

Moreover, since the priest in radio is an important part of religious broadcasting, and since he is always a public figure in every community, he will be called upon to talk over the air from time to time, whether he makes radio a prime interest in his life or whether he doesn't.

For the above reasons, I feel that there is a desperate need for more courses in radio in Catholic colleges and seminaries. It will be in these courses that the elements of script writing, delivery, and so on could be taught, so that priests could take their places in the radio field as successful speakers, writers, and producers and directors, and in turn guide many of the laity into the same field.

Always ready to assist priests in the radio field is the Radio Bureau of the National Council of Catholic Men—to discuss script problems, production problems, and whatever else is connected with radio programs. The services of the Council extend to the production of recordings for use on local programs, and an ever-widening set of services so far as scripts, talks, music, and continuity are concerned.

And now, in very definite conclusion, may I ask the readers to say a prayer for the writer of these articles. Radio is a strange and wonderful field. I have often said that it is a school of humility, and that is true; but like all schools of humility, its lessons are hard to learn. That is why I need your prayers.

WILLIAM C. SMITH

*The National Council of Catholic Men*  
Washington, D. C.

#### DEVOTION TO OUR LORD AND TO HIS MOTHER

It is a common sentiment of our nature to honor every good mother for the sake of her son: it is, then, against our regenerate nature to refuse honor to that best Mother of the best Son. And so it comes that His ministers are her ministers; that fidelity to the gospel of Christ is fidelity to devotion for Mary.

—Fr. Xavier Donald Macleod, in *Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary* \*  
North America (New York, 1866), p. 11.

#### THE CHURCH AND CATHOLIC DOGMA

Two recent and well-written articles have focused the attention of American priests upon the widespread current interest in that part of sacred theology which deals with the development of dogma. The articles, the report on "Current Theology" produced by Dr. Philip Donnelly, S.J. for *Theological Studies* in 1947<sup>1</sup> and "Opinions Concerning Doctrinal Development," written by Dr. Charles E. Sheedy, C.S.C., and published in last month's issue of *The American Ecclesiastical Review*,<sup>2</sup> cast valuable light upon some of the more influential opinions now under discussion in European, and particularly in French, theological circles. Both writings were highly commendable. Together they will inevitably aid in bringing about a more intense study of the nature and the characteristics of Catholic dogma among the priests in our own country.

Any study in this field is valuable only to the extent that it is objective, explaining the function of the Church in presenting new dogmatic formulae and statements, rather than attempting to explain that function away. In carrying out its universal and unique commission to teach divine public revelation, the Church must obviously avail itself, from time to time, of a terminology or mode of expression which it has not previously employed. It would not be a living and effectively infallible teacher of God's message were it to act otherwise. The true study of doctrinal development considers this definite activity of Our Lord's true Church, and tries, ultimately, to describe and to explain it. Any theory about new dogmatic phraseology, on the other hand, which fails to take cognizance of the Church's work, or which attempts to explain the new formulae in terms of an imagined accretion of objective content in the body of dogma is definitely unscientific and runs counter to the Catholic faith.

In other words, the man who wishes to make an accurate study of the development of dogma must take cognizance of the fact that, as a doctrinal institution, the primary concern of the Catholic Church is to teach adequately and infallibly the divinely revealed message which it has received as such from the lips of the apostles. The

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Theological Studies*, Sept. and Dec., 1947.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. pp. 19-32.

Church's power to teach infallibly on such matters as theological conclusions, dogmatic facts, the canonization of Saints, and the approval of religious orders stems from and centers around this primary objective of its teaching mission. The Church is empowered to pronounce inerrantly on these other subjects precisely and only because such activity must be included in the function of a living and effective infallible teacher of the revealed message itself. The Church, within which Our Lord lives and acts as the supreme Teacher of divine truth, must be able, not only to state this truth accurately and effectively to the men of all times and all places, but it must also be able unflinchingly to recognize, in teaching presented under different cultural forms, both its own doctrine and tenets opposed to that doctrine.

