAHNER'S INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT OF THE QUESTION (39-43)

The simple fact of development, we can take for granted. Today it is quite obvious that many of the Church's doctrines had not

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[1] K. Rahner, S.J., "The Development of Dogma," 3, pp. 39-97 in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. I, C. Ernst, O.P., trans., (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961).

always been in existence—at least not expressly, not in their present form. In some sense, then, such doctrines have developed, come to be. But the question, the contemporary theologian's question, is how? In what sense? Within what limits? Or putting it another way, the question is that of a general theory which might account as well as possible both for the essential immutability of dogma and the concrete, historical evidence of developmental change.

In searching for an explanatory theory, however, and as Rahner is quick to observe right from the beginning, the theologian must bear in mind the restrictions imposed by the very nature of the problem with which he is dealing. Rahner does not delay over the risk that is always involved in attempting to apply general formula to particular instance. Instead, he moves immediately into the heart of the matter where the instance and instances are those of doctrinal evolution. First, the developmental process itself is not something mechanical, material, but strictly spiritual; or, as will come out more clearly in the course of his discussion, a matter of interpersonal dialogue and rational consciousness. Even more, when all is said and done, the instance in this case is the unique of its kind. Secondly, since the process is process and in process, and will remain so until the end of history, the perfected law for its understanding is necessarily beyond the theologian's reach. For knowledge of such a law would demand knowledge of the term toward which the unique process of development, initiated by the Spirit and transcendent intelligence, is tending. But this cannot now be had.

The problem, then, is to be approached reverently, with a healthy regard for the provisional quality of theological understanding, and a determination not to oversimplify what is actually a complex issue. With these precautions in mind, however, Rahner is ready to proceed.

## II. Preliminary Analysis. Some Essential Features of Development (43-48)

On the one hand, revealed truth is, in fact, immutable. On the other hand, the nature of human discourse involved in the transmission of revealed truth provides a first clue as to the manner in which this immutability has to be understood.

Thus, ". . . a revealed truth remains what it is, remains pre-cisely 'true', i.e., it corresponds to reality and is always binding. What the Church has once taken possession of as a portion of the Revelation which has fallen to her share, as the object of her un-conditional faith, is from then on her permanently valid possession." (43) Yet at the same time, historical relativism once having been ruled out, it is likewise a fact that "all human statements, even those in which faith expresses God's saving truths, are finite . . . they never declare the *whole* of a reality." (43) These statements, therefore, are not false. They are true. They correspond to reality. But they are not exhaustive; and in this sense, they are never per-fectly adequate to the reality, the divine reality, in question. Hence, at least in principle, they can always be surpassed. A fuller, more extensive, more delicately nuanced statement of the same reality remains constantly possible.

Now the reasoning here is no less profound than it is simple. What Rahner is doing, is to pass from the mere fact of development to its necessity. Not only are human statements finite, he continues, but they are also personal, historical, particular and contingent. Whatever a man hears, whatever he seeks to understand, including God's message of salvation, he receives and grasps in the reaction conditioned by his own existential, private and historical, life-context. This, in turn, is not merely a matter of what we might call the processes of secular history, but the result of Christ's governing action in and of his Church. Nevertheless, the contingency of human reaction effects no change in the divine reality. The true propositions concerning this reality do not become false. ". . . but there is a certain change in the perspective in which (a man) sees the reality through these propositions: he expresses this reality differently, he can state something new about it which he had not explicitly noted before." (45) The changes, moreover, and again we reflect that we are dealing with a spiritual phenomenon and with what we might call the Church's "memory," are not merely changes pure and simple, but such as preserve in the continuum of development—though Rahner does not here use the word—whatever had been achieved already in earlier moments of our Christian past.

Finally, to forestall a possible objection or misunderstanding, Rahner points out that it is with the development of dogma properly so called, and not the development of theology, that we are now concerned. The evolving statements which we have been considering are those of faith itself, with an authenticity and binding force that does not attach to merely theological determinations. For our problem is that of development, not in human understanding of the Word, but in its very utterance, inasmuch as the Church accepts "her doctrinal decisions not just as 'theology' but as the Word of faith—not indeed as newly revealed but as the Word which utters Revelation itself truly and with binding force." (46).

With such essential features of the evolution of dogma thus set in focus, Rahner is now prepared to take up the more serious problematic of "explication"—"explication" being the term he will use to designate the becoming explicit in and through the processes of doctrinal development of what had been only implicit in the sources of revelation.

### III. FURTHER ANALYSIS. DIMENSIONS OF DOCTRINAL EXPLICATION (48-77)

#### A. Revelation as "Closed" (48-52)

"It is a doctrine of the Church," Rahner begins, "though not in the strict sense a defined one, that Revelation 'was closed with the death of the (last Apostle(s)'." (48) This poses, he intimates, an a priori objection to what we have been saying up to now about the possibility and fact of development.

Rahner's handling of this objection, if the writer has grasped his intention correctly, amounts to a neatly successful theological retort. Revelation has been closed, he explains, not in the negative or restrictive sense of codification in a limited and fixed number of propositions, but in the strictly positive sense of an aspect of the climax and fulfillment of salvation history in Christ. It is closed, therefore, with a closing that is, from another and equally significant point of view, necessarily open. What makes it impossible that there could ever be another or future revelation, assures in a very profound way the development of the revelation that is. The key to

this retort lies in the author's concept of revelation as historical dialogue.

Revelation is "an historical dialogue between God and man in which something *happens*, and in which the communication is related to the continuous 'happening' and enterprise of God. This dialogue moves to a quite definite term, in which first the *happening* and *consequently* the communication comes to its never to be surpassed climax and so to its conclusion. Revelation is a saving Happening, and only then and in relation to this a communication of 'truths.' This continuous Happening of saving history has now reached its never to be surpassed climax in Jesus Christ: God himself has definitively given himself to the world." (48)

There cannot be, then, a further revelation. "*Now* there is nothing more to come: no new age, no other aion, no fresh plan of salvation, but only the unveiling of what is already 'here' as God's presence at the end of human time stretched out to the breaking-point: the Last and eternally the latest, newest day. It is because the definitive Reality which resolves history proper is already here that Revelation is 'closed'. Closed, because open to the concealed presence of divine plenitude in Christ." (49)

This positive understanding of "being closed," moreover, and the identification of revelation with the salvific happening, enable Rahner to break down, as it were, the subject-object dualism in the phenomena of development. On the one hand, there will be no new revelation. But on the other, there will be, as development, no merely human reflection upon the already fixed and determined with only a supervisory, "negative" assistence from the Spirit. For "the believing Church *possesses* (this time, emphasis ours) what she believes: Christ, his Spirit, the earnest of eternal life and its vital powers. She cannot leave the Word behind in order to grasp this reality. But no more does she possess *a word about* (emphasis ours) the thing instead of the thing itself. Consequently her hearing of the Word and her reflection upon the Word heard are not *merely* a logical activity, an attempt gradually to squeeze out all the logical virtualities and consequences of the Word heard as though it were a numerical sum of propositions; they are a reflection on the propositions heard in living contact with the thing itself." (50)

