

DOGMA VERSUS THE SELF-CORRECTING PROCESS OF LEARNING

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THE PROBLEM I am attacking began to emerge about two centuries ago and has been with us in fairly clear formulation most of our own century. Thus, Maurice Blondel in 1904 and Van Austin Harvey in 1966 were able to state it in approximately the same terms. Blondel defines his problem as that "of the relation of dogma and history, and of the critical method and the necessary authority of doctrinal formulae."¹ He tells us his task is "to achieve the synthesis of history and dogma while respecting their independence and solidarity."² The execution of the task has a twofold danger: "some tend to behave as though history had to depend absolutely on dogma, others as though dogma had to proceed exclusively from history and be subordinate to it."³ Harvey's approach is different but fundamentally he deals with the same question. Over and over he charges that "orthodox belief corrodes the delicate machinery of sound historical judgment."⁴ He examines the three greats of the passing era, Bultmann, Tillich, and Barth, and concludes: "None of the three theologians makes clear how it is possible to be both a critical historian and a believer."⁵ The new quest of the historical Jesus and various other efforts to solve the problem also fail in greater or lesser degree to achieve their goal.

The mention of Blondel and Harvey will help those who move in other thought-worlds than mine to locate the problem. But it also serves to bring out the tenacity of a question that has changed so little in sixty years and is so much the same for such different writers. Blondel and Harvey differ widely in approach and in solution. Blondel was a philosopher by trade; he worked in the context of Catholic modernism; his solution was given in terms of a Catholic tradition that is "not a limitative and retrograde force, but a power of development

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¹ *History and Dogma*, in *Letter on Apologetics & History and Dogma* (tr. A. Dru and I. Trethowan; London, 1965) p. 222.

² *Ibid.*, p. 224.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *The Historian and the Believer: The Morality of Historical Knowledge and Christian Belief* (New York, 1966) p. 119.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

and expansion";⁶ his explanatory principle was a philosophy of action: "To keep' the word of God means in the first place to do it...; and the deposit of Tradition... cannot be transmitted in its entirety... unless it is confided to the practical obedience of love."⁷ Harvey works in the context of Protestant thought determined by Troeltsch; his explanatory categories are strongly historical; he postulates a perspectival image of Jesus, a memory-impression which controlled the views and beliefs recorded in the Gospels; he reconciles the conflict between doctrine and history by a theory of "soft perspectivism": "This difference in perspective may be such that the two descriptions of the same event also differ, but the two descriptions are not logically incompatible...."⁸ The contrasts, then, between Blondel and Harvey are obvious, but so is the similarity in conceiving the problem: the difficulty of holding fast to absolute beliefs on historical events when scientific research repudiates traditional "history" and itself attempts to reach no more than probabilities subject to perpetual correction.

I am not going to follow the direction taken by either Blondel or Harvey, profitable though that might be. Among other reasons, my own personal inclination leads me to attack the problem in the context of Bernard Lonergan's thought. "In the context of"—there is a handy phrase that enables me to avoid the claim that I speak for Lonergan and allows me to think in the way that is now second nature to me without always distinguishing original elements from the form they may have taken in my mind.

There is a preliminary, historical question in regard to change or development in Lonergan's own thought. I have stated my topic in terms of dogma and the self-correcting process of learning; I have done so deliberately in order to make the opposition sharp between the absolute of faith and the continual revision implied in a process that gradually eliminates misconceptions, mistakes, and plain errors. The preliminary question, however, our own little historical problem, is whether Lonergan's thinking has so changed that these terms can be said any longer to be pertinent. The self-correcting process of learning still is; in fact, one of Lonergan's latest publications applies it to the area of religious doctrines in a way hardly seen so explicitly before.⁹ But

⁶ *Op. cit.*, pp. 275-76.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 274.

⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 252.

⁹ "Functional Specialties in Theology," *Gregorianum* 50 (1969) 485-504; see p. 500: "Judgement [is open] to acknowledgement of new and more adequate perspectives, of more nuanced pronouncements, of more detailed information."

does the concept of dogma any longer apply? There are good reasons for asking the question, and I really have to delay on it a moment.

There is no doubt, then, that Lonergan's thinking has undergone a profound reorientation in the last five years, and that in a way which bears directly on the present question. If we take his *De Deo trino* to mark a kind of term in the prior phase and compare it with some of his later work, we find extremely significant differences. In the Trinitarian treatise we read, like a kind of refrain, the assertion that theology rests on truths, not on data: "non a datis sed a veris incipit."¹⁰ And this is expressly set in contrast to the sciences, both the natural and the human. But when we come to his article on the functional specialties of theology, we are struck by the fact that through several pages of what he seems to regard as his definitive statement he is able to list and describe all eight functions, to assign the ground for their division and to state its need, all without once using the word "truth." We read fourteen pages in that article before the word occurs, and then it does so rather innocuously.¹¹ Or we might compare the faculty psychology of the 1964 treatise, where Lonergan can still speak of the intellect's influence on the will,¹² with the disappearance of such language from the work of the last two or three years. His present cast of mind is much better represented by statements like this one: "man exists authentically in the measure that he succeeds in self-transcendence, and . . . self-transcendence has both its fulfilment and its enduring ground in holiness, in God's gift of his love to us."¹³

The differences are striking and I think it important to advert to them. At the same time, their exaggeration would be as wrong as their neglect. The article on functional specialties may not use the word "truth," but it uses the idea under other names, e.g., what is reasonably affirmed, judgments of fact, elimination of contradictions and fallacies, the refutation of error, the distinction between correct and incorrect understanding, etc.¹⁴ Furthermore, *De Deo trino* had already distinguished between the truth on which theology rests and the truth towards which it strives; the latter deals with an object that grows and changes, it

¹⁰ *De Deo trino* 2 (Rome, 1964) 20.

