

HISTORY AND DOGMA

The relation between history and dogma in Catholic theology has acquired new dimensions. The development of dogma is seen in the light of a new historical consciousness which was ignored, for example by Bossuet, the schoolmen of the seventeenth century and even by Newman. This question is not simply an academic exercise but is at the center of the actual crisis of faith.

This essay is trying to defend the following theses, or rather hypotheses, in the nature of a *questio disputata*. (1) In the development of doctrines, there is an element of fallibility which is very rarely taken fully into account. As the Church is subjected to sin, she is also subjected to error. (2) Most theories of development are looking for an homogeneous development, an unbroken tradition, a continuous growth without negations, omissions or reversals. They are unrealistic. (3) The historicity of dogmas is more complete and far-reaching than it is usually understood. It transforms the so-called homogeneous development into a dialectic of interpretations, which has its own historical continuity. (4) Faith itself, using in its indispensable language the historical consciousness, is the ultimate originator of the identity and the variability of dogmas.

Our problem requires according to the strong and ironic writer, Flannery O'Connor, what the amateur of good fiction wants: "the kind of mind that is willing to have its sense of mystery deepened by contact with reality, and its sense of reality deepened by contact with mystery."¹

The sense of reality prompts us to consider in Newman's words the "effort, hesitation, suspense, interruption," the "many swayings to the right and to the left," the "many reverses" of Christian doctrine.²

¹Flannery O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1970), p. 79.

²John Henry Newman, *Fifteen Sermons Preached Before the University of Oxford* (1826-1843) (3rd ed.; London: Rivingstons, 1872), *Sermon XV, The Theory of Developments in Religious Doctrine* (Preached on the Purification, 1843), p. 317.

Newman himself did not see in these historical hazards an element of fallibility, but quite the contrary a "certainty of advance," "till the whole truth 'self-balanced on its centre hung,' part answering to part, one, absolute, integral, indissoluble, while the world lasts!"³

But since 1843, biblical scholarship and historical theology have presented us with a much more intricate pattern, a more diversified picture than what was known a century and a half ago. We cannot escape what Ernst Käseman calls "the offending sting" of the multiplicity of views, even in the New Testament.⁴ No more than we can avoid considering in historical theology "the kind of radical change that has occurred from time to time in the history of Christian doctrine."⁵

Change, a multiplicity of views, a plurality of theories are not necessarily synonyms for errors. There are partial and complementary views, each true to a certain extent. But, if one does not want to collapse in eclecticism and relativism, it is impossible for the individual or the Church to hold conflicting and contradictory views. One cannot follow Arius and Athanasius, or a Thomist and a Molinist, or be a Manichaean and a Christian at the same time. How can we help therefore considering what the Anglican theologian Maurice Wiles calls "an element of error" in the development of Christian doctrines?⁶

The Element of Fallibility

It is unnecessary to repeat the lucid analysis of Catholic theories of development given by Avery Dulles in the 1970 Convention of this

³*Ibid.*

⁴"Theology never grows in the vacuum of abstraction, untouched by contemporary history. While this fact is generally admitted, it is nevertheless frequently deprived of its offending sting. Changes and tensions are explained as necessary phases of an organic development in terms of the different personalities, groups and epochs involved." Ernst Käseman, *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), p. 255.

⁵Jaroslav Pelikan, *Development of Christian Doctrine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), pp. 144-45.

⁶Maurice Wiles, *The Making of Christian Doctrine. A Study in the Principles of Early Doctrinal Developments* (Cambridge: University Press, 1967), p. 2.

Society.⁷ In spite of the title, Father Dulles concedes that "there seems to be *prima facie*, a difference of emphasis if not in teaching," in various recent Roman documents. Pius XII's encyclical *Humani generis* (1950), Paul VI's *Mysterium fidei* (1965) on the Eucharist and transubstantiation "accent the universal and timeless value of the Church's concepts and formulas." Other documents of Vatican II like the *Decree on Ecumenism* and *The Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* "allow for, and even encourage, a variety of formulations in accordance with the mentality and traditions of different peoples and ages."⁸ There is also one sentence in the decrees of Vatican II which recognizes in the Catholic Church not only the possibility of sin but that of error. Under the principle *ecclesia semper reformanda*, there may be in the Church not only moral frailties, but deficiencies "even in the way that Church teaching has been formulated—to be carefully distinguished from the deposit of faith itself."⁹

The differences, the tensions, the contradictions in the Church's teaching go much deeper than a variation of emphasis. A few examples taken at random will make the point.

The Chalcedonian Christology (451) of one person in two natures meets quite a few difficulties as regards the real humanity of Jesus and the unity of his consciousness.¹⁰ Transubstantiation may seem today a clumsy and misleading way of expressing the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. New terms like "transfinalization" (transposition of aim) or "transsignification" (transposition of meaning) may seem also quite obscure. But they avoid the danger of a physical interpretation of the Eucharist which is not unknown among Catholics. The purpose of Piet Schoonenberg, for instance, is to reconcile an efficient symbolism with

⁷Avery Dulles, S.J., *CTSA Proceedings of the 25th Annual Convention* (1970), vol. 25, pp. 111-36. The article is developed in *The Survival of Dogma* (New York: Doubleday, 1971).