What, therefore, we might conceive superficially as the "object" upon which the reflection of the ecclesial faculty or "subject" would be turned, and through the distance implied in the distinction of "subject" from "object," is actually one with the "subject" itself. "The light of faith, the impluse of the Spirit, do not permit of being isolated for inspection by a reflexive process in which attention is turned back upon itself and withdrawn from the object of faith. . . . (Rather) they form the co-operating subjectivity (God's and caused by God—parenthesis Rahner's) with which the Word is for the first time understood in the act of hearing and understood ever new." (51) It is thus that, with no question of a new revelation on one side, and no question of mere "object-reflection," though assisted by faith and the Spirit, on the other, development becomes in fact "an unfolding of the original treasures of faith under a positive influence of the light of faith bestowed upon the Church." (52)

## B. *Explication as Logical Activity (52-55)*

In all this, however, our author's intention has not been to deny outright the existence in development of what can rightly be called logical activity, but rather to situate this element in its proper and actual context. And it is at such moments, we might observe in passing, that Rahner effectively dissociates himself from those whose prevailing theological temper is manifested more in an adolescent, though rhetorically stimulating, urge to throw things out, than in the maturely critical, scholarly attempt to interpret intelligently and to integrate what quite clearly has the right to remain.

Within the limits set up by the radical impossibility of separating the subject's exercise from identification with the object, reflection from possession of the divine reality itself, there is, nevertheless, "the logical activity which can and does take place upon the original propositions of faith as such . . . . The faith of the Church is ever reflected anew in the propositions of faith. It discovers what is implicitly contained in them, the logical and real implications which result from individual propositions or the combination of several." (52) Yet the reservations and qualifications imposed upon the role of logical process by the larger context just described retain their full force.

The consequences, so to speak, or conclusions which emerge in the course of dogmatic evolution may be binding even from a purely logical point of view. But it is not necessary that they be absolutely binding from this purely logical point of view. For the certain knowledge with which they are had is "not just through the merely logical explication of propositions as such but through the luminous power of the Spirit in contact with the *res* itself." (52-53) Putting aside a further theological question that might arise at this juncture, at least it can be said "that it is not possible to assert that a sure knowledge in faith cannot be had, where what is had *hic et nunc quoad nos* is 'merely' a theological 'argument of convenience'. An assertion of this kind would in fact be a piece of theological naturalism . . . ." (54)

Further, the attempt, "injurious to the honesty which is one of the virtues of theology, . . . at all costs to produce a logically stringent argument of a reflexive kind from the sources of faith for every doctrine of faith to which there is firm testimony in the magisterium of the Church . . . is superfluous in view of the undeniable fact that in many cases the Church's sure conviction in faith has temporally preceded such logical deductions (perfectly possible ones, in certain circumstances—parenthesis Rahner's). Even in the concrete logic of everyday discovery the consequence, the conclusion, must very often be arrived at and brought to light by quite other means than those of logical deduction. . . . In the theological field too, where the knowledge of Revelation becomes progressively more profound, there exists a 'concrete experience', a cognition which integrates a thousand and one merely 'instinctive' observations, and which only with great difficulty, if at all, permits of being exhibited in a chain of syllogistic formulae." (54-55)

## C. *Explication and the Question of Objective Nexus (55-57)*

It remains, however, that revelation is, but in the sense already explained, "closed" with the Apostles. Hence it follows that emergent and new formulations of dogmatic propositions must be contained in some necessarily objective way in an earlier form of faith-consciousness. This objective "being contained," moreover, must attach

not simply to the objects *that* are known, and in themselves, but to the objects *as* known. For both revelation and its doctrinal development are of the order of knowledge and consciousness.

"The theologians," Rahner goes on, "have attempted to explain this necessary connection in terms of the explication of an implicit cognition in an explicit one. So far all are agreed. Something is really 'explained' in this way, for attention is directed by these concepts to a phenomenon which may be actually observed in the advance of knowledge in faith as well as elsewhere. There does actually exist such a thing as 'explication' of a cognition, the fullness of whose content is thereby displayed in an explicit and articulated way. We have the clearest example of this sort of propositional connection in formal logic and pure mathematics. . . . But this catch-word 'explication' does not offer much 'explanation' of what we want, the way in which this connection holds. For the precise nature of this explicative connection, just that with which we are concerned, remains obscure." (57)

In the balance of the essay, Rahner's task will be to examine how the explication of the implicit that is involved in the development of dogma can be further determined, further specified. What exactly is the objective noetic connection between subsequent doctrinal formulations and the primitive revelation? Can we say no more than that the definitions, declarations and clarifications of the Church's doctrinal consciousness merely render explicit what had been implicit from the very beginning? Is specifying explication in terms of formal logic's "analytic exposition of the content of the proposition or of the logical consequences of several propositions with the help of the principle of contradiction" (57) satisfactory? Does such an explanation extend to every instance?

D. *The "Formally Implicit" as Presenting No Serious Problem (57-60)*

Unless the writer has misinterpreted Rahner's intention, our author sees no serious problem in explaining in terms of the analytic exposition of propositional content just referred to a first kind of explication, that of the "formally implicit"—echoing, of course, the

familiar *formaliter implicite revelata* of theologians. He seems to wonder, in fact, if such explication is worthy of the name explication at all.

For Rahner writes, "When the explication is that of a *single* proposition contained in original Revelation, and when this explication only states more expressly ('in other words', in a different conceptual language, etc.—parenthesis Rahner's) 'the same thing' as the original proposition (of course with the guarantee of the magisterium that the new proposition correctly renders the sense of the old—parenthesis Rahner's), there can be no doubt that the new proposition too states what God has revealed, that it is believed with divine faith as materially *God* himself, that it is 'dogma' and not just theology." (57-58) A few moments later, after having introduced into his discussion the "virtually implicit" for which the analytic exposition is not an adequate explanatory device, he returns to the formally implicit once more: "For instance, instead of the proposition: One and the same Logos is God and man, we can say: The 'person' of the Logos has both a human and a divine 'nature'. If theological or metaphysical theories (very important ones perhaps, but in need of justification on other grounds—parenthesis Rahner's) are not attached to the concepts 'person' and 'nature', we may conceive of the second proposition as the bare explication of what is formally implicit in the first. Explications of this kind do undoubtedly exist, the only question here being whether it is particularly illuminating to distinguish between 'explicit' and 'implicit', when in both cases we are meant to be dealing with something stated really 'formally', i.e., something which the initial proposition *itself* really states, for this belongs to the concept of the 'formally stated', if these words are to be allowed to have their natural sense." (60)

These passages were quoted at some length since we shall have to return to the points made, and Lonergan's disagreement, later on.