In teaching the apostolic deposit of divine revelation infallibly over the course of the centuries, the Catholic Church has never denied in itself and has never excluded from this body of teaching any individual truth or group of truths received from the apostles as part of the body of God's message. Furthermore, the Church has never proposed as a part of that message any assertions which were not really contained in the apostolic deposit. Finally, it has never misinterpreted either any individual truth contained in scripture or tradition or the body of divine public revelation as a whole. And, on the positive side, the Church has actually taught, at every time since its inception, the entire deposit of God's teaching entrusted to its care.

Now the body of Catholic dogma is that deposit of truth which the Church finds in Sacred Scripture and in divine apostolic tradition, and which, by its solemn judgment or in its ordinary and universal teaching activity, it presents as having been revealed by God to be believed by all men with the assent of divine faith. Since the Catholic Church has been divinely commissioned and empowered to teach God's revealed message infallibly and *adequately* to all men, it is evident that, at any time during the course of the Church's long history, the body of Catholic dogma has always been and will ever be objectively identical with the original deposit of revelation as the Church originally received it from the lips of the apostles themselves. What the Church sets forth as God's revealed teaching is always exactly and substantially what the apostles told the Church to hold and teach as the divine message.

Just as obviously, however, the form and the language in which that teaching is expressed has developed over the course of the centuries. The doctrine the Church teaches is exactly the same as the doctrine the apostles gave the Church, but a great many of the words and the forms in which the Church asserts this body of truth are and manifestly must be quite distinct from those employed by the apostles themselves. The Church would not be an adequate and effective infallible teaching agency otherwise. Teaching necessarily involves a process of setting forth a body of truth in the language and in terms of the mentality of those who are to learn this truth. It implies labor in the direction of clarity and accuracy. It demands effort to prevent ambiguity and misunderstanding, and to answer the questions which occur to particular sets of learners. Unless the teacher of any body of doctrine is able to answer queries about the content of his message, his efforts are valueless.

The Catholic Church has fulfilled all of these requirements for successful teaching. And, in thus presenting divine public revelation to men, the Church has necessarily and continually made use of new dogmatic formulae and new doctrinal definitions. The new dogmatic formulae are, in the last analysis, merely ways in which the Church has presented to new ages and new cultures the same set of truths which it had previously taught in an older phraseology to other men. The new definitions are the final and thus completely satisfactory resolutions of questions which more recent generations have asked about the meaning and the content of the Church's divine message. Both procedures have been and, until the end of time will ever be, absolutely requisite for the Church in pursuance of its doctrinal commission. Neither adds any shred or aspect of doctrine to the original apostolic deposit entrusted to the Church from the beginning. Yet both can and should be reckoned as constituting an advance in the teaching of this same divine message.

Thus the new dogmatic formula in which the first oecumenical council declared that the Son of God is consubstantial (*ὁμοούσιος*) with the Father prevented any excuse for an erroneous teaching on this point based on an ambiguity on the part of the orthodox presentation. The definition of the Roman Pontiff's infallibility by the most recent oecumenical council answered, once and for all, a question about the content of divine revelation. In both instances

the Catholic Church asserted truths which had always been a part of its own doctrinal heritage. Moreover, in both cases, the Church advanced the cause of truth.

It has been the fashion among some recent writers to explain the dogmatic development within the Catholic Church in terms of certain analogies. Some have likened it to the process by which an oak tree develops out of an acorn. Others have attempted to clarify the issue by comparing it to the process in which white light is broken up into the various colors of the spectrum when it is passed through a prism. Lately an attempt has been made to explain it by a comparison with the process through which a formless mass of precious metal is minted into small coins.

The first comparison is definitely misleading. An oak tree contains an abundance of material not included in the acorn, while the dogma of the Catholic Church contains all and only the divine public revelation which was communicated to the Church prior to the death of the last apostle. The second comparison is innocuous enough, although it has only a very limited effectiveness in elucidating the development of dogma. The third comparison is harmful, implying a fundamental misunderstanding about the nature of the original revealed deposit entrusted to the Church.