¹¹ *Art. cit.* (n. 9 above), *loc. cit.*

¹² *De Deo trino*; see, e.g., 2, 59: "Iam vero cum intellectus sit voluntatem movere atque dirigere. . ."

¹³ "The Future of Christianity," *Holy Cross Quarterly* 2 (1968-69) 5-10, at 7.

¹⁴ *Art. cit.* (n. 9 above), *loc. cit.*; see, e.g., p. 491: "Doctrines express judgements of fact and judgements of value. They are concerned, then, with the affirmations and negations not only of dogmatic theology but also of moral, ascetical, mystical, pastoral, and any similar branch."

begins with hypotheses, it may reach no more than probability.¹⁶ True, this is stated of the truth of theological understanding, not of the truth of revelation, but it does provide for the self-correcting process of religious learning already in 1964, just as the role of truth is still maintained in 1969.

There is a development but it is not a revolution. To get an accurate view of the transition, we should examine *The Subject*, which was the Aquinas Lecture for 1968. Here the new orientation seems to be emerging clearly. Truth is objective, yes, but do not be fascinated by objectivity, for there is the subject also to consider.¹⁶ The new attitude is spelled out, the faults of the old orientation are exposed, there is an admission of today's alienation from dogma. Still, that alienation is regarded as a reaction against the previous one-sided insistence on objectivity;¹⁷ we are nowhere exhorted to abandon all attachment to dogma. A similar point is made in "The Absence of God in Modern Culture"; here there is reference to the "softening, if not weakening, of the dogmatic component once so prominent in Catholic theology,"¹⁸ but this is attributed to the theologians' inability to ground their objective statements; I see no reason to think Lonergan accepts it as an optimum state of affairs or that he has abandoned his own great labor to overcome that inability. When he says, in the latest article to appear, "faith claims truth and certainty,"¹⁹ I do not think he regards the claim as false. What has happened between 1964 and 1969, I would judge, is that a new understanding of values and their role has been added. This does not eliminate the role of truth; it supplies it with a better dynamism, especially in the religious sphere.

In any case the problem is real for many of us; it exists in our minds in terms derived from Lonergan's earlier work, and I will set it forth in those terms as well as I can, with the nuances that distinguish our concept of the problem from those of Blondel and Harvey. There are such nuances, and to advert to them may forestall possible misunderstandings. Where Blondel's concern was apologetics, and Harvey's the morality of historical knowledge, Lonergan's concern has been cognitional process; he has worked on a level so fundamental that it should be relevant both to Blondel's interest and to Harvey's, but he himself has

¹⁶ *De Deo trino* 2, 23-24.

¹⁶ *The Subject* (Milwaukee, 1968) pp. 2-8. It is in this paper too that Lonergan criticizes the old faculty psychology; see pp. 19-20.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4. See p. 14 on the absolute objectivity of judgment.

¹⁸ Pp. 164-78 in *The Presence and Absence of God* (ed. Christopher F. Mooney; New York, 1969); my quotation is from p. 172.

¹⁹ "Theology and Man's Future," *Cross Currents* 19 (1969) 452-61; quotation from p. 455.

made few forays into either of their fields. Again, his work on dogma was naturally done in the context of theology, much of it in the narrower context of dogmatic treatises, whereas his work on the self-correcting process of learning was confined largely to his philosophical work *Insight*; we have, therefore, to put the two together.

Our problem, then, can be set up as follows. The relevant aspect of dogma, which it shares with all truth, is the absolute character of its positing: "Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon was a contingent event occurring at a particular place and time. But a true affirmation of that event is an eternal, immutable, definitive validity."²⁰ The absolute character of dogma can be the more strongly affirmed in that it rests on the infallible knowledge of God: "Sed qui in verbo Dei invenitur sensus, a divina scientia eaque infallibili procedit."²¹ But the self-correcting process of learning seems to suppose just the opposite of this absolute character; it seems to suppose mistakes and errors, in our beliefs as well as in our independent affirmations: "Mistaken beliefs exist, and the function of an analysis of belief is overlooked if it fails to explain how mistaken beliefs arise and how they are to be eliminated."²² As mistaken beliefs have the same roots as error in general, so their correction has the same general remedy; there is no radically new element in "the problem of eliminating from one's own mind the rubbish that may have settled there in a lifelong symbiosis of personal inquiry and of believing. For learning one's errors is but a particular case of learning."²³ That general case of learning is familiar to many of this journal's readers: "the spontaneous and self-correcting process of learning is a circuit in which insights reveal their shortcomings by putting forth deeds or words or thoughts and, through that revelation, prompt the further questions that lead to complementary insights."²⁴ Lastly, though the role of learning in historical studies is not stressed

²⁰ *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (London, 1957) p. 378. Distinguish the absolute character of judgment from "the comprehensive coherence that is the ideal of understanding" (p. 344).

²¹ *De Deo trino* 2, 20.

²² *Insight*, p. 713.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 714.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 174. Those who wish to investigate the notion further may consult the index of *Insight*. To be noted: sometimes the term "self-correcting process" is applied more precisely to common sense, in which case it is the common-sense parallel to the advance of science; this seems to be more or less the regular usage in *Insight* and it becomes explicit in "Natural Knowledge of God": "Common sense meets such questions by . . . the self-correcting process of learning. Natural science meets them by the process of direct and indirect verification" (p. 62 of article referred to in n. 34 below). However, the term is also applied to science in *Insight*, p. 303. Note also that during the learning process "one's own judgment is in abeyance" (*ibid.*, p. 286).