E. *The Problem of the "Virtually Implicit"* (58-62)

"Alongside this explication of what is formally implict in a *single* proposition, however hard it may be to make sharp distinctions in individual cases, there exists a different form of explication of propo-

sitions: the explication of what is 'virtually' implicit in a proposition with the help of another proposition." (58) Our author proceeds to illustrate this difference; and indeed, on the abstract level, it is not difficult to do so.

As Rahner approaches the matter, proposition "X" is formally implicit in proposition "Y" when proposition "X" *states the same thing* as proposition "Y." Putting it another way, the new proposition is formally implicit in the original or old proposition when the new is seen to result from the old "in consequence of a *hermeneutic* and exegetical operation, not involving (as a necessary feature—parenthesis Rahner's) the use of a properly deductive procedure." (59) In instances of this first type, and from the exclusively logical point of view, mere linguistic analysis of the original proposition produces the new proposition. Hence, where divine revelation is in question, it is perfectly obvious that the new proposition, no less than the original, is something revealed by God, accepted and believed in "divine faith."

In the proposition, however, that all men born over two hundred years ago are now dead, simple analysis of what is stated does not allow us to add: Socrates included. For in order to know that Socrates is included in the original and general proposition, we have to know that there was in fact such a Socrates and that he was born more than two hundred years ago. But once we do possess this knowledge about Socrates, then we see clearly that the particular instance is actually implicit, not formally but virtually, in the general statement. In the matter of revelation, however, a problem arises. The statement known through logical retrospect to have been implicit, but only virtually implicit, in revealed utterance does not merely *state the same thing* as the revealed utterance or utterances. When such virtually implicit propositions become part of the Church's doctrinal consciousness, therefore, and for all that they are certain and binding in the guarantee of the Magisterium, can we affirm, nevertheless, that they have been simply "revealed by God"? Rahner feels that we can and should, but he does not stop to argue the point. His positive reply and the reasons behind it will be worked out in the pages to follow.

At the moment, the point he wishes to make is preparatory to the further investigation. There do exist instances of strictly dogmatic development, involving, that is, an authenticating action on the part of the Church, in which explication of what had been stated implicitly but formally is simply not applicable. "If we try to use it in order to explain such doctrines as those of Transubstantiation, Sacramental Character, the validity of heretical Baptism and so on, which have not always been found in an explicit form and yet belong to the Church's treasury of faith today, it is clear that we can only do so by arbitrary and violent measures. Granted that there does *in fact* exist a development of dogma which goes beyond the explication of what is formaly implicit, then it precisely *can* exist. And so there *must* exist (if we are going to take as our basis the logical explication of *propositions*—parentheseis Rahner's) at least an explication of what is virtually implicit, the result of which may yet be claimed as the Revelation of God himself and consequently may be believed on the testimony of God himself." (60)

What makes it possible to consider propositions of this second class revealed by God, Rahner continues, is the fundamental difference that exists between the human speaker and the divine. A human being cannot be said to intend all the actual and objectively necessary consequences or implications of his utterance. For the human mind does not encompass the infinite prospect upon truth de facto opened out by every true statement of immediate intention. With God, however, it is quite otherwise. "He is necessarily conscious of the actual vitality and dynamism of his immediate communication, and aware of all its virtues and consequences. Moreover he has from the very beginning the intention and the will to bring about its explication and to guide it in his own Spirit. It is God himself then who states even what is only disclosed *as* stated in the historical life of what was (immediately—parenthesis Rahner's) stated. And so even what is merely virtually implicit in his speech is his Word." (61)

From our human point of view, such explication involves a real deduction. Nor do we want so say that God has *stated* the resulting proposition formally—stated it formally, that is, in the primitive utterance. But we can say that he had *"com-municated"* it. It is part of his intended message.

Therefore every true proposition conceivable has been revealed by God? This, Rahner insists, simply does not follow. Only those propositions may be considered revealed by God as virtually implicit in the original statements of the primitive revelation which (1) are objectively connected with those of the primitive revelation, (2) the certainty of whose consequence is recognized from the guarantee of the Teaching Church, and which (3) God himself knows de facto will evolve, from what he had revealed immediately, in the historical— hence finite and limited—course of doctrinal development.

A further objection would argue that in Sacred Scripture, the most important starting point, God cannot be said to *com*municate what is only virtually implicit in the original statements. For only that is inspired which the human author actually intends and expresses. But even conceding such a view of the relation between the human and the divine authors, Rahner counters, and allowing that nothing more is *inspired* than what the human author intends to state and write—thus restricting God, so to speak, as author of Sacred Scripture—more can still be *com*municated. For what the human agent passes on, beginning with the "prophet" in the Apostolic Preaching, is not his own message, but God's. The propositions, therefore, that emerge in the evolution of dogma and as only virtually implicit in the propositions of the original revelation cannot be said to have been inspired, or stated by God as author of Sacred Scripture, but they remain nonetheless, in light of the concrete fulness of God's positive intention, revealed by him, *com*municated. (Perhaps the barbarism *"co-communicated"* would give a better clue to Rahner's *"mit-geteilt."*)

F. *Explication as Rooted in the "Infra-Propositional" (63-65)*

Where explication is taken to move entirely within a propositional field—from the original propositions of revlation to the progressively new propositions of doctrinal determination—theological analysis into the ultimate nature of the explicative process, Rahner seems to be saying, cannot go beyond the stage just reached. Two types of development have been accounted for. The first is that of the dogmatic formulation which, when all is said and done, only states

in another way, more expressly, in a different conceptual language, what had nevertheless been stated, and formally stated, in the original propositions. Clearly, such formulation is still the word of God. The second is that of the admittedly more problematical formulation in which the merely virtual implications of what had been stated originally become explicit. But even these virtualities are objectively linked to what had actually been revealed, are known as such by God, and become expressed in the course of doctrinal evolution in accordance with the positive divine intention, incarnated in the Church, that they should be. Hence, though in the beginning these virtualities had not been formally stated, nevertheless they were consciously, responsibly and intentionally "co-communicated." Consequently, these too are the word of God, revealed by him, and believed in Christian faith.

Yet, Rahner continues, "this does not bring us to the end of our discussion. So far we have with the majority of theologians tacitly assumed that the starting-point of a dogmatic explication is *always* a *proposition* in the proper sense. But that this should always be the case may by no means be assumed.