The only completely acceptable and valuable approach to an explanation of the development of Catholic dogma is to be found, however, not in an appeal to some completely extrinsic factor, but in terms of the teaching process itself. There are new dogmatic formulae and new dogmatic definitions, and these are exact statements of the original apostolic deposit of revealed divine truth because and only because the Church is a living and infallible society within which Our Lord resides and acts as the Supreme Teacher. Primarily the dogmatic message as it stands is to be compared with the original deposit as received from the lips of the apostles, not as a tree is compared with its seed, but as a message accurately and adequately taught by a living teaching agency is to be compared with that message as it was originally imparted to the teacher.

In the light of this basic truth about the nature of Catholic dogma, certain tendencies in recent theorizing about this subject must be evaluated. These tendencies seem to stem from a desire on the part of some Catholic writers to assert the vitally effective truths of

our faith in a medium more acceptable to modern minds than that of scholasticism. Unfortunately, however, they all-too-frequently lead towards a misconception of Catholic doctrine as such.

In the first place there is an observable modern tendency to understress or even to deny the fact that the original deposit of revealed truth communicated to the Church by the apostles was and is a body of intellectual teaching. We are sometimes solicited to imagine that the original revealed deposit did not consist in a set of explicitly revealed propositions at all, but rather in the Godhead or in the Person of Christ. In other words, we are told to believe that what the apostles delivered to the Church at the beginning was a thing which could be described, rather than a definite teaching about that reality.

This tendency can lead to a serious misunderstanding of the Catholic message itself. Like any other specious and therefore formidable miscalculation, it is based upon a manifest truth, a truth it twists into a false meaning. It is a fact that the object of divine Catholic faith is in one sense God Himself, the divine Reality. But, at the same time, this object is definitely and truly a series of intellectual propositions or judgments. There is no shadow of opposition between these two truths. From the time of St. Thomas Aquinas an explicit statement of these two aspects of divine Catholic faith has been part of the traditional heritage of scholastic theology.

It is an integral part of Catholic truth that the original apostolic deposit of revelation given to the true Church of Jesus Christ consisted both in the Person of Our Lord and in a body of intellectual teaching, a series of judgments expressed in statements or propositions. The vision of the Divine Persons in a manner independent of and superior to the human process of knowledge by means of ideas and judgments belongs to the status of the Church triumphant rather than to that of the Church militant. If the deposit of revelation given to the Church by the apostles had consisted in Our Lord Himself to the exclusion of a body of teaching, then obviously the subsequent dogmatic statements of the Church would be merely expressions of its experience of Christ.

On the other hand, it is quite incorrect to infer or to imply that the traditional Catholic theologians as a class, or, for that matter, any real Catholic theologian whatsoever, could be judged guilty of teaching that the original deposit of apostolic revelation consisted

in a body of propositions with no reference to God or to His Christ. The truth is that the apostles handed over to the Church a definite body of teaching about God. This body of teaching about God is, in this world, the only basic means by which men may acquire an awareness of the supernatural truth about God in this world. It is the one body of teaching which, by the help of God's grace, men have accepted with the firm and supernatural assent of divine Catholic faith.

Another aspect of this same highly objectionable tendency in modern writing manifests itself in a denial of the fact that the implicit content of the original deposit of revelation can be ascertained by way of theological reasoning. Not infrequently in these times we encounter a hint or a statement to the effect that the choice of new dogmatic formulae and the content of new dogmatic definitions has resulted from some sort of religious instinct within the Church, or even from the indwelling of the Holy Ghost within this society, to the exclusion of any properly logical evidence that the more recent propositions have been really though implicitly contained in the original apostolic deposit from the very beginning. The men who follow this trend are not slow to stigmatize the methods of their opponents as "theologistic" or "intellectualistic."

The truth of the matter is, however, that the Church does not make dogmatic pronouncements apart from logically satisfactory evidence that the truth it asserts as divinely revealed actually forms a part of that body of revealed teaching which it received from the apostles and which it is commissioned and empowered infallibly to teach until the end of time. It remains perfectly true that the evidence upon which the Church acts may well be something which has escaped the notice of a good number of its own theologians, and even of the best among its theologians. Such a case occurred when the dogma of Our Lady's Immaculate Conception was defined by Pope Pius IX. Nevertheless, the evidence was in existence and was examined by the Holy Father before he issued his definition.

