

JOHANN ADAM MÖHLER AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF DOGMA

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INTRODUCTION

STUDENTS of the development of dogma and of the nineteenth century contributions to this special discipline of Catholic theology are invariably referred to Newman's *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*. The English Cardinal is without question the greatest figure of the century in this field. He is, however, not the first or only authority, as he himself states that the viewpoint from which his book is written "has at all times, perhaps, been implicitly adopted by theologians, and, I believe, has recently been illustrated by several distinguished writers of the continent, such as de Maistre and Möhler."¹

Though his work was in no way influenced by Möhler,² Newman himself was fully aware that the German theologian was a ranking authority on the question of the development of dogma. It is more than a mere coincidence that both, though their individual approach differed, were working on the identical subject at almost the same time. Prevailing trends and circumstances demanded a more systematic treatment of this phase of theology. In Germany, for instance, interest in the question of doctrinal development had been steadily growing since the last decades of the eighteenth century. This interest was due in no small measure to the works of a number of non-Catholic writers, who were the first to deal with the question.³

These authors were influenced and motivated on the one hand by a new philosophy of history, a product of the Romantic Revival, and on the other by the "theory of accommodation" (*Lehre von der Akkommodation*), then coming into vogue among many Protestant theologians

¹ 16th ed. (London: Longmans, 1920), p. 29.

² Henry Tristram, "J. A. Moehler et J. H. Newman. La pensée allemande et la renaissance catholique en Angleterre," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, XXVII (1938), 184-204.

³ St. Löscher, "J. A. Möhler und die Lehre von der Entwicklung des Dogmas," *Theologische Quartalschrift*, XCIX (1917/18), 35.

and historians. Their philosophy of history centered around two main ideas: first, that the State and every human society must be conceived and evaluated as a living organism; and secondly, that there is a demand for, and a possibility of, infinite progress in every sphere of human activity, a progress which is itself something organic and vital. The "theory of accommodation," on the other hand, proposed as an undeniable fact that Christ and the Apostles had, by force of necessity, accommodated themselves to certain views and customs of their time; that in the subsequent centuries the Church had gradually freed herself from these time-bound expressions and limitations of her dogmatic teaching and ritual performances; and, furthermore, that this emancipation from antiquated, now often worthless and lifeless traditions must be considered as one of the organic functions ever active in the Church.

As is obvious, these tendencies led directly to, and demanded a development of dogma, the last criterion of which—quite in harmony with the rationalistic tendencies of the time—was human reason. Human reason, guided not so much by faith and tradition, but primarily by new philosophic and scientific findings, was called upon to determine anew for each generation the contents of faith and to harmonize Christian teaching with the exigencies of the modern world.⁴

This, of course, necessarily meant the disintegration of Christian teaching and dogma. Catholic authors were thus called upon to defend their faith against the many threats from this quarter, and the question was raised—not for the first time in the history of Catholic theology—whether Catholic dogma admits a development. The newly arisen controversies called for a strictly dogmatic explanation which, "though tenaciously adhering to the facts as proven by history, would nevertheless sufficiently preserve the teaching of the Church regarding the definite and unchangeable character of the Christian revelation entrusted to the guardianship of the Church."⁵

In dealing with this Catholic reaction against the prevalent Protestant views, Lösch, in the article already cited, discusses the attitude of some of the outstanding Catholic theologians and the more im-

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 32-36. L. de Grandmaison, S.J., "Le Développement du dogme chrétien," *Revue pratique d'apologétique*, VI (1908), 1-33. The same, *Le Dogme chrétien*. (Paris: Beauchesne, 1928), p. 109 f.

⁵ *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* (Paris, 1924), IV/2, 1629.

portant theological schools in Germany—Landshut, Vienna, Würzburg and others. He comes to the following conclusion:

The problem of the 'perfectibility of dogma' received wide attention in all theology of the time. The solution, repeatedly stated in the different variations of the language of Romanticism, is fundamentally one and the same: an objective perfectibility is untenable in the Christian religion, because it contains God's own revelation. A subjective perfectibility, however, is possible and has, as a matter of fact, always taken place in the history of Christian theology. The theological school of Tübingen [Möhler], too, does not go any further.⁶

Möhler, then, was not the first to deal with development of dogma. He was only one of many Catholic theologians to defend the Catholic position against the rationalistic and Protestant attack. He was, however, the first to press the offensive. Though he did not treat the development of dogma *ex professo*, nor deal systematically and at length with the problem in any of his writings, we do find frequent and lengthy references to doctrinal development, which enable us to discover and analyze his ideas on the subject. However, before we begin the discussion of these ideas, we must briefly consider Möhler's background and the motives which guided his literary work.