"In the first place it cannot be doubted that there exists in the natural order a kind of knowledge, which, while it is itself not articulated in 'propositions', is the starting-point of an intellectual process which develops into propositions." (63) Rahner offers the example of a young man in love. The love itself is his consciously possessed and felt experience. Of this same personal experience, he *knows* much more than he can possibly *state*. Attempts at statement, in fact, may even falsify what he actually feels and, in a pre-conceptual, unreflexive way, really knows.

When the young man moves, however, toward a more reflexive self-possession and articulation of his experience, we note two things. First, we have here not "the logical development and inference of new propositions from earlier ones, but (of) the formulation for the first time of propositions about a knowledge already possessed, in an infinite search which only approaches its goal asymptotically. This process too is an explication. Here too there is a connexion *in re* between an earlier knowledge and later explicit propositions. But

the starting-point and the procedure are not those of the logical explication of propositions, which we first took as model for the development of dogma." (64)

Secondly, we have here a reflexive process that in a very profound sense is natural to the love-experience itself. Some minimal degree of articulateness had been present, of course, from the beginning. And as this self-reflexion grows, it "is not the subsequent description of a reality which remains in no way altered by the description . . . (but) a part of the progressive realization of love itself; it is not just a parallel phenomenon, without importance for the thing itself. . . . (Hence) original, non-propositional, unreflexive yet conscious possession of a reality on the one hand, and reflexive (propositional— parenthesis Rahner's), articulated consciousness of this original consciousness on the other—these are not competing opposites but reciprocally interacting factors of a single experience necessarily unfolding in historical succession. . . . (For) reflexive consciousness always has its roots in a prior conscious entering into possession of the reality itself." (64-65)

Rahner finds in explication of this more basic "pre-propositional" or "infra-propositional" type an analogy which contributes to the theological understanding of the development of dogma.

## G. *The Apostolic Experience of Christ (65-68)*

Thus there was the experience of the Apostles themselves, "lying behind propositions and forming an inexhaustible source for the articulation and explication of the faith in propositions. Christ, as the living link between God and the world, whom they have seen with their eyes and touched with their hands, is the objective content of an experience which is more elemental and concentrated, simpler and yet richer than the individual propositions coined in an attempt to express this experience—an attempt which can in principle never be finally successful. The vivid experience of Christ's relationship to sin, for example, his death, his attitude to Peter and a thousand other experiences of the kind, which the Apostles lived through in an un- reflexive and global way, *precede* the doctrinal propositions (at least in many cases, though also *only* in many, not in all cases!—paren-

thesis Rahner's) and form a part of the original Revelation, the explication of which, already begun by the Apostles, is not of the same character as the logical explication of propositions." (65-66)

This larger experience is the life-context and essential presupposition in which the Apostles hear even the *spoken* word of Christ initiating their faith. And the experience itself "becomes continually more explicit and reflexively intelligible as the content of these sayings is unfolded." (66)

Quite clearly, explication of this sort is not at all deduction from propositions. Rather, the emerging proposition expresses and conceives an experience, and the experience is the test and measure of its authenticity. At the same time, the priority of the experience over reflection is also, in a certain sense, reciprocally reversed. For the experience in turn is realized through actually stating what it knows. In this way, reflection illuminates experience, and becomes a natural, intrinsic factor in its continued existence.

*We* see the propositions of Apostolic "theology"—Paul's, for example—since it is prophetic, inspired, charismatic, as the original revelation. For *them,* however, these same propositions were also, in a sense, their theology, a development of dogma, an explication; yet an explication, not from still previous propositions, but from the more primitive and unreflexive Christ-experience. Here the connection, objective connection, between the proposition and what existed before is that "between what becomes partially explicit in a proposition and the unreflexive, total spiritual possession of the entire *res,* so that the explicit proposition is at the same time more and less than its implicit source. More, because as reflexively formulated it elucidates the original, spiritually simple possession of the reality and in this way enriches it. Less, because it never does more than express reflexively and remotely a part of what was spiritually possessed before." (67)

It might be objected, Rahner notes, that, regardless of what might be true in the Apostolic Age itself, at least explication from that time on—and hence, throughout the whole history of dogmatic development properly so called—was strictly from propositions. For the Apostles could transmit to the future, and in the very nature of things we might say, not this larger experience, but solely what they

had taken possession of reflexively, conceptually, in propositional form. But the assumption here, Rahner argues, is simply not valid. What is passed on in the fullness of the Apostolic Succession encompasses Word, Sacrament, and authority; not merely a body of propositions, therefore, and certainly not merely propositions *about* their experience, but their Spirit present in the Church, "the Holy Spirit of God, the very reality, then, of what they have experienced in Christ." (68)

Hence, Rahner concludes, "to this extent there exists here too, in post-Apostolic development of dogma, the connection between what is implict as a living possession of the whole truth in an unreflexive but conscious way, and what is always only partially explicit in propositions. It is only an explication of this kind that provides both the required bond with earlier explications, already propositional in form, and also the simultaneous passage to a new explication from the original experience through the tradition already formulated; and provides them with greater power and cogency than in the Apostolic age." (68)

H. *The "Formally Stated" and the "Formally Communicated"* *(68-74)*

Explication, therefore, is a movement from pre-reflexive possession of an entire truth to its more reflexive, though necessarily partial, appropriation in and through propositional formulation. But this formulation itself, far from being alien to the experience, leaving it behind, substituting in its place what we might call some higher form, is strictly of the experience, within the experience, as self-realization of the experience and continuing to presuppose the experience as its constant and vivifying source. Consequently, even where development is in fact from the propositional to the further propositional—and beginning with the propositional element, as in our author's example of Paul's "theology," in the original revelation (such is the writer's personal suggestion for filling in what appears to be an ellipsis in Rahner's nexus)—it is also and more profoundly from the larger experience. But to see this more clearly, it is necessary to re-examine the nature of propositions in the sphere of revelation and dogma.

The propositions of mathematics, geometry, or formal logic, which are apt to supply the model, tend to have a fixed, and for the most part precisely determined content. Hence, from the point of view of consciousness, what such propositions communicate is already more or less totally explict; what is subsequently inferred or deduced from them is therefore something new, and not something that had "been there" and somehow communicated all along.

It is quite otherwise, however, with "normal" propositions, including those of divine revelation and dogma. For in these, there is, to be sure, a determinate *minimum*. They can readily be distinguished in content from what states precisely the opposite, or something else altogether. But there is also an indeterminate *maximum*. "A proposition of this kind," Rahner observes, "is in the nature of a window that has been opened to give a view of the thing; not of a package with sharply defined contents." (69) In other words, in addition to what is formally and clearly *stated*—as, v.g., when someone says, "This person is my mother"—many other things are stated simultaneously and implicitly, but—this is the important point— actually, even formally, *communicated*.

