DOG—MA! DOG—MA!

ROBERT J. SLAVIN, O.P.

GILBERT CHESTERTON in one of his debates in this country referred to the horror and fear the word *dogma* arouses in the minds of many people. He wittily said that even the well educated lose their minds at its utterance and rush to get out of its way like a young child, running from a ferocious dog, crying: "dog, ma, dog—ma." To be termed dogmatic is to have opprobrium heaped on one's head. In short, dogma is something to be shunned. And all this because of a misunderstanding of the word and its usage. Instead of causing fear it should inspire courage. For us Catholics dogma is a safeguard and a protection; moreover a true understanding of *what* dogma is and *how* it evolves makes our faith reasonable (not of course demonstrable since it is faith) and relatively easy to explain to the open-minded non-Catholic. The Catholic Action campaign of Pope Pius XI demands that the lay apostle know *what* the Church teaches, *how* she teaches it, and *why*. What are dogmas? Why must I believe them? Does the Church have the power to make new dogmas?

A number of people assume that a dogma is a philosophical theory in no way connected with the truth of the Gospel. They should let this primary fact take hold of them—dogmas are primarily *concepts*—not theories, not conclusions derived by inference, not interpretations. Take the statement: "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." Here we have the great mystery of the Incarnation. The concept formed by this statement urges us to make an act of faith. Upon hearing it, we believe it. If you start to reason about it, to draw illative conclusions from it or to do anything but analyze its contents, then your deductions are not revealed concepts but reasoned concepts. Human reason cannot demonstrate the mysteries of faith. As St. Paul said to the Corinthians: "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, a wisdom which is hidden . . . which none of the princes of this world knew . . . but to us God hath revealed them by His Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things even to the deep

things of God . . . But the sensual man perceiveth not these things . . for it is foolishness to him and he cannot understand them."[1]

According to the Vatican Council [2] a dogma is a truth revealed by God and *as such* proposed and defined by the Church for the acceptance of the faithful. Its sources are Scripture and Tradition. For the Catholic, Holy Scripture is not the sole rule of faith, for the Church existed as a teaching body before the books recording her divine institution were composed. She teaches us whether a dogma has been revealed or not. Now this revelation may be either explicit or implicit, formally revealed or only virtually.[3] If only implicit it nevertheless is a revealed concept that can be better known by study and explanation. In themselves these doctrines are revealed but as far as we with our limitations are concerned, they demand a certain definite ratiocination. Now this *discursus* does not proceed from a thing known to the unknown but rather persists in the same concept and only explains in the conclusion what was not *clearly* expressed in the premises. All such conclusions may be defined as dogmas, are called *explicative conclusions* and we hold them on divine faith on the authority of God Who revealed them. On the other hand we have doctrines which are only virtually revealed and we know them principally by reason since we *infer* them by means of a proper syllogism—proceeding from the known to the unknown. These conclusions, usually called illative, can never be defined as dogmas, and we believe them not with divine but only with ecclesiastical faith and therefore they differ from dogmas inasmuch as their formal object is different.[4]

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[1] I Cor. ii, 7-14.

[2] Session III, canon iii.

[3] R. M. Schultes, O.P.—*De Ecclesia Catholica*—article 68.

[4] Attention must here be called to Father Marin-Sola's, O.P., learned treatise on the *"Homogeneous evolution of Catholic dogma."* His theory is gaining ground steadily and it may not be many years before it will become a well recognized theory in Catholic theology. He bases his theory on St. Thomas and states that the current opinion in the schools is the result of a Suarezian error in commenting on St. Thomas which error has been perpetuated through the centuries. Marin-Sola states: Evolution means growth. Take the evolution of beings—they are made up of matter and form and thus their evolution may be either of the matter or of the form. Evolution of form means transformation or change of form which will be Darwinism. Evolution of matter means growth of the compound. Marin-Sola now applies this latter to doctrinal evolution and disagrees with those who hold that theological conclusions (illative) cannot be defined as dogmas of faith. This is his great contribution to the theory of dogmatic development. He maintains that reason is used in these deductions but used as an instrument and does not enter into the conclusion itself—hence the conclusions of this paper are valid even under Fr. Marin-Sola's theory.

Now the Church never has nor could she ever make a truth not substantially revealed by God a dogma because it would lack the revealed concept necessary for a dogma. You will never see this, however, but will proclaim as the Rationalists and Modernists have, that dogma after dogma has been invented, if you approach the question with the false idea that a dogma is not a revealed truth but something entirely deduced by human reason. This accounts in part for the dislike of the term *dogma,* for people fear that anything at all can be defined by the Pope as a dogma—we might even be bound to hold error as true! The absurdity is patent—truth would be prostituted; dogmas could be multiplied unendingly; the deposit of faith (which the Church is bound to preserve intact),[5] would be increased, and finally, our adversaries would be given many more opportunities of raising objections against the faith. Moreover these strictly reasoned conclusions can not be defined as dogmas because they do not fulfill our definition of a dogma. In other words they are not formally revealed, are not contained in scripture or tradition and are not proposed by the Church for acceptance by the faithful as dogmas. The Vatican Council confirmed this when it taught that the "duty of the magistery of the Church was to guard, explain and define divine revelation and *not to increase or perfect it by human ingenuity.*"[6]

There have indeed been dogmas that before their definition were theologically reasoned out in the manner we first set forth. Of these the dogma of the Immaculate Conception furnishes us an example. Two universal revealed laws seemed to stand in the way of defining this dogma—the law of transmitted sin and the necessity of individual redemption. Those who charge that the Church invents dogmas wholesale will find in this particular instance a most eloquent disproof of their hackneyed incrimination. This difficulty was cleared away when it was shown that the Virgin Mother could have been redeemed *anticipatively,* in view of the merits of the Divine Son she was to bear. This fact made the Virgin stand out in all her purity of soul and this from the very first moment of her conception. Mary never knew privation of grace. She alone is the privileged daughter of a race that lost divine bounties when our first parents preferred their own to God's good. Theological reasoning by the Church did not create this dogma. It merely removed an obstacle to the intuition of this dogma in Scripture and Tradition. And when this ob-