⁸Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, p. 190.

⁹"Decree on Ecumenism," in *The Teachings of the Second Vatican Council* (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1966), p. 190.

¹⁰Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), pp. 283ff.

an ontological realism. It is the central problem to whose solution the doctrine of transubstantiation is no longer adequate.¹¹

It is easy to multiply the examples at different levels of importance. *The Syllabus of Modern Errors* (1864) of Pius IX condemning all modern liberties is hardly in an unbroken continuity with the doctrine of the rights of man proposed by Pope John XXIII. The two sensitive doctrines of the irreformability of dogmas and the infallibility of the pope, in the meaning and the statement they received at Vatican I, have become highly questionable: they are incorporating more and more the element of development and collegiality. The embarrassing text which concludes the constitution *Pastor Aeternus* is specially in need of hermeneutic. It reads: "The definitions of the Roman Pontiff are irreformable by themselves and not in virtue of the consent of the Church (*ex sese, non autem ex consensu Ecclesiae*)." But an interpretation is needed. The historian Roger Aubert finds that this statement, all things considered, really means that "the Pope, organ of Tradition, must, to exercise his infallible magisterium, always stay in close contact with the *sensus Ecclesiae*."¹² Interpretations can go so far without saying that they consider the meaning and the statement of a declaration erroneous, or at least open to a new and better formulation, i.e. reformable.

In this background, the affair of the encyclical *Humanae vitae* (July 25, 1968) on birth control becomes theologically important. There is little doubt that Pope Paul VI took his position not to break the continuity of teaching with his predecessors, Pius XI (*Casti Connubii*, 1930), Pius XII (*Address to Midwives*, 1951) and a great amount of episcopal and theological teaching.¹³ The new phenomenon was that individual theologians and teams of theologians took a strong and justified position against the encyclical. Even more important was

¹¹Piet Schoonenberg, "Transubstantiation: How Far is this Doctrine Historically Determined?" *Concilium* 24, 78-91. The author points out that "the materialistic or physical interpretation may still be widespread, but it is certainly not the official teaching of the Church" (p. 82).

¹²Roger Aubert, *Vatican I* (Paris: L'Orante, 1964), p. 235.

¹³*On Human Life. An Examination of Humanae Vitae* (London: Burns & Oates, 1968).

the fact that, not individual bishops, but the episcopates of Belgium, Canada, Holland, France and Germany choose to leave the moral responsibility where it belonged, to the Catholic couples. The theological significance of the episode is that a great part of the Church was accepting a discontinuity in magisterial teaching, and that the pope was put in a minority position *vis à vis* the *sensus Ecclesiae*. It is even conceivable that on this point, and some others, the pope and his theologians could drive themselves into a schismatic position as regards the Catholic, universal and ecumenical Church.

Unless one considers the terrible sufferings, anxieties and guilt imposed on innumerable Catholic couples, it is difficult to understand why the discontinuity in teaching was so hard to accept in the matter of contraception, when in topics more objectively important like ecumenism and religious freedom, the official position was reversed. Religious freedom was still condemned in Rome in 1955, and was solemnly, and rather belatedly proclaimed ten years later. Paul Blanshard would say, three centuries too late.

The facts of history show an element of fallibility and error in the formulation of doctrines. This cannot be covered up by the juridical pseudo-solution of the intervention of authority or, even worse, what Father Lonergan calls "police work."

The Juridical Pseudo-Solution

It cannot be stressed strongly enough that in the New Testament there is no authority over the Church, the body of Christ, but ministries inside the Church. It is not the pope, the councils and the bishops who guarantee the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit who makes the believer accept "the auxiliary character of authority."¹⁴ The authority of course is not the norm of revelation; but revelation, as it is expressed in Scripture, the Apostolic Tradition and the life of faith, is the norm of authority. The authority has authority insofar as it is the voice of

¹⁴Jean Meyendorff, *Relativisme historique et autorité dans le dogme Chrétien*, *Istina* (1969), n. 2, p. 264. Orthodox theologians have an evangelical evaluation of the role of authority in the Church. See Alexander Schmemmann, "Freedom in the Church," in T. Patrick Burke, ed., *The Word in History* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966), pp. 120-53.

norms by which it is itself normed. "After me comes he who is mightier than I" (Mk 1:7).