We can affirm this because they are concretely part of the total, albeit unreflexive, unformulated, mentality—here and now mentality, moreover—of the speaker desiring to communicate; and they can, in turn, be recognized for such by the listener. "He rightly hears in the proposition not just its more or less definable minimum content, but concomitantly all that further content of the speaker's unreflexive awareness not yet propositionally objectified; and he hears it *as* something known to the speaker . . . if *this* kind of speech, *together with* its 'train' of what is not yet propositionally articulate, is intelligible to the hearer: then it is quite possible for the hearer to hear this knowledge of the thing too *as* the speaker's communicated knowledge, something had in common with the speaker about the thing, although not yet propositionally objectified. Or putting it the other way round, it is quite possible for the speaker to pass this knowledge on in propositions. It will then very often be the case that what seems to be something merely virtually implicit, from the purely logical point of view, will be in fact something formally communicated." (70)

Consequently, no less in the sphere of God's revealed word, since "revelation too works with human concepts and propositions, . . . we cannot ignore the irreducible distinction between what is explicitly stated on the one hand, and what is co-present in mind and com-municated on the other. Its importance is felt, and legitimately so, where propositions and concepts are used to communicate knowledge of a reality to which we could not have access in our present state without verbal information: in Revelation. When, for example, someone says, 'Christ "died" for us', everyone understands what is meant by dying or death in this statement. But what is meant by 'death' in this statement is not (or more prudently: need not be) just a physiological exit. The whole human experience of death can be really *stated* (i.e., com-municated) and heard (not just deduced!) in this word, an experience which neither speaker nor hearer has ever transplanted adequately and objectively into propositions ('definitions' of death—parentheses and emphases here all Rahner's)." (72)

In the course of development, then, when reflexive analysis and articulation give propositional form to what was really, consciously, and intentionally stated, or "co-stated," in the original utterances, what precisely is the relation between such propositions and the same original utterances? To answer this question, Rahner has employed a distinction between the "formally stated" and the "formally communicated." The new proposition cannot be taken as formally, though implictly, *stated* in the speaker's original utterance. For strictly speaking, the "formally stated" cannot be implicit (see the important note #2, pp. 70-71). But the new proposition can and should be taken as formally *communicated* in the speaker's original utterance.

Thus, without denying what he had said earlier of the "virtually revealed" proposition, whose right to be considered nonetheless the word of God himself would lie with the divine consciousness, historical responsibility and positive intention, Rahner has gone on to put into theological focus the possibility of a proposition emerging in doctrinal evolution, whose relation to the primitive utterances is not that of the deduced, however legitimately, but of the actually co-stated, and co-signified, and hence more readily appreciated as

simply the revealed word of God. In other words, what develops and becomes formulated in this way is now seen as intimate to the utterance itself precisely as utterance, and not just as objectively connected with it. In this perspective, there would seem to be no question that one was still dealing with the revealed word of God simply, unequivocally.

At the risk of oversimplification, we might put the key point as follows. The revealed utterance, as dialogue between God and man, exhibits a two-fold dimension: it is at once both "statement" and "communication." If we attend to the first exclusively, then we cannot but observe a separation, a distance of sorts, between this original statement and some subsequent statement of dogmatic formulation. We will then have to set about trying to close this distance—for example, by arguing a formal or at least virtual implication of the new statement in the old. If, on the other hand, we attend to both dimensions at the same time and in the same single view, we recognize a more profound possibility: in the original utterance as statement, far more than what responds immediately to the express form of the statement is undoubtedly communicated; but communicated *in* this very utterance or complex of utterances. In the course of the development of dogma, this "more," this larger, unreflexive and not yet expressly formed communication—a part of it, an aspect of it, a "condensation" of it perhaps—becomes reflexive and articulate in a new expression. The significant comparison, however, is not between two statements, the new proposition and the original, but between the new statement or proposition and what was actually communicated in the old. For here, as Rahner suggests, "it might happen that in this explication the proposition B (Rahner means the new proposition), taken strictly, should follow from what is *com-municated* in A or what is 'formally' contained in this com-munication." (73) And in the context, our author's "should follow" is the immediate, non-deductive "follow" characteristic of the reflexive articulation of a communication already possessed.

## By Way of Comment

A theological author, just as any other, should be allowed to state his own case in his own fashion. Aside from a lengthy bibliographical

note at the very beginning, and more or less incidental observations further along, Father Rahner has not attempted to review the vast literature surrounding the problem of development or to align his own position with that of other, even contemporary, theologians. But we find no fault with this. In the writer's judgment, it would simply not have been possible for Rahner to present his own thinking on the subject, and to do so with such clarity, force and incisiveness, if he had tried to run the theological switchboard at the same time.

If, then, we introduce at this juncture the parallel reflections of Father Bernard Lonergan, we do this for a quite different and specific purpose. It is not merely to bring in the ideas of another contemporary author, or of one whose voice we think should be heard, on general principle so to speak. It is rather that, as the writer sees it, the very point Lonergan makes most central—key, in fact, to the whole problem of development—is, but in a sense to be qualified presently, almost totally absent in Rahner.

For Lonergan, if we may anticipate the slightly more detailed account which is to follow, doctrinal evolution is a complex historical process involving three movements, or dimensions of movement: the transcultural, the "theological," and the strictly dogmatic. As "theological," the movement takes a precise direction: toward what can rightly be called theological *understanding;* and theological understanding in a highly particularized sense of the term: that of analytical reduction from the "first," or immediate, in the order of human experience to the "first," or immediate, in the order of things as they are in themselves objectively.

There is no question, however, of a new revelation, or of something "being added" to the primitive revelation, so to speak, from outside. For Lonergan, what is revealed is simply truth—a single truth, or a number of truths. What changes, what comes into being, in the course of development is not truth, but a new and different apprehension and expression of this truth. The same unchanging and immutable truth that is grasped and expressed one way by the biblical hagiographer is grasped and expressed another way by the early Fathers, by the enactments of the great councils and other appropriative decisions of the Teaching Church. But within this

movement from one experiential and relative "first" to yet another—from the biblical, for example, to the patristic; from the patristic to the medieval; from the medieval to the Tridentine—there is simultaneously a persistent and deeper movement from the experiential and relative "first" toward the universal and absolute of the "first" that is objective and systematic, or toward theological understanding in this extremely refined sense of the term. When all is said and done, therefore, Lonergan sees development and explication further specified as simply the progressive appropriation, or self-appropriation, of revealed *truth* in and through its own authentic *understanding*.

Now in all this, we can readily observe an approach to the problem that is quite different from Rahner's. By itself, of course, this would not be significant, but what makes it significant, and granting that Rahner's essay on development in *Schriften zur Theologie*, I, appeared (1954) three years before Lonergan's treatment of the same subject in *Divinarum Personarum conceptio analogica* (1957), is the fact that so many of the elements in Lonergan's solution are at least present in some form in Rahner's earlier but much more extensive discussion. For this fact gives rise to certain questions which those who are familiar with the works of both theologians might find it profitable to ask. Is this "theological" and "quasi-scientific" dimension something Rahner had just not thought about? Is it something he would nevertheless want to incorporate into his own theory? Or, since its consideration is, as it were, suggested by not a little of what Rahner writes, is it something with which he would not be very much in sympathy?

