

## RELIGIOUS ASSERTIONS AND DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT

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ONLY IN recent years have theologians begun to face the problem of language. Other disciplines, particularly philosophy, anthropology, and aesthetics, have been hard at work on linguistics and the theory of communication for many decades. As one would expect, it has been the British theologians who, living as they do on the home ground of linguistic analysis, have been among the first to explore the relations between language and theology. The focus of their attention so far has been largely upon the nature of the "meaning" of religious or theological talk. In this paper I approach the problem of meaning by way of a theory of the development of doctrine. Thus I am addressing myself to a debate of several years standing, one with which American readers may not be entirely familiar. But I am no less interested in the theory of doctrinal development, and the considerations which I adduce from this quarter should be readily intelligible and, I hope, of some small value, quite apart from their use in the context of the British debate. A third feature of my argument is my use of the American philosopher Alfred North Whitehead. I have tried to ease him in gently, and trust that he will not be a stone of stumbling to many.

### DOCTRINAL ERROR AND FALSIFICATION

One way of finding out what a religious assertion means is to determine what might conceivably count against it. If this is the *only* way of attaching meaning to an assertion, or if the "things" which "count against" the assertion can only be happenings or "facts," then the problem is posed in the way Antony Flew did actually pose it in his famous "challenge."<sup>1</sup> Of course, one is perfectly free, and certainly wise, to reject the falsifiability principle as an exhaustive key to meaning; but it may also be possible to accept the *shape* of it without agreeing that the only thing that can count against an assertion is a "fact." Why could not a denial, a counterassertion, or, for that matter, any

<sup>1</sup> Cf. "Theology and Falsification," in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, ed. Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre (London, 1955) pp. 98-99.

qualifying proposition count as a kind of falsifier and thereby confer meaning on an assertion? Yet a third complication can be thrown at the falsification principle, if we dispute the notion of "fact" (the quotation marks are symptomatic of a perverse bias I have against letting a fact be *bare*) usually presumed by the neopositivist critics of theism (I call these thinkers "positivists" or "critics" for brevity) as well as, it seems to me, most of their opponents. For there are several twentieth-century philosophies which, quite independently of each other, can mount strong attacks on the offhand way the positivists have of taking their "facts" as hard, lumpy, determined bits of data. These philosophies generate an epistemology of *perspective* which completely relativizes the autonomy of "fact" and, if matched with positivism in the debate over religious language, they would cause the whole discussion to revert to a deeper level. These philosophies are (1) the philosophy of symbolic forms of the neo-Kantian Ernst Cassirer, (2) the epistemology of the renegade logician Whitehead, (3) the existential phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and, even more recently, William Luijpen, (4) the semi-Kantian Thomism of Bernard Lonergan, and (5) the singular epistemology of John Henry Newman. But I wish to exclude the epistemological move from the present study and concentrate instead on the area represented by my second suggestion, viz., that counterassertions can function analogously to falsifiers for doctrinal propositions, thus providing a partial key to their meaning. I will also show how the phenomenon known to theologians as the development of doctrine—still in its infancy as a theory—illustrates this meaning-giving process.

Flew, in formulating his challenge, points out that theologians reconcile "facts" with doctrines by continually altering the doctrines. Presented with the suffering of children, for instance, the theologian qualifies his original assertion that "God loves us as a father" and retrenches a bit. He reformulates his position in such a way that the "fact" no longer falsifies it. He will say (in the present instance) that God's love is "inscrutable" or "not a merely human love." Now since some theologians might suspect that Flew's hypothetical case somehow misrepresents the way theologians really work, I think it would be worth while to note, before proceeding, a prize case of theological squirming in the practice of St. Augustine. All are familiar with the blunt dilemma in Hume's *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*: if evil exists, and if

God is all-powerful, then either God connives with evil, or he is powerless to prevent it—take your choice.<sup>2</sup> Augustine formulated a similar dilemma in his *Enchiridion*.<sup>3</sup> He reads, first, that God wills all men to be saved (1 Tim 2:4); and he holds, in addition, that God “has done all things in heaven and on earth, whatsoever He would” (Ps 115:3). But if (as Augustine also assumes) not all men *are* saved, then either God does not will universal salvation or He is powerless to effect it. Augustine’s thought on this matter is, to be sure, prolonged and wobbly; but in the work referred to, he contents himself with an artificial and unrealistic answer. He explains “all” as all *classes* of men—bright, dull, high, low, and so forth.<sup>4</sup> At Augustine’s hands the doctrine of God’s universal love seems to have died the death not of a thousand qualifications but of one.

Two observations relevant to Flew’s challenge may be made on Augustine’s misadventure. First, he is not matching doctrines with empirical happenings but with other doctrines. Second, his highly unfortunate qualification presents a fancy target for counterqualifications by other theologians. I will elaborate. First, in Flew’s story the suffering child is supposed to function in the argument as a contradicting “fact.” Likewise, in Augustine’s reasoning the supposed damnation of some men contradicts the salvation of all men. But in Augustine’s case the supposed contradictory is only another proposition, not an empirical “fact.” Augustine does not qualify in virtue of some ghastly thing he or anyone else has seen or could see, but in virtue of a proposition to which he happens to assent. The clash is between doctrine and doctrine, not between doctrine and “fact.”

Second, Augustine’s unacceptable resolution of the dilemma was a position or theological assertion which other theologians (or he himself elsewhere) were able, in their turn, to reject. His account of what God’s will to save all men “meant” became, for his successors, a clear statement of *one* thing it could not *possibly* mean. Whatever the correct doctrine might be, it could not be Augustine’s. The way taken in the *Enchiridion* is a cul-de-sac clearly labeled “Not This” for all who pass by that way.

<sup>2</sup> David Hume, *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Norman Kemp Smith (New York, 1947) p. 198.

<sup>3</sup> Chap. 24, sec. 97; chap. 26, secs. 100–102.    <sup>4</sup> Chap. 27, sec. 103.

I am comparing the way one proposition contradicts another with Flew's criterion of meaning, according to which a proposition has meaning if and only if it is liable to falsification by a conceivable empirical "fact." My contention is that just as the ability to mention a state of affairs incompatible with an assertion is said by the positivist to insure the meaningfulness of the assertion, so, on the other side, a doctrine or proposition that contradicts another doctrine discloses one definite thing that the latter doctrine does *not* mean, and thus helps to delimit the meaning that it does have. There are things with which theological assertions are incompatible, namely, certain other theological assertions. The meeting of such assertions contributes to the "development of doctrine," and gives doctrines an intelligibility which theologians traditionally have been content to call "meaning."

Let us take another example. The stock comment on "heresy" is that it clarifies orthodox doctrine.<sup>5</sup> The usual wording of anathemas by which heretical doctrines are condemned is "if anyone says that *p*, *anathema sit*." Clearly, *p* is an assertion (whether actually uttered by any heretic in the anathematized form or not) which orthodoxy considers to be incompatible with her teaching. The canons of the councils have ordinarily taken this negative form (that Vatican II has refrained from drawing up canons and delivering anathemas is an interesting development). The ancient creeds (except for turns of phrase in the *Quicumque* symbol) are, of course, worded positively. And the Church does make positive doctrinal assertions (for instance, in the chapters or *capitula* of Trent). The point here is that the heretical assertions, by being negated, function as limits for the positive doctrine. The Nicene Creed says of Christ both that He is "of one substance with the Father" and that He was "made man." What does "made man" mean? One thing it does not mean, if we follow the Lateran Council of 647 A.D., is that Christ has only one will, used jointly by His humanity and His divinity. The anathema of Canon 12 rules that out. The confluence of divinity and humanity in Christ must, therefore, be understood in some way such that Christ cannot be said to have only one will faculty. (It should be noted—although the point belongs more properly to the

<sup>5</sup> By "orthodoxy" I mean the official position of the Church to which I belong, the Roman Catholic, and by "heresy" I mean heresy. But this pomposity is not meant to intimidate the reader, who is free to interpret the words in his own way.

next section—that assertions which are incompatible according to the thought patterns of one generation may find a way of being reconciled in a later, and that the wording of anathemas may cause them to become obsolete in time. If faculty psychology becomes—if it has not already become—unwieldy or fruitless as an explanatory theory, then the two-faculty negative of the Lateran Council, while exemplifying a correct adjustment of concepts in a certain context, would retire into the background of doctrine, and different negatives would perhaps vie for its place. This is a typical phenomenon in the development of doctrine.)