[5] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I.II. q. 52, a. 2.
[6] Session III.

stacle was removed, the dogma was seen to have been revealed, not under its own proper, immediate concept, but as contained in that other directly revealed concept—the divine Motherhood of Mary—of which it was an integral part and none the less there because theologians had disputed for or against its definition. The influence of the discursive faculty was *directive* not *creative*. It was because the dogma could actually be observed among revealed concepts that it won its way to definition. It was as an *inclusion* not as a *conclusion* that the Church defined it. No mere moral argument of fitness—she who was to bear the Sinless One must herself have been sinless—made Mary Immaculate, but the revealed Word of God which slowly unfolded the richness of its content.

Christ did not immediately blind us by allowing us to comprehend all of revelation. If we could fully comprehend or apprehend we would then assuredly be blinded like Paul from the sudden and complete revelation of God. With Divine Wisdom, Christ said: "I have yet many things to say to you: but you cannot bear them now. But when the Spirit of Truth is come, He will teach you all truth."[7] That spirit of truth speaks through the Catholic Church—our sole rule of faith.

Thus we see that a dogma is a concept—an implicit, unanalyzed concept, capable of a further and fuller analysis, rich with undeveloped knowledge which will be found to contain hidden problems and also the means for their solution.

Christ brought two things into the world—a new thought and a new life. The thought was essential to the preservation of the life and that is why Christianity is a dogmatic religion. Wherever the thought perished, the life went out with it. Why do socialists, sciolists and communists proclaim the Church a failure? Because she concerned herself primarily, as did her Founder, not with the problem of living but with the problem of life. Christianity is a religious, not a social or economic movement and dogma is meant to foster this religious, spiritual life. After all, how precarious is man's hold on truths which transcend the region of sensible experience, how great the burden of life's cares and worries, and the vehemence of human passions! No wonder then that we should look to the Church where the truths of revelation are taught to us under the seal of divine authority. Revelation considered thus appears to be not only an aid but a necessity.

[7] St. John XVI—12.

The evolution of dogma is not made by the addition of new revelations but by a more thorough explanation of what has already been revealed, for, as we have said before, the deposit of faith cannot be substantially increased one jot. Now all this acceptance of dogmas on divine authority will suggest the *conflict* between faith and reason. Is not reason cramped by these dogmas? Suffice it to say that revelation is no substitute for thought, but the greatest and noblest spur to thinking the human mind has ever had.[8] Implicit knowledge is made explicit. St. Albert calls the evolution of dogma, "a development of the faithful in the faith, not a development of the faith in the faithful."[9] The great dogmatic synthesis of the fourth century, for example, was not invented, but discovered when the Fathers, looking upon the problem of one person and two natures in Christ—which was implicit in the original intuition of Christ's divinity—strove to bring it out distinctly and to express it in rational terms. "Philip, he who seeth Me, seeth also My Father that sent Me."[10] Implicit knowledge is merely made explicit for St. Thomas teaches[11] that all revealed truths are fundamentally contained in two propositions explicitly revealed by God, namely, the existence of God and His Providence.

Science is supposed to have destroyed certain definite religious doctrines by disproving them. So-called scientists of to-day, instead of remaining in their own field of endeavor have allowed themselves to "boil over" into the fields of religion and philosophy, choosing to write on these with their own photographs for the frontispiece. They doubt of everything in order to become *scientific*. When pressed for explanations they dodge the issue. Hawthorne's character—Mr. Smooth-it-away fits them admirably, for he always drew your attention to the general when the point happened to be about the particular or vice versa. The question to be asked them is this: What Catholic doctrine has been disproved by what scientific fact? Is it the Immaculate Conception? Or the Trinity? Or the Divinity of Christ? Or Immortality? Hilaire Belloc asks: "How does the examination of chemical reactions, strata of the earth, old documents, the behaviour of electrical phenomena, upset any one Catholic dogma?" If so, which dogma and how? Of course no answer is ever given for they do not know what Catholic dogma is. Such men

[8] St. Thomas Aquinas—*Commentary on Boethius's 'De Trinitate'*—q. 2, art. 3.

[9] St. Albertus Magnus—*Commentary on Gospel of St. Matthew.*

[10] St. John XIV, 9.

[11] *Summa Theol.* II, II, q. 1, a. 7.

write with their prejudices. They imagine dogma is constantly tending to swamp them in their own particular field, whereas they fail to observe that dogma is not subject to transformism evolution—its source never changes but is always the Holy Scripture with Tradition. Dogma is subject to another kind of development, let us say a homogeneous biological evolution, in other words, dogma is subject to a logical development. Moreover dogma never leaves Christ out of experience for He who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, never meant that the third of these three titles should be taken, and the other two left, that the intellect should never distinctly know Him or that the heart of the sentimentally inclined should have the monopoly of His worship.

Hence we see that dogmas are not calculated to arouse fear and alarm but rather are a source of light and protection. Those modern critics who are posing as "debunkers" of Catholic dogma, have confused dogma with theology, simple apprehension with learned erudition and are busy peddling out to the multitude in the Sunday supplements and *startling* new books their own confusion of mind and labelling their attacks as great modern *historical* discoveries. Are we to place credence in such men—moreover are we to permit such men to force an entrance into the sacred precincts of our faith—into the fields of dogmas which we believe not on any human testimony but by the Revealed Word of God?

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