In the essay, Rahner speaks of theological understanding when he distinguishes mere theology, as Lonergan does also, from strictly dogmatic development. Further, though he does not introduce the point (except perhaps in the brief paragraph on the role of theological reflection in the explication of faith, on page 75), Rahner's concept of "reflexive articulation" would seem at least to suggest as a possible element in this reflexive articulation the analytical process assigned so decisive a function by Lonergan. Rahner speaks, too, of an "evolution within the same truth." (44) And at times, though apparently

without the intention of making a specifying advance over his more generic classifications, he even speaks of the Church's "development in understanding." (53)

On the other hand, there is not only an all but total omission of theological understanding—in Lonergan's sense, certainly—in the basic structure of Rahner's theory of development, but also and more positively a quite different attitude toward such cases of development as that represented by Chalcedon's "one person in two natures." Lonergan considers this 5th century instance as one in which the theological, scientific, or systematic transposition is most clearly manifested. Rahner, as already noted, seems to pass it off as hardly more than another way of stating the same thing.

The writer would suggest, then, that it might be of advantage to expose Lonergan's thought on the subject a bit more fully, and ask if the two positions do not after all rather neatly complement each other.

*Lonergan's Contribution to a Theory of Development*

It should be remarked, first of all, that Lonergan has not thus far published even a whole article or book chapter on the problem of the development of dogma. His longest and most complete discussion is still to be found in the relatively brief sections 6 & 7 (pp. 28-41) toward the end of the introductory chapter one of the trinitarian treatise *Divinarum Personarum conceptio analogica,* Rome, 1957. The chapter itself, moreover, is on the nature and methodology of theological science. Hence, someone might reasonably "complain" that Lonergan's treatment of strictly *dogmatic* development is situated in the context of *theological* understanding. For is this not automatically to risk the very apriorism Rahner is so careful to avoid?

To risk, however, is not the same as to fall victim. It may well be that what Lonergan has to say of dogmatic development is not sufficiently broad to cover more than certain types or areas of development, and approaches even these from a restricted number of pertinent viewpoints. But it is clearly doctrinal or dogmatic development that he is talking about, not mere theology; and he has been

most careful to observe the differences. What follows here, unless otherwise noted, is reconstructed from the passages in *Divinarum Personarum* noted above.

Lonergan's immediate attention is directed to the vast trinitarian and Christological development that took place in the early centuries of our Christian era, to the assimilation during the Middle Ages of the doctrine of the supernatural, and, in passing fashion, to other instances, such as the Tridentine definition of sacramental efficacy as well—hence, it should be recognized, at least to a very wide area of the total historical development. Nicea, one of his own examples, will serve to illustrate his position.

At this first of the great general councils, the Church solemnly attested her faith in Christ's true divinity declaring him to be "consubstantial" with the Father. But we know, so far as words, terms, and verbal expressions are concerned, that *"homoousion,"* originating (at least in this doctrinal sense) only a hundred years or so before Nicea, is not found anywhere in the biblical literature. Nor is it found anywhere in the "oral tradition" of the Apostolic Age. *Something,* therefore, has been changed, added, introduced. But what? What is this something? What is its connection with the utterances of the primitive revelation?

Certainly, it is a matter of words, of external expression and formulation. But is it merely a matter of words? Lonergan takes it for granted that such an explanation would be wholly inadequate. When he argues that the same intelligible truth is grasped and expressed one way by the biblical hagiographer, another by the Fathers of Nicea, he has in mind not merely external expression, but the internal grasp and expression of apprehension and concept. Nor do we wish to imply that Rahner disagrees. His remark that a certain explication "only states more expressly ('in other words', in a different conceptual language, etc.) 'the same thing' " (57-58) has to be taken in the context of a somewhat different frame of analysis. The insertion "in a different conceptual language" provides the clue. In the writer's judgment, Rahner is aware that we are dealing at least with a more precise way of conceiving the same truth, though he may not be aware of what is involved in this more precise conceptualization or its importance.

For Lonergan, in any case, there exists here at least the transcultural phenomenon of transposition, not merely from one use of words to another, but from one underlying mentality to another. There is not only a different way of speaking or writing, but also, and as responsible for this, a different way of thinking. In each case—the New Testament utterance, and Nicea's definition—the ultimate truth is one and the same, unchanged and immutable: Christ is God. Nor does Nicea's declaration make this truth more certain. Nevertheless, it does more than simply restate it, or reaffirm it.

In the biblical utterance, the divinity of Christ is conceived and hence expressed according to the peculiarly Judaic culture and mentality of the hagiographer. When all is said and done, it is not even conceived exactly as "divinity." The thought and hence the expression is more concrete, more graphic, more dramatic, simple and unsophisticated. In Nicea's *"homoousion,"* on the other hand, the same truth that Christ is God is conceived and expressed according to the quite different Hellenic culture and mentality of the conciliar Fathers. Now it is conceived exactly as "divinity." The thought and expression is now "formal," didactic, in a sense—as we will see presently—more "theological," "scientific," even "metaphysical."

In the evolution of dogma, then, there is at least this transcultural passage from one mentality to another. For every age and every people, beginning in Apostolic times, will hear the word of God and grasp the truths of the Christian revelation with variations of perspective and expression proper to a given historico-cultural unit. Yet, there is more still. Nicea not only conceived and expressed the divinity of Christ in a manner quite different from that of the Apostolic Preaching and the New Testament literature, and very peculiarly its own; Nicea established, or at least sanctioned, a distinct evolutional tendency. Perhaps it would be closer to Lonergan's thought to say that Nicea rather "activated" a tendency that is itself radically human, and bound to assert itself wherever mature human intelligence, individual and communal, and especially when illuminated by faith, is allowed its proper scope and freedom. This is the tendency of authentic Christian consciousness to transpose the revealed communication through "systematic" understanding from

an experiential priority (*"priora quoad nos"*) to the objective priority (*"priora quoad se"*).

"Consubstantial with the Father" did not in any way change or add to the revealed truth "Christ is God" as truth. But if "consubstantial with the Father" conceived and expressed the ultimate truth in terms, as we have just seen, of a cultural difference, that difference took at the same time a precise direction. In an effort to combat more effectively the Arian equivocations, the Fathers of Nicea appropriated a formula which somehow got underneath the indefiniteness and pliability of more commonplace apprehension and statement. Christ is God. Yes; and this is to be taken strictly, seriously. Christ is truly God. Christ is God just as truly as the Father is God, for he has the same being, nature, or substance as the Father.