The authority by itself, or abstracted in itself, is far from being the only and supreme guarantee of truth. Catholic theologians are familiar with the distinctions between the extraordinary and infallible magisterium and ordinary, though not conceived as fallible, magisterium. Or the distinction between divine faith related to a dogma of faith, and the "religious assent" which includes "internal and external obedience" to the non-infallible pronouncements of the hierarchy. Though that "internal and external obedience" is due "not only because of the reasons adduced, but rather because of the light of the Holy Spirit, which is given in a particular way to the pastors of the Church in order that they may illustrate the Truth."¹⁵ There seems to be a theological and logical ambiguity in this and similar texts. The Holy Spirit is involved too easily in matters which do not bear such a sacred guarantee. The Holy Spirit nowhere guarantees that each step of the magisterium is going to be an illustration of his presence. Many decisions belong to what Thomas Aquinas calls *conjectura humana*.¹⁶ Furthermore how is it possible to give an internal assent to something which is believed not to be true? If the permission to dissent is granted for serious reasons, how is that dissent in opposition to the Holy Spirit? A juridical obedience cannot be imposed in the name of the Holy Spirit to something one is convinced is untrue. It would be breaking a fundamental law of morality which is, according to Thomas Aquinas, to follow the dictates of one's informed and responsible conscience, even if it is objectively wrong.¹⁷

These academic and scholastic distinctions between infallibility and

¹⁵*Humanae Vitae*, n. 28. Cf. Daniel C. Maguire, "Moral Inquiry and Religious Assent," in Charles E. Curran, ed., *Contraception: Authority and Dissent* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969), p. 127.

¹⁶*S.T.*, II-II, q. 1, art. 3, ad 3. "Possible est enim ex conjectura humana hominem fidelem falsum aliquid aestimare; sed quod ex fide falsum aestimet, hoc est impossibile."

¹⁷All Catholic theologians will, of course, remember that for Thomas Aquinas, a very logical man, it is morally wrong to believe in Christ, if you are not convinced that it is morally justifiable. *S.T.*, I-II, q. 19, art. 5, art. 6.

a fallibility which is not really fallible are remote from the "ethos" and the heart of the Christian people. The Christian simply does not live in those categories. They sometimes seem to be invented to save the face of the magisterium when it "goofs." Why can't the pope, the cardinals and the bishops be mortals among mortals, human beings among human beings, believers among believers, Christians among Christians, with a special burden of responsibility, an office and ministry, an authority which bears fruit insofar as they are faithful to the One who is mightier than they?

The distinctions we have been recording finally are more juridical than theological. They hardly touch the heart of the matter which is the relation between faith and an historical revelation, and what does or does not belong to the Word of God. The multiplication of these distinctions may finally give the impression beautifully expressed in another matter by Antony Flew: "A fine brash hypothesis may thus be killed by inches, the death of a thousand qualifications."¹⁸ The magisterium is not the key to the problem of the development of dogma. The theories of a homogeneous development are equally deficient.

The Illusion of the Homogeneous Development

The problem of how to reconcile permanence and change in dogma is not new. The indispensable work of Dr. Owen Chadwick, *From Bossuet to Newman*,¹⁹ reminds us that in 1688 Bossuet wrote the *History of the Variations of the Protestant Churches*. The controversy between Protestantism and Catholicism was based on the faithfulness to the gospel and the ancient Church. Bossuet's argument was that newness and variety were signs of heresy. The Protestant argument was that Catholicism had perverted the original content of the gospel. Bossuet's polemic is not essentially different from that of Irenaeus against the Gnostics in the second century. There is an authentic *traditio ab apostolis* which gives to doctrines their unity and

¹⁸ Antony Flew, "Theology and Falsification," in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1955), p. 97.

¹⁹ Owen Chadwick, *From Bossuet to Newman. The Idea of Doctrinal Development* (Cambridge: University Press, 1957).

apostolicity and is consecrated by the apostolic succession in the bishops. In every case, it was always an appeal to antiquity, not at all a justification of change.

Newman's Anglican *Via Media* was carrying on the same type of argument.²⁰ Newman was in search of "the Catholic Ecumenical essential Church."²¹ His view at the time was that "Romanism has the principle of true Catholicism perverted; popular Protestantism is wanting in the principle."²² Romanism "substitutes the authority of the Church for that of Antiquity."²³ Therefore the canon of Vincentius of Lerins: *quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus*, "always, everywhere and by all" is the sign of the apostolicity of a doctrine.²⁴ "Romanism is an unnatural and misshapen development of the Truth."²⁵ The quarrel at that point, as Newman saw it later in his *Apologia* (1864), was "Antiquity versus Catholicity."²⁶

The first change in Newman's mind came with his study of the history of the Monophysites. "I saw my face in that mirror, and I was a Monophysite. . . . Rome was, where she now is."²⁷ A little further in the *Apologia*, Newman recalls the vivid impression made upon him by the sentence of Saint Augustine against the Donatists: *Securus judicat orbis terrarum*, which "pulverizes" the theory of the *Via Media*.²⁸ This well known story would be superfluous if it did not show, in the sequence of a long tradition, how strong were the ideas of irreformability, unchangeability, unbroken continuity, undeviated growth, and permanence in dogmas, even in the father of the *Essay On*

²⁰John Henry Newman, *Lectures on the Prophetic Office of the Church* (London: Rivington & Parker, 1837), p. 8.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. vii.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 52.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 61.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 63.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 52.