In what way, then, do anathemas, or the assertions which provoke them, qualify doctrine? And how could the kind of qualification Flew adduces in his challenge be said to add rather than subtract meaning? Consider the unlucky Monothelite. Let it be assumed, to begin with, that his proposition is verbally different from any positive statement of prior orthodox creeds. His words are, then, an enlargement upon, amplification of, or application of, the primal doctrinal material; for the creeds themselves do not mention Christ's will. The heretic ponders the revealed data with its creedal summaries, and brings to bear on it what he thinks he knows about wills. He ventures a theologoumenon which, to his mind, best synthesizes or explains the data (we are imagining a very sophisticated heretic). In opposition to him, the anathema declares that the original "deposit of faith" is not patient of *just that* enlargement. The faith cannot mean *that*. Orthodoxy, one might say, has failed to be compatible with one particular arrangement of ideas or alleged facts, the one expressed in the heretical proposition. A dead end has been roped off—thanks to the efforts of the heretic and his mitred opponents. The doctrine that Christ is true God and true man must henceforth be qualified by the phrase "but not if that means having one will servicing two natures." Now if we were to accept Flew's line of reasoning, we would say that if heresies and anathemas continued at that rate, the doctrine of the divinity and humanity of Christ, meaning neither *this*, nor *this*, nor *that*, would eventually be emptied of its content. Yet we would be mistaken. For if the history of theology teaches anything, it is that the inventive thrust of theological clarification, like the processes of an amoeba on the move, is guided by chance encounters with obstacles. The very reason why the highly articulated

edifice of Scholastic Christology has ceased to be interesting or "meaningful" nowadays is that the problems which forced it into shape are no longer the ones which bother living men. It is not sufficiently influenced by real negatives.<sup>6</sup>

A rejected error may be said to function in theology as a Whiteheadian "negative prehension." The act of negatively prehending a datum goes to define the subject which rejects the datum.<sup>7</sup> I do not require the reader to accept the systematic base into which this statement fits; I am using the negative prehension theory merely as an illustration. For Whitehead, to be actual means to be finite, and to be definite means to be exclusive of some things.<sup>8</sup> "Actualization is a selection among possibilities."<sup>9</sup> An actual entity is determined by what it is not. "The truth that some proposition respecting an actual occasion is untrue may express the vital truth as to the aesthetic achievement. It expresses the 'great refusal' which is its primary characteristic."<sup>10</sup> Whitehead is perhaps too greatly fascinated here with the Platonic "being of nonbeing." Yet it is not unreasonable to admit that we often straighten out our muddled ideas and arguments only when we find out what their faulty elements are. Whitehead's insight is at least partly true.

Another illustration (of humbler origin) may finally bring home what I am saying. Negative qualifications, and doctrinal errors, are like points which fix the position of a curve—and let it be an asymptotic one. Since I have made the points represent negatives, the points in question are all those that lie *off* the curve. Just as these points are unlimited in number, so doctrinal qualifications are unlimited, and continue to be forthcoming as doctrine gradually acquires meaning in the course of an unfinished history. And I will add that, just as it would be

<sup>6</sup> The reader may feel like saying "I don't care whether Christ had one will or two"; by this he would merely mean "That particular aspect of the total meaning of the Incarnation is trivial relative to me."

<sup>7</sup> Leonard J. Eslick, "Existence and Creativity in Whitehead," in *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* (Washington, D.C., 1961) pp. 152, 158-61.

<sup>8</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought* (New York, 1958) p. 107; hereafter referred to as *MT*. See also Whitehead's *Religion in the Making* (Cleveland, 1963) pp. 109, 144; hereafter referred to as *RM*.

<sup>9</sup> Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York, 1963) p. 144; hereafter referred to as *SMW*.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143. See also Whitehead's *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (New York, 1960) p. 227; hereafter referred to as *PR*.

a thankless task to try to fill in all the points lying off the line, so, in doctrine, there are innumerable possible negatives which, because they lie so far away from the line (that is, are so trivial), need not occupy the theologian's attention. He will not feel obliged to deny of God "every conceivable predicate," i.e., it is a waste of theological time, albeit orthodox, to deny that God is literally "sweet-tasting" or "finely powdered."<sup>11</sup>

Does a negative theological qualification enable us to picture "what it would be like" for an orthodox doctrine to be false? We say "The doctrine that Christ is both God and man, as understood at the Lateran Council, would have been untrue if it had been the case that Christ had only one will." Let me explain. There is a question of logic and a question of "fact." On the logical side, the hypothesis states that from a complete set of true propositions about the Incarnation it could not logically follow that Christ had only one will. No claim is advanced thus far for the "factuality" of the base propositions from which the false derivation is attempted, nor is anything said as to how the factuality would even be established, nor is the question considered whether theologians could ever possess—clearly they could not—a complete set of true propositions about the Incarnation. All that is said is that the truths of faith do not entail the conclusion that Christ has only one will. On the "factual" side, the anathema of the Lateran Council lays down that it is not permissible to say (within the Council's conceptual framework) that Christ had only one will. Entailment need not be involved at all. The anathema may merely be expressing that it happens to be the case that Christ does not have only one will. And if this state of affairs is contingent, its contradictory will be, by Wittgenstein's standards, imaginable.<sup>12</sup> And it would be possible for the theologian to provide himself with some idea of what it would be like for the orthodox doctrines to be false: it would be like what it would have been like if Christ had had only one will.

But is "fact" here contingent? Is a one-willed Christ really theologically conceivable? Now I think theologians would admit the theoretical]

<sup>11</sup> I am here controverting one of the points made by Frederick Ferré in his argument against the "analogy of attribution," in *Language, Logic and God* (New York, 1961) p. 74. My position agrees with that taken by W. Norris Clarke, S.J., in his review of H. D. Lewis' *Our Experience of God* (London, 1959) in *International Philosophical Quarterly* 1 (1961) 177.

<sup>12</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, tr. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London, 1961) sec. 4, 462.

possibility of there having been a different economy of salvation, or a metaphysically different Incarnation, in which there might have been a Christ with one will. In *that* case, many orthodox doctrines—the ones which are now not compatible with a one-willed Christ—would also have to have been other than they now are. But that is no trouble; for once we assume a different Incarnation, a whole corpus of different orthodox doctrines may also be assumed. It is conceivable, then, that it might have been otherwise with Christ's wills than it was. Nor does the doctrine that Christ had two wills necessarily mean that this doctrine follows by logical necessity from any set of true doctrines, real or hypothetical. For I pointed out in the paragraph above the possibility that although there might not have been any route of entailment between the corpus of hypothetical orthodox doctrines and the doctrine of one will which the heretic asserted, the one will might nevertheless have been a "fact" whose logical relations with the orthodox "facts" were simply either not known or not able to be known. So from the merely logical point of view also it is possible that it might have been the case that Christ had only one will. The Monothelite propositions, then, are not false by necessity, but false because they do not correspond with what, according to orthodoxy, really was the case. But they do describe a situation which would be incompatible with actual orthodox belief. They form part of the boundary line between orthodoxy and heresy, and designate one thing that orthodoxy does not include.