The *"ousia"* of "homo*ousion"* cannot be assigned the metaphysical precision and exactness of this or that particular school, nor even, speaking carefully, of Grecian philosophy in general. For this reason, we prefer to say "being, nature, or substance," hoping thus to suggest the de facto elasticity recognized by historical criticism. Nevertheless, in a larger and broader sense, the *"ousia"* of *"homoousion"* is at least to some real and extremely significant degree technical; even intentionally so, if we reflect on why it was actually introduced. The truth that Christ is God has been "reduced" to its objective "cause": the same being, nature, essence, or substance as the Father. Within the transcultural movement, therefore, there is the theological movement of analytical reduction. But this is the movement of science.

Two qualifications have to be made immediately. First, even as scientific, the strictly theological process is only analogously science. Its object is God; and in God, there are no proper causes, no principles to which phenomena as apprehended initially in commonplace understanding can be reduced. There is, however, an intelligible order, and this suffices for the theological analysis. Secondly, as scientific and theological, the process is not simply identified with the development of dogma. Mere theology, as Lonergan points out, cannot verify its determinations on the level of faith. Only the Church with her abiding Spirit has the faculty for such judgment;

hence, it is only when and inasmuch as what has been achieved through theological process has been absorbed into the life and preaching of the Church, that the global movement, already trans-cultural and theological, becomes in the strictest sense dogmatic.

Yet, it is as theological that the explicative process in doctrinal development is, in Lonergan's view, further and meaningfully speci-fied. The possibility and fact of post-Apostolic formulations do not conflict with the "closing" and immutability of what has been revealed. For the new formulations represent new understanding, but understanding of the one and the same revealed truth. Such new understandings, moreover, are not only objectively connected with the original utterance in virtue of God's transcendent and intentional design, but they are also precontained in the truth or truths com-municated through the original utterance. For truth is of its very nature intelligible; and where the truth in question is divine, the human intelligence, more particularly the ecclesial intelligence, is positively enlightened and directed in its understanding by the Holy Spirit and internal faith.

Nicea, of course, is not the only instance which Lonergan works out. But time will allow only a brief mention of others. Thus, there is also the Chalcedonian decree. As Lonergan approaches it, the depiction of Christ as both God and man in the New Testament, with true divinity defined against the Arians at Nicea, and the Nestorian dualism of individuals rejected at Ephesus, is now further and systematically reduced "as to its internal and objective causes or principles" at Chalcedon. Christ is at once God and man, and without contradiction, because he is "one person in two (distinct) natures." There is also the medieval doctrine, accepted without conciliar ratification, of the "supernatural." What had been revealed of faith and reason, of prevenient grace and human freedom, of salvific merit and the ethical act, is gradually and at length reduced to an ultimate systematic and objective principle: the distinction between two spheres of being, the supernatural and the natural. There is, finally, the Tridentine reduction of the sacramental revela-tion to the cause or principle of the efficacious sign which actually confers the grace which it signifies.

A lengthier and more adequate exposition of Lonergan's thought, such as would have to include in its evaluation the impressive historical analyses in his *De Verbo Incarnato,* Rome, 1960; and *De Deo Trino,* Rome, 1961, is not at the moment possible. What has been brought out might suffice, however, to suggest certain points of comparison.

*Points of Comparison*

In 1948—and this early date should be taken into consideration—Lonergan published a short essay on the evolution of the dogma of the Assumption ("The Assumption in Theology," in *Vers le dogme de l'Assomption,* Montreal, 1948). At that time, Lonergan saw the basic movement in this particular instance of development as that of theological understanding. In later works, perhaps significantly, he does not introduce the same Assumption dogma among his examples. And in the writer's judgment, it would not be too meaningful to do so.

Where a revealed truth is more or less clearly and expressly communicated in an utterance or utterances of the Apostolic sources, the writer feels that subsequent development can then be shown to have taken the direction of theological and analytical understanding. In such instances, if we may risk oversimplifying somewhat, we may say that the "existence" of the truth, even a particular truth so to speak, had always been recognized, and with a necessary minimum of explicitness; and that the process of dogmatic evolution, where such truths are concerned, actually and historically represented a sort of reduction toward what Lonergan qualifies as the "objective priority."

Where, however, it is the very existence of the truth that was, so to speak, in question, it may well be asked if the proffered solution is more than remotely pertinent. Thus, in the case of the Virgin's Assumption, it seems to have been rather the distinct existence of the truth itself, not its understanding, that gradually emerged into explicit ecclesial consciousness. In retrospect, of course, the theologian can point out that corporeal Assumption as a distinct privilege is necessary to the full understanding of that complex of truths which

encompasses what had been revealed of the primeval fall, redemption in Christ Jesus, the eschatological completion of redemption in the resurrection of the body, the unique sinlessness and holiness of her who was chosen to be the Mother of God. The theologian might also argue that, in a larger sense, self-appropriative understanding of the comprehensive mystery of salvation on the part of the Church is necessarily an implicit, however remote, energy in the development of the Assumption dogma, and in fact in every instance of development, no matter what. On the more immediately human level, however, the operative forces do not appear to have been "theological," but rather, to assign a summary qualification, "affective," "devotional."

From this point of view, then, it seems to the writer that Lonergan's solution is less extensive than Rahner's, less universally applicable. In certain areas of development, it may well be that specification of the explicative process beyond Rahner's reflexive appropriation of what was actually communicated cannot be had.

On the other hand, it also strikes the writer that in other areas of development, and they are certainly vast, the same explicative process can and should be further specified, and that Lonergan's contribution could quite naturally and profitably be assimilated into Rahner's more general theory.

We suggest, in other words, that Rahner has not perhaps given sufficient attention to the element and role of theological understanding—not theological understanding that is merely such, and is to be identified with theology pure and simple, but the dimension of theological understanding in strictly dogmatic development. For concretely, historically, "psychologically" if you will, it seems to the writer that what Rahner calls more loosely reflexive articulation has been, at least in a wide range of development and in a qualified sense possibly even in the total field of development, what Lonergan calls, with a finer precision and closer specification, the movement toward theological understanding in terms of the objective priority.

In any case, and quite aside from the possibility of a still more extensive assimilation, the writer believes that at least Rahner's casual treatment of the sort of development realized at Chalcedon—

where the new proposition is but the "bare explication of what is formally implicit in the first" and what the original already "formally states"—could be revised from a consideration of Lonergan's rather more adequate study of the same point. The process here, historically capable of being verified moreover, is not "logical," not even in retrospect, but "psychological" and "theological." Transposition from "one and the same Logos who is both God and man" to "one person in two natures, the divine and the human" is not adequately explained as merely an analytical exposition of what is formal in the content of a statement, but has to be assessed in light of the actual, long drawn out and progressive effort to understand in terms of objective essentials to which the history surrounding Ephesus, Chalcedon and its aftermath bears witness. For it is not easy to conceive as "formally stated," in the way Rahner seems to be using these words, what was foreign to the whole culture and mentality responsible for the original utterances, and was not in any strict sense a part of the hagiographer's manner of thinking.