²⁶John Henry Cardinal Newman, *Apologia pro Vita Sua—being a History of His Religious Opinions* (London: Longmans, 1890), pp. 106-108.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 114.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 117.

the Development.²⁹ It is rather paradoxical that the theologians of the Vatican at the time, specially Father Perrone, did not recognize that Newman was very much on their side.

Catholic Modernism provided another occasion for the reaffirmation of the unbroken continuity of doctrine. The weakness of Modernism was to conceive dogma as a symbolic, pragmatic or cultural expression of the human religious experience. In the fields of epistemology, ontology, and theology, it was too simplistic. Dogma was not any more a statement of truth, but the relative expression of an immanent religious experience. Modernism as a movement inside the Church was killed effectively and swiftly by what Archbishop Mignot called "a white terror."³⁰ But the problems raised by the Modernists never disappeared and, on the contrary, have taken a much more acute form.

In 1904 Maurice Blondel (1861-1949) in three articles entitled *Histoire et dogme* tried to bring a solution to the modernist crisis on the problem of dogma.³¹ Blondel was reacting against the critical history of Alfred Loisy, which he called "historicism." He was equally opposed to dogmatic theologians, whom he accused of "extrinsicism." Historicism is looking at bare facts which become meaningless and unrelated to the real history of Christianity. Extrinsicism is the habit of dogmaticians who, without any rule of hermeneutic, use distorted facts as proofs of their ideological thesis. Blondel wrote: "Only the violence of contrary evidences pushes back the intransigent absolutism of a thesis, which, in its abstract purity, excludes all experimental docility and all flexibility of adaptation."³² Dogmaticians give the impression

²⁹John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (London: James Toovey, 1845).

³⁰Alec Vidler, *A Variety of Catholic Modernists* (Cambridge: University Press, 1970), p. 103.

³¹*La Quinzaine* (January-February, 1904). *Histoire et Dogme. Les lacunes philosophiques de l'exégèse moderne* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1956). I quote this edition. English translation, *The Letter on Apologetics, and History and Dogma*, trans. by A. Dru and I. Trethoman (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964).

³²Blondel, *Histoire et Dogme*, p. 159.

of "mystical ideologists who pretend to impose their systems to the concrete truth of history."³³

Blondel's solution to the problem of how to reconcile history and dogma was the principle of interpretation of a tradition conceived as "a vital reality."³⁴ It is "an ever actual experience, which, to a certain extent, dominates the texts, instead of being their slave."³⁵ Thus the Church passes from "the living implicit to the known explicit." The meaning of dogmatic formulations is definitive, but the formulations are changeable, insofar as they retain the pristine meaning.³⁶ There is, moreover, Blondel's most personal idea of the verification of truth through moral, religious and Christian action: "the practical verification of speculative truths."³⁷ This idea is similar to Newman's dialectic of the moral conscience or to William James' pragmatism.³⁸ In Blondel, as in Newman, the idea of a homogeneous development is always assumed. It could not be seen differently at the time. But these theories have to be submitted to the judgment of an historian who is far from being prone to "historicism." "The history of Christian doctrine is the most effective means available of exposing the artificial theories of continuity that have often assumed normative status in the churches."³⁹

If we now turn to one of the most recent theories of development,

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 208, n. 1.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

³⁸ An excellent introduction to Maurice Blondel is available. Jean Lacroix, *Maurice Blondel. An Introduction to the Man and His Philosophy*, trans. by John C. Guinness (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968). Cf. also Henri Bouillard, *Blondel and Christianity*, trans. by James M. Somerville (Washington: Corpus Publications, 1970), pp. 29-30. Unfortunately I have not read James M. Somerville, *Total Commitment: Blondel's "L'Action"* (Washington: Corpus Publications).

³⁹ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition. A History of the Development of Doctrine*, Vol. I: *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: University Press, 1971), p. 9.

that of Bernard Lonergan's *Method in Theology*,⁴⁰ we find two sets of statements which are not easily reconciled. On one side, we have the confident repetition of the doctrine of Vatican I on the permanence if not the irreformability of dogmas. The permanence of dogmas is in their meaning as revealed mysteries, not in their formulations. On the other side, the historicity of dogmas implies that "they can be better and better understood." This is the idea of homogeneous development. Apparently dogmas cannot be misunderstood, forgotten or reversed. Father Lonergan expresses his position as follows: "The permanence of the dogmas, then, results from the fact that they express revealed mysteries. Their historicity, on the other hand, results from the facts that (1) statements have meanings only in their contexts and (2) contexts are ongoing and ongoing contexts are multiple."⁴¹ Normally it should be concluded that there is no unbroken continuity, or a majestic and uninterrupted development from implicit consciousness to better and better understanding. But Lonergan does not draw such a conclusion.