¶ However, although this line of argument succeeds, I believe, in conjuring up a possible, picturable, contradictory, empirical "fact"—a one-willed Christ—I cannot claim to have met the requirements Flew establishes for the falsification situation; for, although anathematized Monothelitism helps identify the content of Christian orthodoxy, Monothelitism itself lacks meaningfulness according to Flew's criterion. It needs to be provided with falsifiers of an empirical type if it is to answer Flew. The hypothetical "one will" of the hypothetical Monothelite Christ remains on the propositional level, not on the empirical. The Monothelite doctrine can be believed or disbelieved; it cannot be pointed at. But neither could the will itself—whether one or two—be pointed at. It would always be a matter of theological interpretation whether or not the man on the shore of Galilee had what the systematic



theologian wants to call "two wills." Of course, it is precisely at this point that an epistemology of perspective joins issue with positivism; but we have agreed to prescind from all that. So the whole dispute between the heretic and the Council stays on the propositional level. And no heretical doctrine expressed in a proposition is as solid-looking as a child dying of inoperable cancer. My falsifier, in other words, is a concept, not a thing; and indeed, I conceded that much at the outset. What I do insist on, though, is that a contradicting concept (an anathematized proposition) contributes toward the clarification and specification of the meaning of a doctrine.<sup>13</sup>

#### DOCTRINAL ERROR AND INCOMPATIBILITY

The notion of "error" in Christian doctrine has been left unanalyzed in the preceding discussion. What are the relations between an orthodox doctrinal proposition and the counterpropositions anathematized as error? What are the modes of compatibility and incompatibility between them?

An ecclesiastical anathema of the form "If  $x$  says  $p$ , *anathema sit*" states that a particular formula  $p$  is false. With Whitehead, I want to distinguish a verbal statement or "form of words" from a "proposition."<sup>14</sup> A form of words can symbolize "an indefinite number of diverse propositions."<sup>15</sup> Language is ambiguous, and many propositions can "fit the same verbal phraseology."<sup>16</sup> Thus, "Caesar has crossed the Rubicon," a form of words, may differ, as a proposition, for the Roman legionnaire, the British historian, or the American schoolboy, depending on what each has in mind by "Caesar." Now the question can be raised whether an anathema is directed against a verbal statement or against one or more of the propositions which it might embody. Since a given unorthodox opinion (proposition) can be expressed in many ways, it would be highly improbable if the anathema were directed solely against the mere external phraseology of the opinion and not against the opinion itself, regardless of its phraseology. I take it, then,

<sup>13</sup> At this point the epistemological maneuver alluded to at the beginning of the paper could be brought forward to transfer the empiricist's hard "fact" to the level of the conceptual framework used by the theologian.

<sup>14</sup> *PR*, p. 297.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*; see also pp. 17, 293.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 298.

that an anathema contradicts a proposition rather than the "form of words" in which it happens to be expressed. But, returning to the notion that a form of words may embody many propositions, does the anathema contradict one, or several, or all of the possible propositions into which the verbal statement can be analyzed? In order for the anathema itself to be true—and the irrevisability of conciliar canons is apparently an irrevisable tenet of Roman Catholicism—at least *one* of the condemned propositions must be false. Since for the most part the propositions into which the condemned statement is analyzable will be significantly similar, common sense suggests that *many* of them will lie within the range of meaning of the condemned statement. But it is not logically necessary that *all* the propositions into which the condemned statement is analyzable are false. The most an anathema *need* say is that a certain verbal statement is analyzable into at least *one* false proposition.

For an anathema to be true and "irrevisable," it is not necessary that anyone ever actually held or asserted the one or more propositions condemned by it as false. By a certain formula a heretic may understand one thing (his own intended proposition) and his judges another. The proposition which the judges understand by the verbal statement may never have occurred to the heretic at all—though he may at some time or other have used the very words which the judges condemn. The Church must acknowledge the likelihood of her having condemned false propositions entertained (hypothetically) by no one but herself. Indeed, it may have happened that the heretic's proposition was one of the true (if any) propositions into which the condemned statement is analyzable. And this state of affairs, if it can be shown in individual cases to have obtained, is of much more interest to the present-day ecumenist than to the historian; for a way is now opened whereby an orthodox proposition may be framed—or unearthed—that uses a verbal form which was once condemned and which still clothes a false proposition, as long as that (or any other) false proposition is not identical with the orthodox proposition. If this conclusion holds, orthodoxy has the prospect of simultaneously preserving the irrevisability of the anathematizing canons and allowing the retrieval of true propositions lying hidden side by side with one or more false propositions within some anathematized assertion. Words which were once thought to bear

only a false meaning can perhaps now be shown to have true meanings as well, meanings which need not be considered as falling under the anathema. This would mean nothing less than a break—technical, unexciting, waiting for concrete exemplification, but nonetheless real—in the fence of Roman Catholic “irreformability.” As Rosemary Ruether notes, the happy talk of *aggiornamento* and development of doctrine will never reach to the root level of *ecclesia reformanda* if no reinterpretation of the doctrine of inerrancy is forthcoming.<sup>17</sup> And I will add, there is no use praising the open fields on the far side of *metanoia*, as Ruether does, unless the guardians of orthodoxy are shown an irreproachably correct way of unfastening the fence.

If these considerations are an asset in the domestic struggles of the separated churches, they appear at the same time to be a slight liability for the apologist in controversy with the positivist critic; for the theologian has made himself another loophole, this time among the very negatives he had been offering as a type of modified falsifier. However, the falsifier is still there in its old place; only now it appears much harder to locate than before. The theologian’s dissection of the anathema may seem to rid orthodox doctrine of all chance for collision with incompatibilities, whereas in fact the theologian is only separating the real incompatibilities from the apparent ones. Meanwhile he has given another demonstration of the way theology advances by minute readjustments toward self-clarification.

If contemporary critics are anxious for theologians to name things that would be incompatible with their systems, contemporary theologians, on the other hand, are justified in pointing out that a certain morbid interest in making incompatibilities where none existed has been the scourge of past theology. The task of the systematic theologian is the theoretical reconciliation of increasingly diverse material in increasingly higher syntheses. The inability of a system to account for a datum, whether of revelation or of human experience, must always be considered a small failure. Whitehead, speaking of speculative philosophy, calls such a failure “inadequacy.”<sup>18</sup> Theologians strive for adequacy. Just as the premature closing of the interpretation of “facts” is a fault in the empiricist, so the unnecessary solidification of his system

<sup>17</sup> “Is Roman Catholicism Reformable?” *Christian Century* 82 (1965) 1152–54.

<sup>18</sup> *PR*, pp. 4, 5.

is a fault in the theologian. When a theological system fails to be consistent with a "fact," it means either that the possible interpretations of the "fact" are being unduly restricted from below, or that the theoretical structure into which the "fact" is being subsumed requires readjustment. Theology aims at synthesis, not at exclusion. The creation of a theology is a venture in explanation. Furthermore, there can be (and are) diverse orthodox theologies in existence simultaneously. These either (1) apply similar explanations to diverse sets of data, or (2) use different explanatory constructs to account for the same data. Also, different emphases on or evaluations of identical data result in systems dissimilar only in regard to their internal proportions. Consequently, it is not easy for the positivist to say at what point in theology his evidence is even *pertinent*. The positivist who has embarrassing data to peddle is obliged to knock on all the doors before he concludes that no one can afford to pay for his product.