When he began his preparation for the definition of the Immaculate Conception, Pope Pius IX made it completely clear that he relied upon the assistance of divine grace to enlighten his mind on the project he was about to undertake. In an encyclical letter dated Feb. 2, 1849, the great pontiff begged the bishops of the

Catholic world to have the faithful entrusted to their care pray publicly for him.<sup>3</sup> Yet Pope Pius IX certainly did not consider that this divine help in any way exempted him from examining the properly theological evidence about this doctrine. In this same encyclical he announced the appointment of a pontifical commission to study this evidence and to report to him.

The commission appointed at that time by Pope Pius IX applied itself first of all to a consideration of the characteristics in function of which a truth or a proposition is said to be definable as Catholic dogma. It indicated no less than nine principles which must be employed in evaluating a proposition as definable.<sup>4</sup> The first four among these principles dealt with the type of evidence not absolutely necessary in order that a proposition should properly be judged as definable.

(1) The fact that, in the past, there have been conflicting teachings on this subject within the Catholic Church, or the fact that all have not hitherto agreed on this teaching, does not render a doctrine incapable of definition.

(2) The fact that even authoritative writers can be quoted in opposition to a teaching does not render that teaching incapable of being defined.

(3) In order that a doctrine be definable, it is not necessary that there should be explicit, or even implicit, testimony to this doctrine in Sacred Scripture, since it is certain and manifest that the scope of revelation is wider than that of Scripture.

(4) In order to show that the doctrine to be defined belongs to Tradition, it is not necessary to adduce a series of Fathers and of other witnesses reaching back to apostolic times.

All of these negative principles imply the commission's conviction that, in order that a doctrine should be considered as definable, there must be real evidence that this teaching is actually to be found in the apostolic deposit of divine public revelation. The commission

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Cardinal Gousset, *La croyance générale et constante de l'église touchant l'Immaculée Conception de la Bienheureuse Vierge Marie* (Paris, 1855), pp. 22 ff.

<sup>4</sup> For a more complete examination of this report, see the article "The Requisites for an Infallible Pontifical Definition according to the Commission of Pope Pius IX," in *The American Ecclesiastical Review*, CXV, 5 (Nov. 1946), 376 ff.

manifested not the slightest trace of willingness to content itself with a conviction about the definability of a doctrine based upon some corporate religious sense within the Church or upon any other so-called "non-intellectual" factor. This concern of the commission shows itself even more clearly in the positive principles it delineated.

(1) In order that a statement may be considered as definable, there must be a certain number of solemn testimonies directly pertinent to it.

(2) A proposition is capable of being defined if there can be found one or more revealed principles containing it.

(3) A proposition is capable of being defined if it shows a necessary connection with dogmas. In other words, a proposition ought to be accepted as revealed when, from the denial of this proposition, there follows by logical and immediate necessity the denial of one or more revealed principles.

(4) A proposition may be defined as Catholic dogma if it is preached as a part of divine public revelation in the concordant teaching of the actual episcopate.

(5) A proposition is capable of definition when it is shown to be a part of divine public revelation by the practice of the Church.

In calling for a theological examination of the question he considered defining and for a study of the conditions that rendered a truth capable of definition, Pope Pius IX stated clearly that he was following the precedent established by his predecessors on the pontifical throne. It was clearly his idea that it would be impossible to define a doctrine as a Catholic dogma of faith in the absence of definite theological evidence that this doctrine was contained in the original apostolic deposit of divine public revelation. The report of his commission manifests this same certainty. Clearly the report of the commission is not in any sense an infallible document of the Catholic Church. It is, nevertheless, an authentic and highly important statement, especially in the light of its intimate connection with the ultimate definition of Our Lady's Immaculate Conception. It indicated the sort of procedure the Church actually employed. This procedure turns out to be something tremendously remote from the kind of thing conjured up by those writers who have protested against "theologism" in the accurate and traditional descriptions of definable doctrinal propositions.