(Lonergan's category of "history" was not at all fully developed at the time of *Insight*), still it is sufficiently acknowledged: "As the data assembled by historical research accumulate, insights are revised continuously in accord with the concrete process of learning."²⁵ Our problem, then, is this: Does the self-correcting process of learning apply to dogma? If it does, how can dogma remain dogma? If it does not, how can dogma and historical inquiry deal with the same historical event? How bring them into confrontation? It seems as if they must be kept in quite separate and watertight compartments, the modern version of the double truth.

To meet this problem, I will adopt tactics something like those the agnostic has used against proofs of the existence of God: he forces his opponents to qualify and to qualify until, he says, the thesis has died the death of a thousand qualifications. I think the method is legitimate for me, simply because the present problem rests on a thousand misconceptions and clearing them up eliminates the problem. My first step, then, is to ask about our starting point: Is it the present, or is it the past? I will affirm it is the present, and will point out the particular cognitional stance involved in such an affirmation. Secondly, I will go on to ask about the fixed dogmas our present has inherited from the past and about their relation to human thinking and future progress. Finding that dogmas already given leave us considerable freedom to go on learning in a human process, I will ask, thirdly, how those dogmas themselves arose, and whether the learning process that was then involved required the reversal of the believer's former world. My fourth step will take us to that former world of our beginnings: I will ask whether there are dogmas in Scripture, and in what way they may exist there. My last step will be to ask how a theologian and believer can live at peace with his dogmatic foundations in the Scriptures despite the perpetual revisions that may result from critical work on the Gospels and the other writings that record our historical origin.

STARTING POINT: PRESENT OR PAST?

My answer to the first question is that our starting point is the present, and since this is going to result in a difference of stance between Roman Catholic and Protestant, where the latter may appear to be left floundering with the problem while the former escapes, I would like to assure our Protestant brothers from the outset that I am not abandoning them—I may even adduce principles that will help

²⁵ *Insight*, p. 540. The question is complex: there are revisions forced by further data, and there are those due to the advent of new investigators; in regard to the latter, we can escape relativism by passing from a descriptive to an explanatory viewpoint.

them remain Protestant! But my concern now is analysis of the data.

In some sense, surely, all of us who were born into Christian homes have the present as our starting point: it is from parents, pastors, and teachers that we learn our faith and through their witness that we adhere to Christ. But the Roman Catholic continues throughout life, or may so continue, to take as his proximate rule of faith the dogma of the Church, presented to him by those who are authorized to speak for the Church. The Protestant, I suppose, somewhere along the line is taught that the Scriptures, not the institutional and present Church, are his only rule of faith; and so, as soon as he begins to read scriptural criticism, he is involved in the problem of the historicity of the records. The difference is that the Catholic postulates continuity of the present doctrine of the Church with that of the past, and can do so according to his dogmatic principles, whereas the Protestant, in order to be a Protestant and remain consistent with his Protestant position, must postulate discontinuity.²⁶ I am not sure that Luther, in order to be a protestant, a reformer, needed to postulate discontinuity; but to be a Protestant, to belong to a separated church and to justify that separation, one must, it seems, postulate discontinuity.

I certainly do not mean to affirm that the proximate rule of faith, the magisterium of the Church, which sufficed for us when we were children and is still operative for us in adulthood, can be made an excuse for intellectual complacency and laziness. The proximate rule has to derive from the original rule. Our beliefs are not independent of certain historical events said to have occurred many centuries ago, and we cannot be indifferent to what historical research discovers in regard to those events. We must put our dogmas into confrontation with what the historians say actually happened, and achieve a symbiosis of what we believe with what we can rationally assert by means of historical science. However, I do mean to affirm that the problem loses some of its urgency for us; we can postpone it or, if we do attack it, we can live in relative peace of mind while investigation goes on. We have what Lonergan calls our existential history, prior to narrated history, to critical history, to methodical history,²⁷ to support us in the meantime.

However, that is a denominational difference in faith-attitude; theologically it is not the main thing. The basic difference here is one of

²⁶This difference I first heard expressed by Lonergan himself in his 1962 institute on the method of theology, but I believe it is widely recognized. Ritschl, we are told by Philip Hefner, was bothered by the problem of continuity, which is the Catholic principle, and discontinuity, which is the Protestant principle (*Faith and the Vitalities of History* [New York, 1966] p. 32).

²⁷*De Verbo incarnato* (Rome, 1964) pp. 9-11.

general cognitional stance, what might be called today the mindset, and this seems to me much more important for sorting out the various misconceptions that lie behind our problem. The instructive parallel is the difference between Newman and Descartes.²⁸ Descartes would begin with a universal doubt and go on to establish all knowledge on the secure basis he discovered by this method; but what in fact happened was that many accepted his starting point but could not follow his footsteps and so ended in skepticism. Newman, on the contrary, would prefer to begin from a universal credulity, with the prospect of eliminating error in due course as the truth develops and occupies the mind. This he regarded as "the true way of learning,"²⁹ and the very terms he used show how relevant his cognitional stance will be to our problem of dogma and the self-correcting process of learning.