Let us return to the examination of ways in which doctrinal error can convey a quota of truth. Consider, first, an orthodox proposition. The proposition is true and its contradictory false. But this only means that in no area in which it is *applicable* does it fail to apply truly. It does not imply that it is relevant to every situation, and never negligible. The doctrine of the Assumption, for instance, is one which is considered by Roman Catholics to be analyzable into several true propositions. But quite possibly this doctrine has importance and explanatory power only for a limited range of data, and connects only tenuously with other parts of the system to which it belongs. To be sure, it coheres with orthodox doctrine on the Resurrection, Ascension, and eschatology; it enlarges our notion of what being a "redeemed creature" can involve; and it strengthens the Christian appreciation of the flesh. Finding further areas of relevance for the doctrine will be both fruitful for the Church and a test of the theologian's ingenuity. But by and large it does not hold its own in relation to the central insights of Christianity. The fact remains, however, that any proposition contradictory to it would be a doctrinal error subject to anathematization. But this state of affairs is ambiguous, and might imply either that the erroneous proposition (1) is part of a satisfactory explanatory system which has failed to use pertinent data, or (2) belongs to a system which is unsatisfactory only because it has adjusted itself to account for data which are

in fact false or irrelevant, or (3) involves true and relevant data but incorporates them into an incoherent or inadequate explanatory system. However, the erroneous proposition need not be thought of as devoid of all truth. There is a way in which it may very well be true in every respect. It may (4) belong to a satisfactory explanatory system correlated to a narrow set of data to which the orthodox doctrine is not, because of its *own* narrowness, applicable. In the first three cases the onus of readjustment lies with the condemned proposition; but in the fourth case it is evident that readjustment is also incumbent upon the orthodox system. The impasse has been brought about by limitations on both sides. In the fourth case we are dealing with doctrines which are merely different, not contradictory. The limitations of the opposed systems within which the doctrines occur account for the differences. And the limitations are not past remedy. Consequently some orthodox and heretical doctrines are theoretically capable of being welded together without the dismissal of one or the other by a "negative prehension." I shall appeal to Whitehead once more for an account of how such a welding might take place.

In his most mellow book, *Modes of Thought*, Whitehead asserts that "in the nature of things there are no ultimate exclusions, expressive in logical terms."<sup>19</sup> He is treating inconsistency, conjunction, and togetherness.

The concept that two propositions, which we will name  $p$  and  $q$ , are inconsistent, must mean that in the modes of togetherness illustrated in some presupposed environment the meanings of the propositions  $p$  and  $q$  cannot both occur. Neither meaning may occur or either may occur, but not both. Now process is the way by which the universe escapes from the exclusions of inconsistency.<sup>20</sup>

Inconsistency is resolved into forms of togetherness by *process*. (Where does process leave positivists? Standing in Hartshorne's dust.) In the context of our own problem, process corresponds to development of dogma. The togetherness into which conflicting doctrinal propositions of certain types might be integrated is that of a broader explanatory theological system. To overcome type-4 inconsistencies, orthodoxy would need to develop a theory powerful enough to account both for its own previous more limited theory and the data with which that

<sup>19</sup> *MT*, p. 76.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

theory was correlated, together with the alternate explanatory system plus the data with which *it* was correlated. The higher synthesis  $S_1$  would embrace the orthodox theology  $S$  with its data  $D$ , and the alternate theology  $S'$  with its data  $D'$ . The construction of the hypothetical  $S_1$  is, naturally, the task of future generations.  $S_1 \dots S_n$  would be an ascending hierarchy of consistent theologies inclusive of all lower-grade theologies. A complicated task, indeed; but we are reassured by the suspicion that areas of conflict in existing theologies are often haphazard and sometimes silly, so that a complete overhaul may not be needed.

Whitehead, in an earlier more technical passage, names two ways in which this sort of harmonization occurs. The first of these depends on the principle that

a readjustment of the relative intensities of incompatible feelings can in some cases reduce them to compatibilities. This possibility arises when the clash in affective tones is a clash of intensities, and is not a sheer logical incompatibility of qualities. Thus two systems of prehensions may each be internally harmonious; but the two systems in the unity of one experience may be discordant, when the two intensities of their subjective forms are comparable in magnitude. There may be a discordance in feeling *this* as much as *that*, or in feeling *that* as much as *this*. But if one be kept at a lower intensity in the penumbra of feeling, it may act as a background to the other, providing a sense of massiveness and variety. This is the habitual state of human experience. . . .<sup>21</sup>

This way of resolution requires the subordination (without the elimination) of one of the constituent elements. Another way of resolution does not involve such subordination, but employs instead a new element of higher power. It is brought about

by spontaneity of the occasion so directing its mental functionings as to introduce a third system of prehensions, relevant to both the inharmonious systems. This novel system is such as radically to alter the distribution of intensities throughout the two given systems, and to change the importance of both in the final intensive experience of the occasion. This way is in fact the introduction of Appearance, and its use [is] to preserve the massive qualitative variety of Reality from simplification by negative prehensions.<sup>22</sup>

The "novel system" here is the  $S_1$  of the preceding paragraph. (Briefly, "Appearance" is novelty entering the actual, "Reality," from the pole of the possible.<sup>23</sup>)

<sup>21</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York, 1962) p. 259; hereafter referred to as *AI*.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 260.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 210-13.

Orthodoxy has been adept in the past at noticing incompatibilities between her own propositions and the counterpropositions of heresy. But if we follow Whitehead, we must say that the states of incompatibility were conditioned, at least in part, by their limited historical settings. Orthodoxy is wrong, then, in supposing that all the formerly valid modes of exclusion must remain forever valid in all subsequent settings. Sometimes orthodoxy even attempts to thwart the emergence of new settings—historical and political as well as conceptual or theoretical—which might threaten the validity of the old exclusions. For example, can orthodoxy, in spite of an improved understanding of New Testament parables—and in spite of Blake—still straightforwardly maintain that no way is known of absorbing the ancient (and persistently recurrent) theory of *apokatastasis*? Orthodoxy's aim should rather be the incorporation of widely varying Christian insights, and this can only be done by expanding her own skin. Otherwise she will be forced to repeat the monotonous warnings of incompatibility: *anathema sit*. To be content with this state of affairs is to be in the condition Whitehead calls *decadence*. "Advance or Decadence are the only choices offered to mankind. The pure conservative is fighting against the essence of the universe."<sup>24</sup> Defined as "Wisdom," theology must set herself the task not of consigning to oblivion whatever contradicts her, but of finding ways of mutual adjustment with as little mutual mutilation as possible. "Wisdom is proportional to the width of the evidence made effective in the final self-determination."<sup>25</sup> Theology will be enriched only to the degree that she is consistently able to incorporate a wide spectrum of values and ideas. The "'aim at contrast' is the expression of the ultimate creative purpose that each unification shall achieve some maximum depth of feeling, subject to the conditions of its concrescence."<sup>26</sup>

The negation of heretical propositions on the part of orthodoxy has a parallel in the negation of orthodox propositions by competing theologies. The prime example is, of course, the Reformation. At that time there was, in the name of biblical simplicity, a great lopping off of doctrine. Trent retaliated by negating these negations. The anathemas

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 273.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>26</sup> *PR*, p. 381. For a more concrete discussion of the adjustment of theological incompatibilities, see my "Newman's *Apologia* and Lackmann's Ecumenism," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 2 (1965) 406–25, esp. principles "Two" and "Five," pp. 414, 422–23.

of that Council are frequently phrased in this fashion: "If anyone says that such and such a doctrine is *not* true, *anathema sit*." Now in the light of what was said above, it becomes possible for orthodoxy to admit that the protesters were often right in their sense of the disharmony between what they saw in the medieval Church and what they felt was required by the true spirit of Christianity, without having to admit that what the anathemas stated was therefore not true; for, granting that in a particular case the Reformer was moving in the right direction by devaluating one doctrine and setting another in its place, his flat rejection of some devaluated doctrines amounted to what we referred to earlier, in Whitehead's terms, as "negative prehension." The sickness and "disharmony" within orthodoxy was overcome by "anaesthesia."<sup>27</sup> What the anathematizing Council father (viewed benignly) wished to assert was that the Reformer was wrong if he maintained there was *no place at all* in Christian theology for a highly restricted and properly modified doctrine of, say, indulgences. (Actually, Trent's belated statement on indulgencies in Session 25 is not in the form of a canonical anathema.) The Reformer, on the other hand, was right, and his judges wrong, in regard to his estimation of the importance due to the idea and practice of granting indulgences; for it is surely a mistake to accord to any imaginable true positive proposition about indulgences more than an nth hundredth of one percent of value in Christian life and thought as a whole.