According to what the commission found to be the norms

actually used by the Church in discerning propositions which are capable of being defined as dogmas, the *ecclesia docens* has always looked to see that there was solid theological evidence that a doctrine was contained in the original deposit of revelation before defining it. Once this doctrine has been proposed as a dogma of the Church by the Holy Father himself or by the *ecclesia docens* under his leadership, it is something to be accepted as true on the authority of God revealing it, rather than by reason of the theological demonstration which showed it to be a part of the original apostolic deposit. Nevertheless, prior to the definition itself, it was the manifest duty of the Church authorities to investigate the theological evidence pertinent to the doctrine to be defined. The charism of infallibility, protecting the Holy Father and the *ecclesia docens* as a whole from misinterpreting the divine message, in no way dispensed the divinely authorized teachers within the Church from this investigation of theological evidence. This could not be true unless there is actually available sufficient theological evidence in favor of every truth defined as dogma by the Catholic Church throughout the course of the centuries.

Incidentally, the report of the commission appointed by Pope Pius IX gives little support to those writers who would draw a real distinction between formal implicit revelation and virtual revelation. These writers are under the impression that a doctrine is formally but implicitly revealed when it is really contained in the original deposit of divine revelation, although not thus contained in the phraseology or the manner in which it has subsequently been presented by the Church. A thing is said to be virtually revealed when it can be shown to belong to the revealed message by means of a genuine demonstration based on principles contained in the revealed message itself. The writers who hold that there is a real distinction between these two concepts hold that the virtually revealed proposition is arrived at by means of a true process of reasoning, a passage from one truth to another, while the process by which one establishes the authenticity of a statement formally and implicitly revealed is not a genuine reasoning process at all, since there is no real passage from one truth to another.

The commission gave no sanction to such a distinction. A truth was considered as definable when one or more revealed principles containing it can be found or when, from a denial of the proposition

under consideration, there followed with logical necessity the denial of one or more revealed principles. From this point of view at least, the commission found nothing to prevent the definition as a Catholic dogma of any proposition which assumes the stature of a genuine theological conclusion.

This traditional and genuine concept of doctrinal development in the Catholic Church is far from denying a real distinction between faith and theology. The point of the matter is, however, that the real distinction between these two entities is not based on the order of reality with which they deal, but rather upon the manner in which they deal with it. Divine Catholic faith is the acceptance of Catholic dogma, an absolutely certain assent based upon the authority of God revealing. The Church which proposes and formulates the dogmatic message acts as the instrument of Our Lord, residing within it and governing its doctrinal activity. The individual theologian acts as the servant of the Church in explaining and teaching this same message, expounding the doctrines and showing how they are contained in the original revealed deposit.

Theology presents its message in the form of conclusions, of propositions set forth as acceptable by reason of their demonstration from principles of divine faith. In point of fact, most of the conclusions presented in the average manual of theology and demonstrated and explained in the light of their position in the original deposit of faith are actually dogmas of the Church. It is precisely the demonstrative and discursive presentation of these truths which is proper to theology as such. Dogma differs from theology, not because it deals with a different realm or variety of truth, but because it is a body of truth authoritatively presented by the apostolic college and by the head of that college, acting as the instruments of Christ within the Church, presented in such a way that its acceptability does not depend upon the value of any demonstration but only upon God's own authority.

Another tendency manifest in some recent writings on Catholic dogma is that which classifies the original deposit of faith with other great ideas, which have developed and have vitally affected mankind. Thus we are led to believe that there is a similarity between the development of the ideas of democracy, of nationalism, and of communism and the development of Catholic dogma within the true Church of Jesus Christ. However respectable the original

source of this theory may be, the doctrine itself is quite incompatible with the truth about Christian revelation.

The "ideas" to which the authors who favor this tendency allude were concepts which at first designated certain vague and formless things that proved eminently desirable to great portions of the human family. A great many individuals attempted to clarify these originally vague concepts and, in the course of time, a number of explanations were forthcoming. Some of these explanations turned out to be inconsistent with the original notions. Others proved to be acceptable expressions of these much-discussed concepts. In every case, however, the men who were attracted by certain originally vague ideals were solely occupied with the task of explaining to themselves and to others the details which belonged to the objects they desired.