DOGMAS: RELATION TO LEARNING AND PROGRESS

In our second step, therefore, we assume the cognitional stance of a Newman rather than of a Descartes; we take the dogmas that are the rule of faith for the Catholic child as they are for the Catholic theologian, and we ask about their relationship to human thinking and learning, especially to the historian's progress in the study of the Gospels and to the modernist's attempt at a contemporaneous doctrine. Now, without making an exhaustive inventory but confining myself to the dozen or so dogmas that enter the theological work I have done (really there are hardly more than that), I would say that they are not likely to be directly touched by Gospel criticism. My favorite dogmas are the conciliar definitions of the fourth and fifth centuries, which, Lonergan says, are couched in "catholic" language. That is, the movement of thought in patristic times was away from the particularities of the Hebrew mind, or of the Pauline or the Johannine mind, towards what is universal.³⁰ "What the Father is, the Son is too"—that is the gist of

²⁸ This point too I owe to Lonergan: see the *reportatio* of his course *De intellectu et methodo* (Gregorian University, 1959) pp. 44-45; also *Insight*, p. 716.

²⁹ John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (London, 1930) p. 377. The passage is worth quoting at greater length: "Of the two, I would rather have to maintain that we ought to begin with believing everything that is offered to our acceptance, than that it is our duty to doubt of everything. The former, indeed, seems the true way of learning. In that case, we soon discover and discard what is contradictory to itself; and error having always some portion of truth in it, and the truth having a reality which error has not, we may expect, that when there is an honest purpose and fair talents, we shall somehow make our way forward, the error falling off from the mind, and the truth developing and occupying it." Newman had formed this mentality some time before he wrote the *Grammar*; see pp. 94-95 of that work, where he quotes one of his earlier writings.

³⁰ *De Deo trino* 1 (Rome, 1964) 10-11, 13, 112; there are also indications of this idea in

the Nicene dogma.³⁰ But such a statement is a long way from direct conflict with statements on the human consciousness of Jesus. Even the dogma of Chalcedon, where it deals with the human and historical as in the statement "Whatever man is, the Son is too," does so in a way that leaves our faith free from the vicissitudes of Gospel criticism.

Similarly, if we go in the other direction, towards development of a theology based on the dogmas, there is little restriction on the learning process. The thing is that the dogmas are not a continent but a beach-head, not the sea of infinity but little islands scattered on the sea; they are not boundaries (at least, not just boundaries), they are also openings to further investigation; not a *summa theologiae*, but fragmentary items of knowledge. As Karl Rahner says of Chalcedon, it is not an end but a beginning.³¹ Once we realize the extremely narrow strip of infinity occupied by the dogmas and, as well, the general heuristic character of their formulation, many of the difficulties vanish which arose from a false perspective in which dogmas loomed as the horizon itself of religious thought. On the side of the object there is room for infinite advance; on the side of our concepts we are not bound by any supposed determinateness of our categories.

HOW THE DOGMAS AROSE

I said that dogmas are not likely to conflict directly with the results of Gospel criticism—which suggests that there may be an ultimate confrontation. In fact, there is a relationship. The dogmas claim to be true; their truth may be largely heuristic in conception, but it does refer to a concrete, historical figure who lived at a certain place in a certain time. So we have to take a third step and ask about the emergence of the dogmas. I am not yet dealing with the Scriptures, but heading in that direction. I am concerned here with the process of formulation and acceptance of dogmas, and the relation of that process to the total con-

Vol. 2, e.g., pp. 25, 28–29, 60 (to be remembered: the long introduction of Vol. 2 was largely worked out before that of Vol. 1). There is a section "De usu fontium . . ." in Lonergan's course of lectures *De methodo theologiae* (see the *reportatio* made by his students, 1962, pp. 56–57). It is extremely useful on the question of that limited general truth a theologian asks of Scripture, and on the way he may attain it with certainty despite the repeated revisions of exegesis.

³⁰ Notice that when I call this formula "catholic," I am affirming that it leaves behind the particularities of the Greek mind as well as those of the Hebrew. Nicaea was not a capitulation to Greek philosophy but a victory over it; see *De Deo trino* 1, 5–112 (summary on p. 112).

³¹ Karl Rahner. "Current Problems in Christology," *Theological Investigations* 1 (Baltimore, 1961) 149–200. Notice the title of the German original: "Chalkedon—Ende oder Anfang?" (*Das Konzil von Chalkedon* 3 [ed. A. Grillmeier and H. Bacht; Würzburg, 1954]).

sciousness of the believer.

We need now a concept of the total object of that consciousness in its conglomerate aspect. Lonergan uses the neat little phrase "the subject and his world."³² It is that "world" that I am interested in, but under a particular aspect. The original concept is Heideggerian, I think, but Palmer makes Heidegger's world "a structural whole of interrelated meanings and intentions."³³ I would qualify that statement somewhat; I think much of this world is unstructured, many of its elements are not related to the rest in any specific way. It is a conglomerate world, more like the contents of a wastepaper basket, or the collection of treasures a boy carries around in his pockets, or the odds and ends of furniture stored away in the attic of an old homestead. It is the total intentional object, then, of consciousness, the aggregate, the summation from beginning to end of the stream of consciousness, the integral of an extended lifetime, the deposit of long-continued experience. It consists of images, memories, mental schemata and associations, links vaguely made and half forgotten, things loved or feared, old ideas and new worries, questions and puzzles, answers half glimpsed, poems learned long ago by heart, words concrete and abstract, "if only . . ." formulations, suspicions, guesses, opinions, beliefs, assumptions, judgments and prejudgments, information and misinformation, commandments and precepts, graces accepted and rejected, causes to which one is committed or projects for which he is responsible—the whole precipitate of a lifetime but, like the patrimony of a community, quite undifferentiated, a hodgepodge, a conglomerate object that stands to mind-set as materials to their meaningful arrangement. Biologically stored in brain cells and nervous system, consciously it is vaguely objectified as the one vast world within the horizon of the mind, only partially explored and largely unorganized.