I have sketched some of the phenomena connected with the clash of doctrinal propositions, and have underlined the behavior of "errors" and "anathemas" as negatives. I have insisted that theology must assume the task of seeking higher syntheses in which the contradictories can be reconciled. The philosophical terms in which theological ascent was described were Whiteheadian rather than Hegelian. This theological process needs to be elaborated and confronted anew with the problems of "qualification" and "falsification" dealt with in the first section. This I shall proceed to do. Let me only point out that it should now be clear to the reader that the difficulty over theological qualification of doctrine raised by the positivist critics against the claims of religious statements to be genuine assertions is similar in structure to the problem which orthodoxy's claim to inerrancy throws up to the theory of

<sup>27</sup> *AI*, pp. 255-59.



doctrinal development. The similarity can be expressed in a neat proportion—assertion:qualification::inerrancy:development. My position is that each of the four terms of the proportion has its proper place in orthodox Christian theology.

#### DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT AND QUALIFICATION

Not counting pale anticipations in Tertullian's late Montanist works, the first contribution to the theory of the development of doctrine was Cardinal Newman's *Essay* of 1845. I shall not begin, however, with Newman, but with Whitehead, his legitimate heir. One of Newman's cardinal principles was that primitive adumbrations of a doctrine are to be interpreted in the light of later more detailed statements of it, and Whitehead provides these.<sup>28</sup> At one time Whitehead contemplated theology as a career, and his abiding interest in and helpful insights into the philosophy of religion well fitted him to understand Newman. He refers to Newman's *Essay* in *Science and the Modern World* and acknowledges a debt to it in *Adventures of Ideas*.<sup>29</sup> Certainly Newman's thought is congenial to some of the main lines of Whitehead's process philosophy. The two men can often be made to illuminate one another.

Newman's philosophical background in British empiricism gives him affinities with the present-day linguistic analysts.<sup>30</sup> Whitehead too, in some of the very passages which speak most plainly on the theory of doctrinal development, shows an awareness of the kind of difficulty recently made urgent by British philosophy.

The great point to be kept in mind is that normally an advance in science will show that statements of various religious beliefs require some sort of modification. It may be that they have to be expanded or explained, or indeed entirely restated. If the religion is a sound expression of truth, this modification will only exhibit more adequately the exact point which is of importance. This process is a gain. In so far, therefore, as any religion has any contact with physical facts, it is to be expected that the point of view of those facts must be continually modified as scientific

<sup>28</sup> John Henry Cardinal Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (London, 1890) pp. 15, 16, 106, 114, 126, 134, 155. See also Newman's "The Theology of the Seven Epistles of St. Ignatius," in *Essays Critical and Historical* (London, 1910) pp. 222-61.

<sup>29</sup> *SMW*, p. 163; *AI*, Preface, p. [7].

<sup>30</sup> James Collins (ed.), *Philosophical Readings in Cardinal Newman* (Chicago, 1961) pp. 28-29.

knowledge advances. In this way, the exact relevance of these facts for religious thought will grow more and more clear. The progress of science must result in the unceasing codification of religious thought, to the great advantage of religion.<sup>31</sup>

Notice the word "modification." The situation Whitehead pictures is a replica of the one that irks Flew. When faced with some "advance in science," religion rephrases its claims by making wholesale modifications and qualifications. For Flew, the rephrasing is a retreat; for Whitehead, a "gain."

Whereas science rejoices in modifications, religion, Whitehead observes, has in the past usually displayed a fear of change. Rather than accept happily the "series of novel situations" produced by science for human thought and life (the theories of evolution, psychoanalysis, and relativity, and their consequences), religion has yielded to them only by force, and the result has been an "undignified retreat" which has "almost entirely destroyed the intellectual authority of religious thinkers."<sup>32</sup> The stubbornness of the retreat, not the retreat considered as a modifying activity, is what displeases Whitehead. Flew would be partly pleased and partly displeased with the modifying activity. He would not object to modification on the ground that it leads away from truth, for he would probably say that only by severe modification could religious doctrines become palatable. His objections are that modification is (1) a disguised abandoning of a position formerly held as unshakable, and (2) a Protean wriggle or red shift which forever deprives religious doctrines of empirical moorings. Now Whitehead, like Newman, holds that there are "principles" which remain unalterable throughout the process of development.<sup>33</sup> If they are right, a non-retreating stable meaning could be found among those principles (as for there being an empirical criterion among them, that is another question). However, I shall touch upon this opening only briefly at the end of this section, and examine instead the topography of "qualification" and "development of doctrine" according to Whitehead and others.

The theist whom Flew hales into court is made to qualify the assertion "God loves us as a father loves his children" by adding that this love is "not a merely human love."<sup>34</sup> Let us consider the theologian's

<sup>31</sup> *SMW*, p. 169.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168; see also *RM*, p. 136.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140; Newman, *Essay on Development*, p. 324.

<sup>34</sup> Flew, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

qualifications from the point of view first of *expression* and then of *limitation and generality*.

Part 4 of Whitehead's *Religion in the Making* (which he thought of as a sister volume to *Science and the Modern World*)<sup>35</sup> is titled "Truth and Criticism." The first two subsections are "The Development of Dogma" and "Experience and Expression." In the former he says: "the philosophy of expression is only now receiving its proper attention."<sup>36</sup> The very next year saw the publication of his own treatise on the subject, *Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect*.<sup>37</sup> But already in *Science and the Modern World* he had made some shrewd observations on expression. "Religious thought develops into an increasing accuracy of expression, disengaged from adventitious imagery: . . . the interaction between religion and science is one great factor in promoting this development."<sup>38</sup> It is impossible, of course, to go into detail here about his theory of language, although we can highlight a few points without stopping to assess them in the context of his whole system. In the quotation immediately above, we can note that he feels that the revision of historically conditioned imagery is a move toward accuracy rather than toward vacuity. He says, again, that religion's "principles may be eternal, but the expression of those principles requires continual development."<sup>39</sup> However, no precision has been made yet as to just *why* or *how* the verbal revision of doctrine is a gain instead of, as Flew thinks, a loss. But the following passage holds a clue:

Another way of looking at this question of the evolution of religious thought is to note that any verbal form of statement which has been before the world for some time discloses ambiguities; and that often such ambiguities strike at the very heart of the meaning. The effective sense in which a doctrine has been held in the past cannot be determined by the mere logical analysis of verbal statements, made in ignorance of the logical trap. You have to take into account the whole reaction of human nature to the scheme of thought.<sup>40</sup>

If this passage were glossed in the light of Whitehead's mature epistemology and theory of language, a great deal could be drawn from the

<sup>35</sup> *RM*, p. [7].