Anselm Atkins seems to be the only theologian who addresses himself to "the need to make room for reversals, negations, or what he calls de-developments." It seems as if the canon of Vatican I,⁴² borrowed from the *Commonitorium* of Vincentius of Lerins, is inadequate. The understanding of the doctrine of the Church does not develop *in suo dumtaxat genere, in eodem scilicet dogmate, eodem sensu, eademque sententia*.⁴³ Dulles translates this formula: "in the same doctrine, in the same understanding, and in the same opinion."⁴⁴ The Latin text may be stronger, more restrictive, and so understood in Vatican I: "in the same dogma, the same meaning, and the same sentence." This declaration reflects a confidence in homogeneous

⁴⁰Bernard J. F. Lonergan, S.J., *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), pp. 319-26.

⁴¹*Ibid.* p. 326.

⁴²Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, p. 132. Anselm Atkins, "Religious Assertions and Doctrinal Development," *Theological Studies* 37 (1966), 523-52.

⁴³Vatican I, *Constitutio de fide*, Sessio III, ch. 4, Denzinger (1946), n. 1800, 1818.

⁴⁴Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, p. 186.

development which does not correspond to the facts of history. The identity is more mysterious and the historicity more fundamental than they have been so far acknowledged. They involve negations, oblivion, shifts of emphasis, regressions, tensions, contradictions and errors. This does not even take into account the contingency of cultural, political, social, and economic factors which were often at work in the decisions of the Church. Thus the juridical or moral solutions of the problem of change in dogmas are equally ineffective.⁴⁵ We are therefore obliged to turn, once again, to the analysis of historical consciousness, and the requirements of a dogmatic, i.e., conscious, reflective, articulate experience of faith.

The Historicity of Dogmas and the Dialectic of Interpretations

The first aspect of historical consciousness is formed by the critical and scientific method of history (*Historie*) perfected in the nineteenth century. History tries to emulate the empirical sciences and is written in a positivist, objective, and neutral spirit. At best that was the "noble dream," the intention and the wish. Applied to Scripture, to the history of the Church and of dogmas, the new method introduced in the Christian churches a first awareness of historical "relativity." Revelation appears always as communicated and expressed in human language. The Word of God is articulated by the words of men, submitted, even if inspired, to the cultural conditions and limitations of a particular historical situation. There is no problem today to recognize that the Pentateuch is made of documents of different nature and various dates; or that the Gospels were copiously edited by their

⁴⁵It is the weakness of the interesting book of Van Austin Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer. The Morality of Historical Knowledge and Christian Belief* (New York: Macmillan, 1969), p. 127: "The heart of the issue before us is the collision of two moralities of knowledge, the one characteristic of the scholarly world since the Enlightenment, the other characteristic of traditional Christian belief." The question of the relation between history and faith, between history and dogmas, is to try to reconcile the logic of faith and the logic of history. It is an intellectual and ontological problem not a moral question. To be "obedient" in the Roman sense, or to be "honest" in the Protestant sense does not even touch the difficulty, except in the personal life of a Vatican theologian, or a fundamentalist.

writers; or, in the words of Reinhold Seeberg, that "Dogma is a tangible historical reality, it may very appropriately be also historically depicted."⁴⁶

As soon as the critical and scientific method of history was firmly established, it came under the fire of the critical philosophy of history. A second degree of historical consciousness was born. The objects of the study of history, so the critique goes, are never objects of nature. They are man's creations, illusions and stupidities: human ideas, experiences, imaginations, realizations and destructions of many kinds. The problem is always to understand what our ancestors meant. It is therefore extraordinarily difficult to understand history as a succession of bare facts, the past, which can be written down, in the formula of Leopold Von Ranke, *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*, as it really happened.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the tastes, decisions, interests, choices, philosophical and religious, or anti-philosophical and anti-religious presuppositions of the historian play an enormous part in the kind of history he writes. Imagine President Richard M. Nixon writing, as he will, the history of the Watergate affair! It is only possible here to refer to the works of Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), of R. G. Collingwood (1889-1943), of Raymond Aron, Henri-Irénée Marrou and others.⁴⁸ These investigations are relevant to the relation between history and dogma, because they stress the point that facts in the past, and their contemporary record in scholarly history, are never divorced from

⁴⁶Reinhold Seeberg, *Text Book of the History of Doctrines* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 6th pr., 1964), p. 24.

⁴⁷Jacob Burckhardt, *On History and Historians*, with an Introduction by H. R. Trevor-Roper (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), p. xi.

⁴⁸Wilhelm Dilthey, *Einleitung in die Geistes Wissenschaft* (1883); R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1946); Raymond Aron, *La Philosophie critique de l'histoire* (Paris: Vrin, 1950); Raymond Aron, *Introduction à la philosophie critique de l'histoire (1938)* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948); E. T., *Introd. to The Philosophy of History. An Essay on the Limits of Historical Objectivity*, trans. by George T. Irwin (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962); H.-I. Marrou, *De la connaissance historique* (Paris: Seuil, 1959). A good introduction to these problems is provided by Hans Meyerhoff, *The Philosophy of History in Our Time. An Anthology* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959) and Ronald H. Nask, *Ideas of History*, (2 vols.; New York: E. P. Dutton, 1969).

interpretations of human consciousness. The Gospels had a kind of factuality, but the actual facts were already reinterpreted by the believing mind. The new criticism brought the modern historiography closer to the ancient historiography, more preoccupied by meanings and interpretations than detailed factuality. Therefore history appeared more and more as a dialectic of meanings and interpretations.