I think we need this concept, this view of one's world; for it is within such a total object that small and fragmentary bits of truth emerge, and it is within the religious counterpart of this "natural" world that small and fragmentary bits of dogma emerge into religious consciousness. The truth may have a fundamental role, linking us to the real as gravity links us to mother earth, but like gravity it need not figure largely in our consciousness or in our "world." No, it is the world itself in its totality that makes us what we are existentially, not the truth

³² In the article on functional specialties (n. 9 above) p. 490.

³³ Richard E. Palmer. *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Evanston, 1969) p. 133. Notice, p. 132, that Heidegger's world is not objective over against a subject (as Lonergan's is, at least in the phrase quoted) and, p. 133, that it is unobtrusive: the structural whole and the place of elements within it appear at the moment of breakdown.

that is embedded within it, not even the truth that happens from time to time to emerge into a differentiated object. When some special experience occurs, like hearing the good news of salvation, or feeling the twinge of conscience, or conceiving a great idea, or realizing at long last and accepting some fundamental truth, the experience occurs against the background of the former totality and settles into its more or less modest place in the new totality.

In the context provided by this totality we can set the self-correcting process in general and achieve those increments of truth which pertain to learning, even religious learning, without magnifying the step to the cataclysmic proportions of a complete overthrow of our world. We can do this as individuals, and we can do it as a church, for the whole Church is a learning church. What makes the learning process a traumatic experience, not to say disaster, for many of us, is our misapprehension of what is going on. We make truth *the* object of mind, looming up in solitary splendor. Not only that, but we take elements to belong to the level of truth when in fact they are mere suppositions or assumptions or plain picture-thinking. Or, when we actually have a dogma, we take it to be the comprehensive statement of the matter instead of being just a glimpse of the total truth. Then surely learning becomes a traumatic experience. Instead of a modification in the arrangement of the furniture in our world, the world itself is overturned. The truth we have learned now looms as a totality set in direct opposition to a "truth" (translate: supposition) that we held before as if it too had been a totality. But, in fact, it was previously there as part of the furniture of the mind, undifferentiated, imprecise. In Lonergan's phrase, it had not been "promoted"³⁴ to the status of truth.

What is the process of this promotion?³⁵ The immediate factor in

³⁴ "Natural Knowledge of God," *Proceedings of the Twenty-third Annual Convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America* (Washington, D.C., 1968) pp. 54-69; see pp. 59-60. The first instance of this use of "promotion" that I have noticed is in "Cognitive Structure," in *Collection* (New York, 1967) p. 229; but there it is not used of the transition from understanding to judgment. The latest instance is "Functional Specialties in Theology," p. 500.—There was recently an instructive example of the confusion that can be caused by such a misapprehension as I described of the "truths" we hold. When the decision was made to exclude various "saints" from the Roman calendar, those who thought these figures pertained to the truth of their faith were badly shaken. Others, however, who regarded St. George (say) as part of the furniture of the religious mind, but not at all as someone whose existence had been promoted to the level of truth, were quite unruffled; for them St. George, like Tobias, Santa Claus, the Holy Grail, and so forth, still pertains to the furniture of the Catholic mind, but he is more clearly located now in the conglomerate.

³⁵ I cannot think here of going into the judgmental process in detail. I must simply refer those not familiar with Lonergan to his *Insight*, especially chaps. 9-11. For some ac-

most dogmas was the question for reflection, the "yes or no" question. But generally a long period of clarification precedes such a question. Thus, at Nicaea the question was: Is the Son God in the same sense as the Father is God? The question is limpidly clear in those terms, which I borrow from Prestige,³⁶ but even at Nicaea it was clear enough. My point, however, is that that question could hardly have been asked without the labor of clarification implicit in New Testament writings and beginning in earnest 150 years before Nicaea. During that period of mental effort the Church was in the position we are in today with regard to collegiality: they did not even know what question to put in a "yes or no" form. So the ideas have to occur, they have to occur in all their variety and opposition. What we call subordinationist ideas of the Son had to appear on the scene for the consubstantiality of the Son to be clearly conceived. Similarly today, a one-sided view of the papal role, a tendency toward absolute monarchy in isolation from its subjects, such an idea had to appear and have its vogue before we could begin to conceive the situation properly.

Still the conciliar way is not the only way. There is a variety of methods by which cognitional elements in general are promoted to the level of truth. There is the formal, authoritative way in which the scientist works, striving to concoct a crucial experiment that will settle the matter definitively. There is the opposite extreme of a question too rudimentary to require more than an understanding of everyday language and a set of sensing apparatus: "Is it raining out?"—the matter is settled by looking out the window.³⁶ But in-between there is the type of community judgment illustrated by Newman's example, Great Britain is an island. It is not settled by taking a look, and I doubt

count of the dialectical process that goes on as the Church learns a new truth, I may refer to my paper "The Conscience of the Theologian with Reference to *Humanae vitae*," to appear in *Conscience: Its Freedom and Limitations* (Fordham University Press; Proceedings of the Seventh Biennial Institute in Pastoral Psychology).

³⁶G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London, 1952) p. 213.