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125. Whitehead has a reference to R. M. Eaton, *Symbolism and Truth* (Harvard University Press, 1925).

<sup>37</sup> New York, 1959.

<sup>38</sup> *SMW*, p. 170; see also the passage quoted on pp. 539-40 above.

<sup>39</sup> *SMW*, p. 168.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.

words "ambiguity" and "whole reaction of human nature to the scheme of thought." He wants to point out the cleavages between doctrine, as stated in any given formula, and the truths, vaguely apprehended in the manifold of human history and experience, but only poorly expressed. In *Religion in the Making* he will say: "you cannot convey a dogma by merely translating the words; you must also understand the system of thought to which it is relevant," and "the formula is then secondary to its meaning; it is, in a sense, a literary device. The formula sinks in importance, or even is abandoned; but its meaning remains fructifying in the world, finding new expression to suit new circumstances. The formula was not wrong, but it was limited to its own sphere of thought."<sup>41</sup> Whitehead here focuses on the gap between words and meaning. If words and doctrine were equivalent, a paring away of words would entail a corresponding elimination of doctrinal meaning. On the contrary, words, for Whitehead, are not a perfect vehicle, and tend to confuse meaning as well as to convey it. Hence a revision of words may very well release new meanings, new disclosures, new aspects of truth which, in the old formula, could not break through to the surface. In a still later work he suggests that "the development of systematic theology should be accompanied by a critical understanding of the relation of linguistic expression to our deepest and most persistent intuitions."<sup>42</sup> Expanding on the sources of experience in a later chapter, he remarks:

The main sources of evidence respecting this width of human experience are language, social institutions, and action, including thereby the fusion of the three which is language interpreting action and social institutions.

Language delivers its evidence in three chapters, one on the meanings of words, another on the meanings enshrined in grammatical forms, and the third on meanings beyond individual words and beyond grammatical forms, meanings miraculously revealed in great literature.

Language is incomplete and fragmentary . . . .<sup>43</sup>

Adjustments of language are to be conceived not as the slow elimination of content from doctrine, but as doctrine's gradual enrichment. Qualification of doctrine through development is the veritable condi-

<sup>41</sup> *RM*, pp. 125, 131.

<sup>42</sup> *AI*, p. 166.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 227.

tion of meaningful theological assertion. Qualification is the agent both of precision and of deepening. We must not, of course, be so naive as to think that our mere insistence on this is enough to satisfy the positivist with his special criterion of meaning. Nevertheless the theologian has less reason now to feel disreputable when he qualifies his statements.

We have briefly considered qualification in *expression*, and will now consider a second mode of qualification expounded by Whitehead: the *recognition of the limits* within which a proposition or theory is true. As I said earlier, a doctrine such as the Assumption may very well be true without having a wide range of applicability. (By "applicability" I mean "reverberations in the rest of theology and life" or the like.) It must be kept in its place and not be allowed to crowd out more fundamental doctrines; indeed, it must always be hedged in by them. "A one-sided formulation may be true, but have the effect of a lie by its distortion of emphasis."<sup>44</sup> The appearance of "lie," which so absorbed the Reformers, is a species of what Whitehead calls "the Fallacy of Mislaced Concreteness."<sup>45</sup> The Reformers, as we saw earlier, were wrong in confusing a "mislaced emphasis" with a falsehood, but they were right in decrying the imbalance prevalent in late-medieval belief and practice. Putting a doctrine within its proper bounds amounts to preserving its inherent truth. This progressive limitation of doctrine, as needed, is a qualifying activity proper to true orthodox development of doctrine, and is theology's rightful concern. And the result of this qualifying activity, as the reader is by now ready to guess, is not a narrowing down of theology but an expansion of its explanatory range. The "higher syntheses" toward which theology stretches in its effort to incorporate the complexities of revelation and human experience are made possible, in part, by the acknowledgment of the limitations of its formulations at any given stage. Speaking of the role of philosophy (which, in this respect, he would take to be similar to that of theology), Whitehead remarks that

in its turn every philosophy will suffer a deposition. But the bundle of philosophic systems expresses a variety of general truths about the universe, awaiting co-ordi-

<sup>44</sup> *RM*, p. 123; see also p. 139. For another example, see my "Revaluating Corpus Christi," *New Blackfriars* 47 (Sept., 1966) 659-63.

<sup>45</sup> *SMW*, pp. 52-58.

nation and assignment of their various spheres of validity. Such progress in co-ordination is provided by the advance of philosophy . . . .<sup>46</sup>

He says explicitly of doctrine that "a dogma—in the sense of a precise statement—can never be final; it can only be adequate in its adjustment of certain abstract concepts. But the estimate of the status of these concepts remains for determination."<sup>47</sup> "Status" I take to mean degree of specificity or abstraction and correlative range of application.<sup>48</sup> The "adequate adjustment" is perhaps like a logical syntax whose terms require interpretation and reinterpretation. When the true status of a term (concept) is found out, the term may need to be replaced by another. Finding and using the rules of transformation for theological terms is ticklish business, but theology cannot avoid it. The Council of Nicaea transformed terms, though it worked more by intuition than by rule.<sup>49</sup> The medieval doctrine of transubstantiation was the product of unformulated rules of transformation, and today some theologians of the Roman Catholic Church want to transform the terms once more. A better-known example is Bultmann's program of demythologization. And so the absorption of lower-level generalities into higher, by which theology moves toward more effective syntheses, goes on. Whitehead gives an example from the history of science:

The fate of Newtonian physics warns us that there is a development in scientific first principles, and that their original forms can only be saved by interpretations of meaning and limitations of their field of application—interpretations and limitations unsuspected during the first period of successful employment. One chapter in the history of culture is concerned with the growth of generalities. In such a chapter it is seen that the older generalities, like the older hills, are worn down and diminished in height, surpassed by younger rivals.<sup>50</sup>

In a more detailed passage, too long to quote, Whitehead gives two other cases. The opening sentence succinctly states the theme: "A clash of doctrines is not a disaster—it is an opportunity."<sup>51</sup>

<sup>46</sup> *PR*, p. 11.

<sup>47</sup> *RM*, p. 126; *MT*, pp. 14–15.

<sup>48</sup> Whitehead, "Harvard: The Future," in *Science and Philosophy* (New York, 1948) pp. 222, 224; hereafter referred to as *SP*.

<sup>49</sup> Michael Novak, in "Newman at Nicaea," *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 21 (1960) 444–53, exploits Lonergan's epistemology (see n. 66 below) to advantage in analyzing the process of development at the Council of Nicaea; see esp. pp. 445, 449–51.

<sup>50</sup> *PR*, p. 15.

<sup>51</sup> *SMW*, pp. 166–67.

If the doctrine of "inerrancy" is to be maintained alongside a realistic theory of development, that theory must include, as Whitehead's does, an account of the incompleteness of language and the relationship between falsehood and misplaced emphasis or unnoticed limitation. The theory of development proposed by Karl Rahner makes at least a gesture towards meeting these two requirements. I shall give an extended passage from his *Theological Investigations* and then evaluate a criticism of it offered by the Lutheran theologian George Lindbeck.