This criticism of history may lead, at first sight, to a certain relativity⁴⁹ inside scholarly history itself, and from there it could be extended into a universal and philosophical relativism. But it is not necessary to draw the conclusion that we are more and more lost in a sea of opinions, without any possibility of ever reaching the truth. Heidegger remarks: "we have nothing to do with a vicious relativizing of ontological standpoints," even when "we are to *destroy* the traditional content of ancient ontology."⁵⁰ To avoid relativism, some theologians use the term "perspectivism,"⁵¹ what Schillebeeckx calls "the perspectivism of every assertion of truth." But "perspectivism" suggests the image of a painter sitting in the field and taking a "perspective" of the countryside. It is misleading if it means that the historian, the theologian, or the believer is not himself as historical as the objects he is trying to understand and to grasp.

It is the historical consciousness itself which can bring us out of the weaknesses of historicism, relativism or perspectivism. In the historical

⁴⁹Fr. M.-D. Chenu, in 1937, was not afraid to speak, and was therefore condemned for speaking, in relation to faith itself, of the "relativism of dogmatic formulations." "This historical relativism," he wrote, "is only the effect, in the succession of time, of their metaphysical relativism." "La Théologie au Saulchoir," in *La Parole de Dieu, I. La foi dans l'intelligence* (Paris: Cerf, 1964), p. 255.

⁵⁰*Being and Time*, p. 44.

⁵¹Loneragan, *Method in Theology*, pp. 214-20. Edward Schillebeeckx, "The Problem of the Infallibility of the Church's Office. A Theological Reflection," *Concilium* 83 (New York: Herder & Herder, 1973), 81-87. Fr. Schillebeeckx, in dealing with infallibility, is using Maurice Wiles' distinction between "necessary" and "legitimate" or "valuable" developments. Infallibility may be "legitimate" without being "necessary." Schillebeeckx remarks that the accumulation of distinctions may make the old model ineffective. "The alternative is to replace this earlier model by a perhaps provisional model which will enable the new experiences to be better accommodated and understood" (p. 87).

consciousness itself the past is discovered, recollected, rediscovered and reinterpreted. The method of interpretation and the ontology proposed by Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur have no inclinations toward relativism or skepticism.

It is the third aspect of historical consciousness which reveals the dialectical continuity between the past, the present and the future, and includes discontinuity, reversal and error.

Temporality, Heidegger writes, is the meaning of man (*Dasein*: "Being-there"). Surely the fact that man is finite, temporal and mortal is not news. But Heidegger gives a new depth of meaning to that eternal truth. Man is not only in time, as a child in the maternal womb, or an individual between the dates of his birth and of his death. Man's temporality is an intrinsic determination of his being. All the ultimate questions man can and must ask appear on the horizon of time. Conversely, Being unveils itself to man in his temporal and historical condition.⁵² This new conception of time cuts a way between the classical and the Kantian notion of time. For Plato, time is the movable image of the immobile eternity. For Aristotle, time is the measure of movement according to before and after. For Kant, time is a subjective form *a priori* to our sensibility, for which the phenomena appear in succession.

Between the eternal, the cosmic, and the subjective notion of time, Heidegger's time becomes the ontological phenomenon inseparable from human consciousness. Therefore the historicity of man is prior to the universal history it makes possible and creates. When man is trying to understand the meaning of traditions transmitted to him, he can only do it on the basis of his own historicity. At this level the historical consciousness can no longer get rid of its past, ignore the present or be blind to the future. The future, the present and the past are "ecstasies of temporality." Man makes himself existing in time "in the unity of the ecstasies."⁵³ As regards the past, there is a similar movement of consciousness in the importance St. Augustine gives to memory. St. Augustine as an individual was trying in the *Confessions* to recall the ways of God in his life. St. Augustine the theologian, in the *City of*

⁵²Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 39.

⁵³*Ibid.*, p. 377.

God, was trying to find out the ways of God in universal history. In the same fashion Marcel Proust was trying to recover "the lost time" and to transform it in *le temps retrouvé*. The evanescent time still exists in memory.