³⁶The question of the virtually conditioned and its use in simple statements of this sort came up at the Lonergan Congress, so I must explain that I do not mean that "knowing" the fact that it is raining is equivalent to "taking a look"—though my written words may have suggested that. The full story, it seems to me, is that looking out the window is a final step in reaching the virtually unconditioned, and the judgment in this case seems simple only because there are a great many conditions that exist in a habitually fulfilled state in my mind. For one thing, the words "raining," "out," etc. have a meaning that is part of my habitual knowledge; however, they became part of my habitual knowledge only in a laborious process in which other conditions of various kinds were fulfilled. Again, knowing the difference between sleeping and waking is one of the conditions of rational judgment; that too is now habitual with me, but once it was not; I had to learn it, and in the process of learning had to reach a virtually unconditioned in which various conditions of a quite different kind from those presently relevant were fulfilled.

whether anyone ever performed a crucial experiment on the question. How, then, is it promoted to the level of truth? By something, I should say, that is parallel to what Lonergan calls "indirect verification" in the field of science: "the law of falling bodies was verified directly by Galileo, but it also has been verified indirectly every time in the last four centuries that that law was among the presuppositions of a successful experiment or a successful application."³⁷ In a similar way, a long history of wars and commerce and adventure testifies indirectly to the Briton's supposition that he lives on an island. I am not saying that community beliefs cannot be wrong: they can indeed be wrong, and for a very long time, but not when the belief comes by the very process of living under daily verification of this indirect kind. Not at least among rational men—the fanatics we have always with us (that Flat-Earth Society!).

You see where I am heading: towards the real area of controversy, the Gospels. We have dogmas in the Church, religious cognitional elements that have been promoted to the level of truth by a formal process parallel to that of science: there are ideas, then there are opposed ideas, there is debate, even violence, there is a long process of clarification, there is the settlement of the matter by conciliar action. But the question is whether there are other truths promoted to the level of truth by a more informal process, and especially about other truths before the dogmas appeared. The classic instance of dogma occurred three centuries after Christ. How did the truth exist during that period? How was it contained in the scriptural accounts of Christ? We have come to the fourth step of our investigation.

DOGMAS IN SCRIPTURE?

Let us first recognize that the believer of New Testament times had his religious "world" with an object as conglomerate as that I described for the man in the street: it is filled with assumptions, guesses, memories, pictures from the Old Testament, images of Jesus (a "perspectival" image, if you like), images too of the apostles and holy places, of saint and sinner, with commitments and hostilities, beliefs, suspicions—the whole bit. His way of looking at the structure of the universe, his view of what we call the three-storey universe, can be located without trouble in the conglomerate, at a level far below that of belief. It has not yet been promoted to truth; it has not been tested; it has not even been questioned. If the question on the structure of the universe had been put, and the answer given "The universe is a three-storey job,"

³⁷ "Natural Knowledge of God" (n. 34 above) p. 61. See also "Belief: Today's Issue," *Messenger* (Toronto), June, 1968, p. 9.

I might say that here at last we have a good solid error, but this would be, I think, to distort somewhat the mind of the primitive Christian, who would hardly conceive the question in the way I ask it.

What, then, in this conglomerate world has been promoted, at least informally, to the level of truth? The detailed answer can be given only to individually specified questions, which must be answered each on its own merits. But I would list a few categories of "truth" that can be found in the Scriptures. The first is one that in fact every one of us tacitly accepts and affirms by his conduct even while he may be denying it by his theological dissertations: it is the truth of the original kerygma, much as it is found in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4. This is so obviously foundational to the whole enterprise of sacred science that to regard it as mere imagination, the expression of mere subjective experience, a mere idea, would eliminate all truth from the Christian religion and invalidate the whole quest from the beginning (see Paul in 1 Cor 15:12-19 and Gal 1). I do not say that this proves the truth of the kerygma; I say it proves that we tacitly accept its truth in making our commitment and engaging in our enterprise. I do not say either that the kerygma has reached the carefully defined stage of the Nicene definition; I do say that it is sufficiently well defined for us to build our religious lives and our theological pursuits on it as a basis. Finally, I would make a parallel with Newman's "Great Britain is an island." In each case you have something so foundational that to reverse it would be almost literally to overturn one's world. It may be too that, where Newman's proposition is indirectly verified by a good many centuries of history, the kerygma is verified in its own way by Blondel's "faith in action." But that is not really germane to my purpose; I am not at the moment verifying our Christian faith for anyone, I am trying to locate the element of truth where it belongs.

There is a second set of cognitional elements in the New Testament that I would regard as promoted to the level of truth, those on which there has been something like particular reflection, express argument, and duly formed judgment by those whose charismatic qualities equip them to speak for the Church. This set is not well defined in my thinking yet, but a step toward clarification would be to compare two candidates for inclusion and ask why I would accept one and reject the other. I would wish then to include Paul's position on the law-gospel question; I would *not* wish to include his theological treatise on the head-dress of women in church. Why do I spontaneously make this difference when Paul argued both questions so explicitly? There is less difficulty perhaps about including the law-gospel doctrine; for this was so closely

linked with the foundational truth of Christianity, was so widely debated within the Church and settled (at least in practice, with dogmatic implications) by something like a general council. But why would I not include Paul's position on women's headdress? I suppose the marginal character of the question is relevant in helping us determine how thoroughly Paul formed his faith-judgment, but if that judgment were really formed I would wish to include even marginal items. I suppose, too, the moral field in which the question rises is relevant, since a moral question may be settled one way today and another way tomorrow when the situation is different. But there are dogmatic elements involved, so we must look further. The narrow extent of participation in the Church is relevant, again as a clue to how well and duly formed Paul's judgment may have been, but those who hold the apostles were prophets and more than prophets would not regard this as decisive if Paul as an apostle were really operating on the level of truth. This is, I think, the fundamental point. So what I am really saying is that Paul had not quite fully promoted this matter to the level of a truth of faith, that he was really only "arguing" for what seemed to him to be proper Christian conduct. My view gains antecedent probability from the context as I described it, but is also half expressed in Paul's very conclusion: "However, if you insist on arguing, let me tell you, there is no such custom among us" (1 Cor 11:16). That seems to mean "Well, even if my arguments are not convincing, do as I say anyway," and would put this cognitional element in the conglomerate somewhere beyond a mere idea, but somewhere short of truth, would locate it perhaps where we would locate a sober probability in a developing science.