The Christian message, however, was never a vague or formless concept at all. It was not at first nor at any time merely the object of an inchoate and wordless desire on the part of human beings. It was a definite teaching from God, presented as such by Our Lord, and shown to be authentic through the various motives of credibility He attached to it. Its development is merely the continued process of teaching this same doctrine by Our Lord through the Church within which He resides.

Thus it is not true that Catholic dogma is in any way different from the original deposit of faith or from the body of Catholic teaching at any time during the history of the Church. It is true, of course, that much of Catholic dogma finds no expression in the earliest monuments of Christian literature. One who knows the status of primitive Christian literature would never make the mistake of imagining that it contains all that was taught as divinely revealed during the earliest years of the Church. It is also true that a certain amount of Catholic dogma is not contained in the inspired books of Sacred Scripture. The Scripture is not the only source of divine revelation.

What the Church teaches today as Catholic dogma does not differ in the least substantially and objectively from what the Church taught as dogma during the first centuries or from what the Church received as divine revelation from the lips of the original members of the apostolic college. Although, from time to time during the

course of the centuries, the Church has made use of new formulae in teaching its dogmas, no one of these new formulae has ever opposed or contradicted any dogma of the Church or any other formula in which the *ecclesia docens* had authoritatively expressed its divinely revealed message previously. Once the infallible teaching Church has consecrated a formula as an accurate statement of a divinely revealed truth, that formula can never be relinquished. It always remains the infallibly correct expression of a truth contained in the deposit of Christian revelation. In every case, new dogmatic formulae serve to set forth explicitly truths already forming a part of God's revealed message, truths already presented, really though implicitly, under previously existing dogmatic formulae. In no case can the new formula be understood as a correction or replacement of the old.

Finally, it is quite misleading to imagine that Catholic dogma today can accurately be described as something which the early Christians could not and did not foresee. They were perfectly aware of that message which is now expressed and enshrined in Catholic dogma. They could not, of course, be expected to have previous knowledge of the cultural and linguistic reasons which made imperative the present mode of teaching the very truths which they believed and which we believe. They could not foresee the Tridentine expression of God's revelation about His grace, but the teaching they believed was and is the very doctrine which Trent infallibly expounded.

JOSEPH CLIFFORD FENTON

*The Catholic University of America,  
Washington, D. C.*

MISSION INTENTION

"The Church in the Belgian Congo" is the Holy Father's Mission Intention for the month of February, 1949.

Answers to Questions

ON THE REVIVAL OF VESPERS

*Question:* What is the obligation of a pastor to have Vespers on Sunday afternoon or evening in accordance with the recent letter *Mediator Dei* and the old prescription of the Baltimore Council? As we have the *Kyriale* for the congregational singing of High Mass, what do we have for the singing of Vespers?

*Answer:* Vespers, in a more or less truncated form, used to be the regular Sunday service for the afternoon and evening in our churches but for several decades the practice has fallen into desuetude. In the *Mediator Dei* of our Holy Father there is an earnest recommendation that the pious custom of holding the Vesper service for the laity be not allowed to become obsolete but the encyclical states that, in this matter, nothing is prescribed as of strict law. "It is very earnestly to be hoped that lay folk should take active part in reciting or singing the office of Vespers on feast days in their own parishes."

The Second Plenary Council of Baltimore (Tit. VI, Cap. iii, 379) did order that Vespers be sung, and in their entirety, in all churches on Sundays and feast days and that Vespers be not omitted on account of other services. However, the Fathers of the Council inserted the clause, "quatenus fieri potest," in consideration of practical difficulties in the carrying out of the decree. The Council furthermore (*loc. cit.* 380) recommended that the rudiments of Gregorian chant be taught in the parish schools to the end that eventually a great part of the congregation would be able to chant Vespers with the clergy. The Third Plenary Council (Tit. III, Cap. iv, 118) legislated that Vespers must be sung in their entirety, with no abbreviation of the psalms, and quoted (*loc. cit.* 119) the words of the Second Council concerning the teaching of chant in the schools.

As to the obligation of initiating or restoring Vespers as the regular Sunday afternoon or evening service in parish churches, while the *Mediator Dei* of the Holy Father certainly recommends Vespers in preference to any non-liturgical devotion, nothing is