The three levels of historical consciousness which are in our culture, scholarly history, critical philosophy of history, and the ontological structure of man's temporality, may be summed up in the terms of Raymond Aron: "Man is in history," "Man is historical," "Man is a history."⁵⁴ The believer is in the same condition. But this condition does not abolish the past. Quite the contrary, as Gerhard Ebeling writes: "Actually both factors, identity and variability, belong inseparably together and are linked to one another in the process of interpretation."⁵⁵ The relation between history and dogma is a particular case of the relation between history and faith, emphasized in the problem of the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith. The final word of Kierkegaard's agony over that problem is that the believer believes *by means* of the historical testimonies, but *in virtue* of the condition given by God.⁵⁶ If Jesus himself is submitted to historical ambiguities, so is the faith in him, and much more so the dogmas of the Church. As Pascal said: "There is enough light for those who want to believe, and enough obscurity for those who want to disbelieve." The so-called homogeneous development is in reality a dialectic of interpretations. It is clear, therefore, as Jean-Pierre Jossua writes: "that the rule of faith is not an immutable formula, but a certain proportion of succeeding formulas bearing the marks of distinct contexts."⁵⁷

The Dialectic of Interpretations

The problem of interpretation is inseparable from historical

⁵⁴Aron, *Introduction*, p. 319.

⁵⁵Gerhard Ebeling, *The Problem of Historicity in the Church and Its Proclamation*, trans. by Grover Foley (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967 [German, 1954]), p. 26.

⁵⁶Sören Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. by David F. Swenson (Princeton: University Press, 1936, 7th pr., 1958), p. 87.

⁵⁷Jean-Pierre Jossua, O.P., "Rule of Faith and Orthodoxy," in *Dogma and Pluralism: Concilium* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), p. 65. Homogeneity is only the transposition of fixity (p. 59).

consciousness.⁵⁸ It is, as Gadamer writes, "a reflective attitude *vis à vis* tradition."⁵⁹

In historical continuity, it is *for* the ancient formulas, *with* them, and *against* them that it is possible to create a new meaning and a new reinterpretation. In that sense the lack of reinterpretation is not only unresponding to the present but it puts the past to death in insignificance. This is what Blondel perceived: "Fixity is a virtual heresy."⁶⁰ And Ebeling: "If proclamation were not a new interpretation of what was proclaimed in the past, it would not be proclamation of what was proclaimed in the past."⁶¹

Paul Ricoeur has added valuable suggestions to the dialectic of interpretations. Starting with the difference between grammar and discourse, Ricoeur shows that the meaning of the discourse goes beyond the happening or the event of that discourse. The meaning opens up a new horizon, a new form of being-in-the-world, a new world. This interpretation of language is more objective than the psychological (Dilthey) or existential (Bultmann) theories which are based on a subjective choice or decision, or an interpersonal relationship between the author and the reader. Ricoeur writes: "Beyond my situation as a reader, beyond the writer's situation, I direct myself toward the possible modes of being-in-the-world that the text opens to me and makes me discover; this is what Gadamer calls 'the fusion of horizons' in the historic understanding."⁶²

What we must appropriate is not simply a past experience, or a remote intention, or a situation of "once upon a time," but "the trans-eventual (*trans-évenementiel*) meaning and the world's horizon to

⁵⁸Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (1927) (11th ed.; Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1967), pp. 148-53; E. T. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper, 1962), pp. 188ff.

⁵⁹Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Le Problème de la Conscience historique* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1963), p. 9. Cf. also *Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: Siebeck-Mohr, 1960).

⁶⁰Blondel, *Histoire et Dogme*, p. 213.

⁶¹Ebeling, *The Problem of Historicity*, p. 26.

⁶²Paul Ricoeur, "Événement et sens", *Révélation et Histoire*, ed. by Enrico Castelli (Paris: Aubier, 1971), p. 23.

which it refers."⁶³ The meaning is immanent to the event of the discourse and goes beyond it. So the meaning acquires an "omni-temporality." The epistles of St. Paul are addressed to us as well as to the Christians of Rome or Corinth in the first century. "The omni-temporality of meaning," Paul Ricoeur writes, "signifies that it is open to all reading. Therefore the historicity of reading is the counterpart of the omni-temporality."⁶⁴ Or, "the trans-eventual step (phase, stage) of meaning is the resource of all new actualizations."⁶⁵ As I understand it, "the omni-temporality of meaning" is not an Hegelian universal concept or an eternal idea imperfectly reflected in time. It is a meaning created by man, therefore, even if inspired, incomplete, imperfect and fallible. At each stage, it remains involved in the ambiguities of history. But history itself implies continuity and novelty, progress and regression, grace and sin, truth and error. Louis Dupré's axiom that "the price to pay for an historical revelation is some sort of contingency"⁶⁶ is only half-true. Because the Christian revelation with its interpretations is written in history, it is not a myth or a gnosis but endures in the memory of man and offers itself to him as a forever new historical possibility. Nevertheless the problem of the development of doctrine is not and cannot be solved on the ground of history, logic and culture alone. In the believer and the theologian the human means are assumed, subsumed, and integrated in the structure of faith.

Faith, Identity and Variability

In faith, the believer intends a real, personal and ultra-personal mystery which is unique and one, which is eternal though revealed in time and related to time, which remains incomprehensible, even when expressed in a thousand propositions.