All this means that we cannot escape our responsibility for judging in the twentieth century simply because the Church of our fathers spoke in the first century. We have not only to form our judgment on new questions as the early Church did, we have also to form our judgment on whether the early Church had duly made up its mind. It is not a matter of judging whether the early Church was right; we are not today going to judge the objective question all over again; if that has already been done, the decision is normative. But we are judging the *stance* of the early Church: Have we or have we not a duly formed faith-judgment of Paul or another apostle or the Church as a whole?

We have to exercise our own judgment, then; we cannot shirk that responsibility. This applies to the third set of elements in the New Testament which I think have been promoted to the level of truth: certain reflected statements where the existential sense of the word

"is" can be determined. The word "is" does not always mean such a statement; it can occur in a question, or in a supposition, or in argument on the way to truth, or in a simple piece of fiction where the real affirmation is never articulated at all.^{37a} But when John says at the end of his Gospel that he has written it in order that his readers might believe "that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (20:31), it is clear enough not only that this is the existential use of "is" but that the statement is the reflected and utterly central core of his faith about Jesus. If the Evangelist's charism means anything at all, or, if you wish, if the early Church's acceptance of his Gospel as her faith means anything at all, then we have here a cognitional element promoted to the level of truth and normative for the later Church. I would go further and say the same about the other Evangelists insofar as their "theses" can be determined; for each of them has a thesis too, though it may not be articulated as neatly at the end of his Gospel as it is in John's. There is no need to demand from them an elaborate conceptualization of their message, any more than it was necessary to do so in regard to the kerygma itself. There is no need to suppose that any of them, or all of them together, wrote the definitive Christology. Even if they are just like the blind men around the elephant (and I think the most trenchant critics would grant that much), they have said something true and normative.

DOGMATIC FOUNDATIONS AND PERPETUAL REVISIONS

I come now to my fifth and last question, which is perhaps the step the reader has been waiting for. All that I have said might be admitted by the believer familiar with the problem of Blondel or Harvey; he might still say that I have not met the historians where they take their stand, on the question of the *ipsissima verba* and the *ipsissima facta* of the historical Jesus. I have talked about the Gospels; I have not talked about Jesus of Nazareth. Do not expect too much from me at this point; I am neither an exegete nor a historian, and I do not intend to take time out for several years to equip myself to do their work. What I promised to do is talk about the way a dogmatic theologian (and a believer) can live at peace with his dogma on Jesus and even relate it to work on the historical Jesus, allowing for the perpetual revisions that advancing historical science may require. I will illustrate this rather

^{37a} This was not well put. There is a difference between the use of "is" in a question or supposition and the positing of "is" in a statement, but the existential *intention* is present in each case ("existential," i.e., in the Neo-Thomist use of the word).

briefly and in one example only; still, that example is taken from a crucial area, that of the knowledge Jesus had.

There is a dogmatic thesis that Jesus had what we call the beatific vision. It is commonly regarded as a "truth" that is *proxima fidei*, that is, an element of doctrine that is just short of having been promoted to the level of an article of faith. The authorities would certainly take a dim view of its denial, and so would I, on independent theological grounds. It has a history: I have not traced it through the New Testament, but the scriptural basis is growing clear in John's conception of the Saviour. The Fathers took very difficult and important steps in distinguishing human operations from divine; the Scholastics elaborated distinct elements in the human knowledge. But I would say it is possible for a naive realist to read all this long history and be utterly incapable of handling the problem of the "beatific vision" and the "ignorance" of the last day, a problem that would seem to put dogma and history in direct conflict but really loses its urgency in the Lonergan view of Christ's human knowledge.

No reader of this journal thinks of the beatific vision as resulting from a special pair of binoculars enabling one to see an old man with a long white beard. The beatific vision is understanding; it is understanding of God; God is comprehensively conceived as *ipsum Esse*, in the rolling Latin into which they translated John Damascene: "totum enim in seipso comprehendens, habet ipsum esse velut quoddam pelagus substantiae infinitum et indeterminatum."³⁸ Now Lonergan's thesis of 1964 on the knowledge of Christ (I believe it was his last piece of work as a "scholastic" theologian) struggles with the relationship of this *scientia ineffabilis*, which is that of a vision of God that cannot be uttered, to a *scientia effabilis* that characterizes Jesus' historical life and can be communicated to his fellow man.³⁹

I will not go into this; if it is familiar I need not; if it is not familiar, a few minutes of explanation would not help much. But let us remind ourselves that *scientia ineffabilis* does not mean simply that human words are lacking; it means more fundamentally that human ideas and concepts are lacking. The illuminating parallel is that of the mystics—illuminating because they talked much more about their psychological experiences than Jesus did. They simply could not express what they had "seen" (translate: understood), they had to resort to "pictures" of a garden being watered or of a castle that has rooms within rooms, the

³⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1, q. 13, a. 11.