In the first place it is obvious that a revealed truth remains what it is, remains precisely 'true', i.e. it corresponds to reality and is always binding. What the Church has once taken possession of as a portion of the Revelation which has fallen to her share, as the object of her unconditional faith, is from then on her permanently valid possession. No doctrinal development could be merely the reflexion of a general history of humanity, a history of civilizations containing nothing but the objectivization of the everchanging sentiments, opinions and attitudes of a continual succession of historical epochs. Such an historical relativism is simply false, metaphysically and still more theologically. Yet all human statements, even those in which faith expresses God's saving truths, are finite. By this we mean that they never declare the *whole* of a reality. In the last resort every reality, even the most limited, is connected with and related to every other reality. [Note the exact fit with Whitehead's metaphysics.] The most wretched little physical process isolated in a carefully contrived experiment can only be described adequately if the investigator possesses the one comprehensive and exhaustive formula for the whole cosmos. But he does not possess such a formula; he could have it if and only if he could place himself in his own physical reality at a point which lay absolutely outside the cosmos—which is impossible. [The last point, made against empiricism, accords with an epistemology of perspective.] This is even more true of spiritual and divine realities. The statements which we make about them, relying on the Word of God which itself became 'flesh' in human words, can never express them once and for all in an entirely adequate form. But they are not for this reason false. They are an 'adaequatio intellectus et rei', in so far as they state absolutely nothing which is false. Anyone who wants to call them 'half false' because they do not state everything about the whole truth of the matter in question, would eventually abolish the distinction between truth and falsehood. On the other hand, anyone who proposes to regard these propositions of faith, because they are wholly true, as in themselves *adequate* to the matter in question, i.e. as exhaustive statements, would be falsely elevating human truth to God's simple and exhaustive knowledge of himself and of all that takes its origin from him. Just because they are true, an infinite qualitative difference separates them, in spite of their finitude, from false propositions, however hard it may (even often) be in individual cases accurately to determine in the concrete where the boundary lies between an inadequate and a false statement. But because our statements about the infinite divine realities are finite and hence in this sense inadequate—that is, while actually corresponding to

reality, yet not simply congruent with it—so every formula in which the faith is expressed can in principle be surpassed while still retaining its truth. That is to say, in principle at least it can be replaced by another which states the same thing, and what is more states it not only without excluding more extensive, more delicately nuanced prospects, but positively opening them up: prospects on to facts, realities, truths, which had not been seen explicitly in the earlier formulation and which make it possible to see the same reality from a new point of view, in a fresh perspective.<sup>52</sup>

When Rahner says that the more adequate, new formulas state “the same thing,” he is dealing with qualification on the level of expression. When he adds that these formulas positively open up new “prospects,” he moves into the second kind of qualification, that of the discovery of the higher synthetic viewpoint by the careful shunting of more limited syntheses into the background.

Lindbeck’s article “Reform and Infallibility” is a fair and constructive report on the status (1961) of Roman Catholic theory of doctrinal development.<sup>53</sup> It is interesting, though, to see Lindbeck wondering whether development of doctrine does not do the same thing to infallibility which we have seen that Flew thinks qualification does to religious assertions. The tactics of theologians such as Rahner seem to Lindbeck to “evacuate infallibility of all real meaning.”<sup>54</sup> But when Lindbeck paraphrases Rahner’s “however hard it may be [to distinguish ‘false’ from ‘inadequate’]” by “exceedingly difficult if not impossible,” it indicates that he is unaware of the philosophical case which can be made—indeed, which Rahner himself makes—for the distinction. For if it were impossible to distinguish a falsehood from an inadequacy, there would be (by Leibniz’ principle of the identity of indiscernibles) no difference between the two, and there could be no point in “asserting that [inadequate statements] are errorless.”<sup>55</sup> If Lindbeck’s criticism were valid, Flew, for one, would indeed rejoice. But certainly Rahner feels that the distinction is vital, and the preceding discussion should have made it clear that, for a Whiteheadian at least, the distinction is quite defensible. In fine, when Lindbeck, after explaining the technical means which Roman Catholic theologians use

<sup>52</sup> *Theological Investigations 1: God, Christ, Mary and Grace*, tr. Cornelius Ernst, O.P. (London, 1961) pp. 43–44.

<sup>53</sup> *Cross Currents* 11 (1961) 345–56.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 346.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*



to ascertain the "limits" of propositions for which inerrancy is claimed, asks whether it is "really candid and honest . . . to go on maintaining that Popes and Councils proclaim infallible and unalterable dogmas," it seems to me that the candid answer is that it *is* candid.<sup>66</sup> For whereas Lindbeck is not required to admit that no "infallible" propositions are false, it does seem that he should accept the logical distinction between false and inadequate doctrines, together with the real possibility of their distinction in fact.

Lindbeck then goes on to ask whether the interpretational maneuver does not "undermine the basic affirmation of the Roman Church that its faith is, and always has been, identical with that of the apostles."<sup>67</sup> He is raising a challenge analogous to Flew's. What has already been said is to be taken as a partial reply. But of course it is not completely satisfactory; so in the remaining pages I will pursue the problem from a slightly different angle.

The most fruitful and defensible definition of theology is, in my opinion, St. Anselm's formula, *fides quaerens intellectum*. Though it is not a "dogma" at all, it fits Whitehead's prescription that a dogma be "adequate in its adjustment of certain abstract concepts."<sup>68</sup> The adjustment or interrelation is what is adequate, not the concepts. The status of the concepts in this particular formula has frequently received new determination. I submit that the formula would work admirably well no matter what concepts you use, as your theology improves, for *fides*, *quaerens*, or *intellectum*. However that may be, there certainly is one sense in which it is eminently applicable in the argument against the critique of developmental reinterpretation on the one hand and of clarification-by-qualification on the other. For the formula *fides quaerens intellectum* is both a *third set* in the proportion mentioned at the end of the second section and, if correctly understood, a key to the proportion itself, so that one can say "assertion:qualification :: inerrancy:development :: *fides:intellectum*." When the critic insists, "But what *is* it that you believe when you say you believe?" or "What *is* it that you claim to be inerrant?" the best answer is "It is that which I am trying to understand." Let *us* try to understand what *this* answer

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 348.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *RM*, p. 126.

means, and if we do not entirely succeed, it will only be because we are such true Anselmian theologians. We will attempt to comprehend how the "faith" of the present age can be said to be identical with the faith of the apostles, in spite of the modifications brought about through development. We need to see how the "adequate adjustments" expressed in dogmatic formulas can remain the same, whereas the concepts which succeed one another as variables in the formula do not.<sup>59</sup>

Newman, in the *Essay on Development*, wrote:

When it is declared that "the Word became flesh," three wide questions open upon us on the very announcement. What is meant by "the Word," what by "flesh," what by "became"? The answers to these involve a process of investigation, and are developments. Moreover, when they have been made, they will suggest a series of secondary questions; and thus a multitude of propositions is the result, which gather round the inspired sentence of which they come, giving it externally the form of a doctrine, and creating or deepening the idea of it in the mind.<sup>60</sup>

The variable concepts here are the three terms of "Word became flesh." The adjustments by which theology advances are the steps in the questioning process (*quaerens*) native to the human mind. Theology tries to understand (*intellectum*), through investigation and through the "series of secondary questions" which understanding evokes at every stage of the unending ascent, what was originally given as a revelation proposed for simple assent (*fides*). For example, one stage of the investigation of the Gospels issued in the *homoousion* definition and the other historically conditioned concepts in which it is imbedded. These variable and deficient concepts are not the object of faith; rather they are the tools by which faith seeks to understand. They represent the achievement of understanding at a particular time, not the ultimate object toward which understanding strives. Faith, through understanding, goes toward a "more" out in front. Yet at the same time, if a believer is asked "what" the object is in which he believes, the answer has to come in terms of *homoousion* or some later clarification of it, because, at the time he is questioned, that really is his understanding of what he believes. (If he merely assents to the *homoousion* without

<sup>59</sup> In an address given in 1939, Whitehead argues that differences in the variables affect the patterns in which they occur, though he seems to admit that the effect is negligible ("Analysis of Meaning," *SP*, pp. 136-37). For a more characteristic exposition, see the 1936 address "Harvard: The Future," *SP*, p. 224, and *MT*, p. 64.