The identity of faith is ultimately given by its real and personal object: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever"

⁶³*Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*

⁶⁵*Ibid.*

⁶⁶Louis Dupré, *The Other Dimension: A Search for the Meaning of Religious Attitudes* (New York: Doubleday, 1972), p. 306.

(Heb 13:8). It is important to remember the "once and for all" (Rom 6:10; Heb 7:27; 9:12; 10:10), and the "fullness of time" (Mk 1:15) of the manifestation of Christ, so clearly stressed in the New Testament, and flippantly ignored in some schemes of process, change, and evolution. Of course this is only discernible in faith, hope, and love, and is not unambiguously reflected in history.

Until very recently a propositional or evolutionary notion of revelation and faith has made the problem of development insoluble. The metaphor of the seed growing into an immense tree, the trust in logical deductions, the image of a great march forward from progress to progress have been misleading.⁶⁷ Faith itself is the origin of the identity of revelation and the dialectic of interpretations, if it is seen in its totality.

According to St. Thomas Aquinas "the act of the believer does not end at the proposition but at the reality."⁶⁸ The act of faith is a response to a revelation which is not simply a revelation-doctrine, or a revelation-event, but a revelation-mystery. Revelation is at the same time an event of the past, or a series of events, a continuous mystery, a sacred presence, and a series of interpretations. All the explicitations or explications of the revelation-doctrine literally do not make sense except by reference to the graceful and real participation in the revelation-mystery. What is still valid in Newman's theory, and is more visible in the *Sermon* on development than in the *Essay*, is the discovery that the development is an intrinsic necessity bound to the nature of an inexhaustible and incomprehensible revelation, to the structure of faith and a living tradition.

Faith is the human, temporal answer to revelation. It is primarily an illumination of the created mind by the uncreated mind, which inclined the believer to consent, to adhere through love, to the unique, one and total divine mystery. It is the testimony of the Holy Spirit inside the believer (1 John 5:10), or "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). Faith does not primarily intend an "explicit" aspect of the Christian doctrine, but the

⁶⁷Henri de Lubac, S.J., "Le probleme du développement du dogme", *Recherches de Science Religieuse*, 35 (1948), 130-60.

⁶⁸S.T., II-II, q. 1, art. 2, ad 2.

divine Reality itself unique and indivisible. As Newman writes: "When we pray, we pray, not to an assemblage of notions, or to a creed, but to One Individual Being; and when we speak of Him, we speak of a Person, not of a Law or a Manifestation."⁶⁹

Before the mystery, faith is gifted with a power of expansion, a penetrating insight, a faculty of discernment, which operates more by love than formal judgment. This endless quest for understanding which uses historical consciousness as well as logic, is the origin of the dialectic of interpretations. Faith itself, from a theological viewpoint, is the originator of the identity and the historicity of dogmas.

In *that sense*, the distinction between implicit consciousness and explicit knowledge, or in Newman's words: "the reality and permanence of inward knowledge, as distinct from explicit confession,"⁷⁰ is still useful. Perhaps we might call the implicit apprehension, a pre-thematic, pre-conceptual consciousness. The believer has the experience that he is in touch with the loving mystery as a whole, not part by part. At the beginning of faith, in the becoming of faith, as at the height of mystical experience, the objective determinations fade away, retire into the background, even if they always remain indispensable. It is the believing reflective consciousness which, by an absolute human necessity, needs interpretation and language, as much as the revelation. In authentic Christianity there is no faith without historical consciousness, there is no negative theology without an affirmative theology, there is no authentic mystical experience without the temporal and historical faith. But the successive interpretations and the variability of language are immanent to the global, total apprehension, which originates and animates them, and gives them identity and continuity, beyond what is available to the historical consciousness. It is the *lumen fidei* which evaluates the indispensable objective determinations, and is the criterion of true or untrue developments, and there are such. It is an illusion to believe that a given culture is the criterion of the "relevance" and "meaningfulness" of faith. On the contrary, faith often has to be the judge of culture.

Faith is not only a personal act, but builds up a living tradition,

⁶⁹*Sermon*, p. 330.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 323.

and a community with its Scripture, its worship, its order. Tradition is the transmission of the *depositum fidei*. But it is not constituted primarily by a mechanic and external passing on as if of an object whose fabrication is finished. The *depositum fidei* and its transmission are first of all the continuous communication of its real object and subject, effected by the Holy Spirit, "the soul of the Church." "As therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in Him" (Col 2:6). Oscar Cullmann comments on this text: "The *Kyrios* appears as the content of the *paradosis*. But he is at the same time its content and its author."⁷¹ The tradition itself is dominated by somebody mightier than itself. If we want to keep on talking about infallibility for lack of a better term, it is precisely located and "there" only when the Christian faith is in real relation with its immense and total subject, and when the prayerful community recognizes the enduring presence of its Lord. "I am with you always to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20).

GUSTAVE-PIERRE LÉONARD
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⁷¹Oscar Cullmann, *La tradition. Problème exégétique, historique et théologique* (Paris: Neuchatel, 1953), pp. 21, 24.