³⁹ *De Verbo incarnato*, p. 332.

interior mansions.

The point is that Jesus did not look at a series of "objects" of knowledge lined up on the shelves of the divine mind, and then turn to communicate to His disciples the secrets of that vast warehouse, perhaps making a mistake as He did so. The point is that there is an infinity between the object of His vision and particular items of the created world and human history. What was given to Jesus was not an encyclopedia of the divine ideas, all conveniently arranged in alphabetical order (Aramaic language). There just is not and cannot be any such direct transfer as naive realism would conceive from beatific vision to daily life. The one is so remote from the other as an "item" of knowledge that in the course of a long lifetime, or even in the course of an era of human history, men might never bring them into relationship; much less, then, is this going to occur in the short span of thirty years. I say it is remote as an item of knowledge; I do not mean that it does not guide and guarantee particular items, only not in the way a premise guides a conclusion, or a yardstick guarantees my estimate of length. It is more like our notion of being. That is only a notion, where Jesus had understanding; our notion is empty, only an anticipation, where the understanding of Jesus was full and actual. But there is a similarity of role: just as our notion of being is remote from our judgment on today's weather as an item, while guiding and guaranteeing it in a fundamental way, so the vision Jesus had can be related both remotely and immediately to His judgments in the human and historical sphere. As our notion of being hardly comes to our attention, though it is so basic in human consciousness, so the vision of Jesus could guide His judgments without having the alerting character of an alarm bell or compass needle.

I would go farther, then, than Blondel. Where he explained the early Church's expectation of an imminent parousia in terms of what the disciples could absorb of the Master's message,⁴⁰ I would explain it more basically in terms of what the Master could Himself conceive in a human way. I would say that, side by side with the vision of God, in a relationship that was both remote and immediate, there was the conglomerate that is the world of every man. Within this conglomerate, guided and guaranteed by the vision, but in such a way that the relationship could perhaps remain unattended to, a vision of man and his world slowly emerges. This emergence is quite compatible with the

⁴⁰ *Op. cit.*, pp. 246, 275, etc. But notice, p. 284, that Blondel too acknowledges a finite element in the human knowledge of Jesus.

normal biological and psychological stages of human growth. There is nothing in the vision of God that prevents a boy of twelve who is just coming to puberty from reflecting in a way he never did before on the meaning of life, or coming to a sense of his vocation and realizing that he must devote himself untrammelled to the Father's business. As the years go on, this understanding of the destiny of man, of man's responsibility for conducting himself in such a way as to remain open to communion with the All, of the awful possibility of closing himself to such communion, of the terrible consequences of the daily *kairos*, this understanding may grow sharper and express itself in the parables of crisis. Along with this there may begin to emerge the understanding of a need for a fundamental option between the "merely human" and the divinely human, of the need to die to the human in order to set it in proper proportion and to begin to live the divinely human life. But this whole process is compatible with, indeed supposes, no formed judgment whatever on a variety of questions (which may include the date of the last day) that are not immediately related to the task in hand. Etc., etc., etc. That "etc., etc., etc." means I am growing lazy. I am satisfied in my own mind with having seen how one might proceed in reconciling the human experience of Jesus which the historian investigates with a particular doctrine, a quasi dogma, that is of some importance in theology.

To recapitulate now the last four steps of my argument: There is dogma; it is normative, the core of our faith and the basis of our theology; but it is of a sort that leaves the historian singularly free to pursue his investigations. The dogma arose in a learning process, but the effect of its emergence was not to overturn one's religious world, it was merely to bring some elements in the conglomerate object of consciousness into clear relief. There is basis for dogma in Scripture, but we have hardly begun yet to work out in any systematic way the catalogue of such unformulated dogmas, or the conditions under which we might affirm them to be contained in Scripture. Further, the elements that seem the most likely candidates for inclusion in the catalogue are not such as to corrode "the delicate machinery of sound historical judgment." This is tested, sketchily, in the particular case of the knowledge Jesus had. I consider that the supposed opposition between dogma and the self-correcting process of learning has died the death of a thousand qualifications. Maybe, if it enjoys a resurrection in the minds of my readers,

my laziness will be pushed to a more accurate account of my position or, if that proves impossible, to an abandonment of what is untenable.⁴¹

⁴¹ The following question was also put to me at the Congress: Do you exclude a priori at least *some* propositions that would falsify dogma, e.g., that Jesus was a fraud? Must you not hold that historical investigations cannot produce evidence for such a proposition? And then do you not determine history by dogma? To this I would answer that there are propositions which in principle are not falsifiable: e.g., the fundamental validity of cognitional process in general, which has to be assumed in the very attempt to falsify it. Next, there seems to be a somewhat similar situation in faith. The adherence of faith is a first in its own order; all further pursuit of truth about Christ supposes such an adherence as its basis. That Christ is a fraud would therefore be excluded by faith somewhat as the falsifiability of cognitional process in general is excluded by one who tries to understand the process and judge upon it.—But now it seems to me we must go deeper. To deny the fundamental validity of cognitional process is not only to issue in internal contradiction but also and more importantly to reject cognitional process and its validity as a *value*. Similarly, to open the question whether Jesus was a fraud is not only an internal contradiction for the believer but a rejection of the value that has been revealed to him. The believer accepts that value and does regard it as impregnable by history, but I wonder if the historians do not accept parallel values of their own which they attach to the past and assume in the very exercise of their vocation. In any case, if they escape internal contradiction in regard to Christ by not believing, we cannot say they forever escape the more fundamental confrontation with values whose rejection is far more serious than internal contradiction.