In the original utterance or utterances, there had been "Christ" and "God" and "man." But there was not, so to speak, the Christological problematic; there was no recognition that there is a sense in which Christ was one, a sense in which Christ was two, and therefore a necessary difference between the first sense and the second. With Chalcedon, however, and as Lonergan demonstrates (*De Verbo Incarnato*, pp. 162 ff.), this systematic element becomes in effect, de facto if not with conscious deliberation, officially assimilated.

Or to put it simply, the explication here—and in so many other instances of the same type—would seem to be more complex than Rahner had observed, and from a more protracted examination into this very complexity, it would seem that Rahner's general theory of development might have incorporated more satisfactorily the scientific, or quasi-scientific, dimension. At least the writer, and perhaps also the reader, would be interested in learning what is Rahner's own view on the matter.

## CONCLUSION

In the final analysis, Rahner discovers the correct understanding of development in the correct understanding of revelation itself as

part of salvation history. This, in the writer's judgment, is what gives his essay its impressive unity and power.

Revelation is first a happening, and only then a communication of truths. As part of the salvation event, revelation too, just as everything else in the salvation event, attains its climax and necessarily definitive moment in Christ. It is precisely in this light, Rahner argues, that we have to understand the doctrine of revelation having been "closed" within the limits of the Apostolic Age—as something "normal" and positive, therefore, not as a strange retarding force upon what would later be called the development of dogma.

For development itself is not only possible, but concretely necessary. Human statements, even those expressing God's revealed word, are essentially finite; at least in principle, therefore, they can always be surpassed by others communicating the same message more fully, more comprehensively. Nor are the original statements mediating God's revealed word in any sense a disengaged body or sum of propositions. Rather, because of the identification between revelation and salvation event, they are propositions heard in vital contact with the "thing," the "reality" possessed. Hence, reflection upon these propositions in the post-Apostolic era is actually a self-appropriation of the larger "happening," and in this very activity, the "happening" is no more "object" than co-operating "subject." For the Spirit and light of faith guiding the exercise are part of the "reality" possessed.

Rahner returns, as it were, to this wider, more "existential" concept of revelation when he moves on to examine the explicative process, and attempts to give a truly adequate answer to the basic questions: what is the connection between the new propositions and the primitive revealed utterance? Is the connection such as to allow us to affirm of the new propositions that these too are simply "God's word"?

He approaches the problem in two distinct steps. To begin, he accepts the more conventional frame of reference and discusses the emerging propositions that are said to be "formally" or "virtually" implicit in the propositions of the original revelation. With the former, the "formally" implicit, there is no serious difficulty. Since, as Rahner sees it and we have already commented on the point, mere linguistic

analysis suffices to show that what is stated in the new proposition had been precontained and even formally, though implicitly, stated in the original, the new proposition is itself clearly the "word of God." The "virtually" implicit, however, does present difficulty. Here, linguistic analysis is not sufficient to demonstrate the objective and actual connection between the new proposition and the original. The new proposition cannot be said to have been formally stated in the original. Nevertheless, Rahner continues, there is a great difference between the divine and the human speaker. God is perfectly conscious of the actual vitality and dynamism of his immediate communication; he positively intends, moreover, to bring about in the course of time and through the guidance of his Spirit, its explication. Propositions evolving in this way, therefore, had not been formally stated in the primitive utterances, but they had nonetheless been formally communicated in the primitive utterances. Consequently, whatever is 'virtually' implicit in God's speech so communicated is still, and in the strict sense, "God's word."

The explanation, however, is less than wholly adequate. The key lies in the notion of "com-munication." But to appreciate this, we have to take a second and deeper look at the reality of revelation as part of the salvation event.

Like the young man in love, who knows far more of his love-experience than he can possibly state, the Apostles had in their extremely real and vivid experience of Christ a knowledge of Christ—preconceptual, unreflexive, not yet stated or made express, but still *knowledge*—which became the inexhaustible source for articulation and explication of the faith in propositions, beginning, as Rahner notes, with the Apostles themselves. But this subsequent explication would not be a matter of the logical development of new propositions from earlier ones; rather, the "new" propositions would be formulated for the first time, and would be, all the same, of a knowledge already possessed. The articulation, moreover, would not be foreign to the experience, but thoroughly natural to it, a vital factor in its progressive realization.

In its most profound dimension, therefore, doctrinal explication is not a movement from proposition to proposition, as generally

taken for granted, but a movement from pre-reflexive possession of an entire truth to its more reflexive, though necessarily only partial, appropriation in and through propositional formulation. Further, the same undefined "knowledge of experience" remains the real starting point and persistent enclosure throughout the whole historical process spanning the full distance from the original revelation to the lastest reflexive formulation. But to appreciate its role where the revealed utterance itself is in question, we have first to rid our minds of the misconception of the revealed utterance as "formal proposition."

The statements of the original revelation are most unlike the propositions of mathematics, geometry, or formal logic. These latter have a fixed content. What they communicate is already almost totally explicit; what is then inferred from them is consequently new, not something that had always "been there." Ordinary propositions, however, and such as we encounter in the statements of the original revelation, may have a determinate minimum, but they also have a most indeterminate maximum. Far more is communicated by them, knowingly and intentionally and hence formally, than the immediate intelligible content of the statement as statement. But this "more" is stated simultaneously, for it is actually part of the total, unreflexive, here-and-now mind of the person desiring—in and through this statement—to communicate. And the listener, too, the partner in the communication, is aware of this "more"; what he hears, and hears rightly, is not just the definable minimum content of the statement. And so it is that often enough what seems on quick glance to be only virtually implicit in a statement is actually formally communicated.

As Rahner sees it, therefore, the key to the solution lies in a more painstaking re-evaluation of the revealed utterance. What has been transmitted from Apostolic times is not a package of propositions, but the entirety of the Christ-experience climaxing the history of salvation. The revealed utterance is part of this entirety, and as utterance, it is both statement and com-munication. If we attend too much to the "statement," especially if we let serve as a workable model the formal proposition, we will encounter instances of

later doctrinal development in which only with difficulty and straining will we be able to see the new proposition as itself "God's own revealed word." But if we attend to both "statement" and "com-munication" together, we should find it comparatively easy to see that what reflexive articulation has brought out expressly in the course of time was nevertheless "co-stated," because knowingly and intentionally "com-municated" in and by the revealed utterance; hence itself "God's own revealed word."

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