<sup>60</sup> Newman, *Essay on Development*, p. 59.

understanding it at all, i.e., without its being the product of his own personal act of understanding, as is the case with the simple believer and most theologians, then *homoousion* stands for what is believed, and the real conceptual level of theological understanding, as distinct from belief, is somewhere lower.) Theology explains and describes its object of belief in the very terms of what it understands its belief to be—and of course the understanding is always deficient and in flux. But the creaturely concepts by which theology tries to understand are radically different from the acts of assent by which it believes. Its manufactured concepts do not become its object of belief, even when they are crystallized in inerrant doctrinal formulas—that would be idolatrous as well as foolish. As Whitehead says, the formula “expresses something beyond itself”; it “sinks in importance, or even is abandoned; but its meaning remains fructifying in the world, finding new expression to suit new circumstances.”<sup>61</sup> “The dogmas of religion are clarifying modes of external expression.”<sup>62</sup>

The critic remains puzzled, however, because when he asks the Anselmian theologian simply to *specify* his belief without further ado, the theologian replies that what he believes is what he is trying to understand, but that, at the same time, the belief is distinct from his understanding of it. “Very well then,” repeats the critic, “if belief is different from understanding, forget about the understanding, and just tell me *what you believe*.” Should the theologian then recite him a creed or read him a page of Aquinas? The *creed* says what he believes—not the *Summa*. Yet he will explain what the *what* is by reading from the *Summa*. That, then, is what he believes? No, because in a day or two he will be reading from Rahner. The theologian holds that his belief is tied up in a *process*, and that although he can, at any given moment, produce some conceptual explanation of the object of his belief, he must insist that he does not equate any partial product of the process, or the process itself, with the process’ termination. The theologian’s belief always has a definite conceptual shape which he can propose to the critic as the “meaning” of his belief; but since that conceptual shape is but an imperfect part of a larger structure not yet fully formed, it belongs to the essence of that shape to be destined for qualification

<sup>61</sup> *RM*, p. 131.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

both by way of expression and by way of increasingly less limited conceptualizations. Belief is both a beginning and an end, with understanding coming in-between. The beginning will not satisfy the critic, and the end is not available to the mortal theologian, so they must learn to make do with the in-betweens.

(Since the theologian as theologian is a special case of the believer, I should remark that his process of understanding is paralleled in the simple believer by a process which is more rich and Christian than the intellectual process considered in isolation: namely, the growth *into* (*eis*) Christ through love—which produces love's complement of con-natural or experiential knowledge.)

The heuristic structure of knowledge which we are here dealing with is accorded a place of honor in Whitehead's epistemology. No theory of understanding or belief can afford to ignore the mind's questioning character. On the one hand, the process of intellectual penetration is "deficient in meaning" if it lacks all completion whatsoever (and so theology is always concerned to produce definite concepts); on the other, "to feel completion apart from any sense of growth, is in fact to fail in understanding."<sup>63</sup> "We can never fully understand. But we can increase our penetration."<sup>64</sup> The theologian could well adopt as his own norm Whitehead's picture of Plato's mind in action, "with its ferment of vague obviousness, of hypothetical formulation, of renewed insight, of discovery of relevant detail, of partial understanding, of final conclusion, with its disclosure of deeper problems as yet unsolved."<sup>65</sup> The facticity of Christ clothed in the language of the Gospels is the "ferment of vague obviousness"; the theologizing of the New Testament authors and the early "rule of faith" derived from the apostolic preaching is the "hypothetical formulation"; the thinking of Church Fathers, councils, theologians, historians, exegetes, poets, and saints down to the present displays the other moments of understanding in kaleidoscopic patterns. The best the theologian can do for the critic is lend him the kaleidoscope.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>63</sup> *MT*, p. 66.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>65</sup> *SP*, p. 225.

<sup>66</sup> The Jesuit theologian Bernard Lonergan has developed, quite independently of Whitehead it seems, a systematic heuristic epistemology designed primarily, like Kant's, to account for the kind of knowledge acquired in the sciences; see his *Insight: A Study of Human*

In what way then (to return to Lindbeck's question) is the developed faith the "same as" the primitive faith of the apostles? I have tried to show that what develops is our *understanding* of the faith, and that, although in a certain sense faith and understanding are dialectically coterminous, so that our understanding of the faith at any given moment is what we display when asked to designate the content of our belief, the conceptual fruit of understanding is never identical with the full "meaning" or intrinsic intelligibility of the object of belief. Moreover, it might be theoretically possible to locate a static feature (such as a "pattern," "principle," or "fact") distinct from the process of understanding, which will do duty as a permanent element in the object of faith. This feature need not be prominent among the aspects of belief, nor easily ascertainable in history, nor large in respect to the scope of material to which it justly applies. The various rules of faith of the early Church resemble patterns at least superficially, and they were designed to provide permanence and identity of belief. It would not be hard to show the prototypes of these in the kerygma of the New Testament and their derivatives in later orthodox syntheses. Or if "rule of faith" is considered in its usage as a singular, perhaps it is like a collection of permanent "principles" such as those of which Newman spoke.<sup>67</sup> Or we might follow through with Whiteheadian concepts and ask whether the object of belief is like an "eternal object" ingressing into creeds, or whether the content of a creed has a route of historical endurance like a "society" and retains permanence by "objective immortality."

To summarize. In the first section we found that the clarificatory "falsifiers" of doctrine seemed to be opposing propositions rather than "facts." In the second we noticed the ways in which such propositions did or did not actually clash with orthodox propositions. In this section we have seen that the orthodox concepts themselves are subject to

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*Understanding* (New York, 1958). He has applied his theory to the development of doctrine in *Divinarum personarum conceptio analogica* (Rome, 1959), studies of which are already beginning to appear; see Robert L. Richard, S.J., "Rahner's Theory of Doctrinal Development," *Proceedings of the Eighteenth Annual Convention, Catholic Theological Society of America*, June, 1963, pp. 157-89; *id.*, "Contribution to a Theory of Doctrinal Development," *Continuum* 2 (1964) 505-27; Frederick E. Crowe, S.J., "On the Method of Theology," *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 23 (1962) 637-42.

<sup>67</sup> Newman, *Essay on Development*, pp. 323-54.

progressively clearer expression and broader comprehension. Our answer to Flew has been, in effect, to interpose between him and us a mass of complications through which he will have to pick his way before he can directly confront us again with his challenge. We have backed off, spurting smoke, and are now waiting for his dim shape to appear again. Typical theologians, we. But though we have furnished nothing that will meet the positivist criterion of meaning, perhaps we still have learned that, whatever qualification—or doctrinal development—amounts to, it is the way in which theological meaning manifests itself.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>68</sup> The last phase of our argument may have left some readers uneasy about the casual introduction of the terms “object,” “ultimate,” “stands for,” “facticity,” and “intrinsic intelligibility.” These terms leave us with residual questions—“deeper problems as yet unsolved”—which will have to be dealt with in a study of the relation of “fact” (event, occasion) and “idea” to religious assertions. We say that we believe truths and that religious language asserts them. But is the object of belief a true proposition, or is it some “fact” which the proposition is about? Do we believe the “fact” or the proposition about the fact? A problematic along these lines can be drawn up from material in Newman, Whitehead, and others. For the time being, I suggest that “fact” and “idea” be tacked on to the proportion worked out in this paper, so that we will be left with the tentative arrangement “assertion:qualification::inerrancy:development::fact:idea::*fides:intellectum*.”