The views on doctrinal development held by Protestant authors were, as has been said above, the result both of the rationalistic tendencies then in vogue and of their counterpart, the Romantic Movement. Germany, in the beginning of the nineteenth century, was dominated by rationalistic thought. Conceived, born, and bred in Protestantism, these new philosophical trends had their most devastating effects in the religious field. Extreme rationalists, many of them Protestant divines, succeeded only too well in undermining the doctrinal basis of Christianity. They contested the necessity and even the possibility of supernatural revelation, set up a new rule for the interpretation of Scripture, rejected many of the dogmas thus far held in the Protestant sects, and so prepared the way for a decidedly negative hostility to the Christian religion.⁷

⁶ Lösch, *art. cit.*, p. 58.

⁷ A. Minon, "L'Attitude de J. A. Moehler dans la question du développement du dogme," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*, XVI (1939), 330 f., 360-69; J. Alzog, *History of the Church* (New York: Benziger, 1912), III, pp. 970-83. Cf. also J. B. Robertson, "Memoir of Dr. Möhler," which serves as an introduction to his English translation of the *Symbolik* (*Symbolism*, [3rd ed.; New York: Cath. Publication House], pp. 39 ff.). Both Alzog and Robertson base their account largely on Döllinger's *Kirchengeschichte*.

The reaction against these rationalistic tendencies started with the great literary and artistic movement known as the Romantic Revival, which, as someone has remarked, began "with the worship of medieval art and literature and ended with the worship of medieval religion." Upsetting the traditionally accepted hierarchy which placed reason above the other faculties of man, Romanticism exalted the importance of the irrational in man, of feelings and emotions. Against Classicism the Romantic Revival stressed not the static *esse*, but the dynamic *feri*; against Rationalism it postulated and emphasized appreciation and love of mystic thought. Historical continuity and organic growth became the dominant factors in the interpretation of everything human, of life and thought and history. Thus Romanticism was the apotheosis of eternal dynamism and immanent activity. From it sprang a profound longing for the unattainable and for the transcendent-divine, an inclination also towards the irrational and mystical, which reaches its highest expression in the consciousness of dependence on the infinite and eternal.⁸

Both the Catholic and Protestant faculties of the theological school of the University of Tübingen were strongly influenced by this reactionary movement which was to have its effects on the *Weltanschauung* of a whole generation.⁹ The first volumes of the *Theologische Quartalsschrift*, the publication of the Catholic theological faculty which was begun in 1819, are indicative of the far reaching consequences of the Romantic spirit on Catholic theology. Möhler lived and worked in this atmosphere. He was a pupil and a close friend of Drey (1777–1853), who was in sympathy with the idealistic philosophy of Schelling (1775–1854). Schleiermacher (1768–1834), who with his work *Reden über die Religion* (1799) had become the Protestant theologian of Romanticism, exercised a dominant influence, especially on the Protestant theologians of the rival faculty. Ferdinand C. Baur (1792–1860), the greatest of Möhler's opponents, was an ardent admirer and follower of Schleiermacher's philosophy and theology. Hegel (1770–

⁸ P. Chaillet, S.J., "Centenaire de Moehler: l'amour et l'unité; le mystère de l'Eglise," *Revue apologetique*, LVI (1938), 517–22; cf. the article "Romantik" in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* (Freiburg: Herder, 1936), VIII, 967 ff.

⁹ P. Chaillet, S.J., "L'Esprit du christianisme et du catholicisme. I. Les antécédents de l'Ecole de Tubingue. II. L'Ecole de Tubingue: Drey, Baader, et Moehler," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, XXVI (1937), 483–98, 713–26.

1831) and his system, too, were well known to Möhler. Several writers, interpreting Möhler's later works, have even tried to prove a strong literary dependence on Hegel.¹⁰ It is true that Möhler is indebted to Hegel, as well as to Schleiermacher and Schelling, for certain of his views, but their influence should not be overstressed. A. Minon, who discusses the question at length, comes to this conclusion:

If one wants to explain the intellectual relationship and the similar frame of mind which we have pointed out in these philosophers and our theologian [Möhler], we must, it seems, go back further than to their idealistic philosophy. Schelling, Schleiermacher, and Hegel, even though they oppose each other, preserve a certain common *Weltanschauung*, the view of the world peculiar to Romanticism. It is there that Möhler meets them, however much he may differ from them in other respects.¹¹

Möhler, then, was doubtless a Romanticist. Consequently, the chief characteristics of the Romantic Revival as pointed out above, consciousness of historical continuity, of organic growth, and of life as something dynamic and ever active, are elements of which we must not lose sight when considering and evaluating Möhler and his work. It is the thought, and often also the language, of Romanticism which more than anything else characterize his presentation of the problem of doctrinal development.¹²

The importance which we attach to Romanticism as a stimulating and driving force in Möhler's literary career must not, however, overshadow the importance of his Catholic inheritance. That Catholic thought and Catholic tradition—the faith of the Fathers and of the Church—form the most vital element in his writings becomes evident from even a casual perusal of his works. Möhler had for a time specialized in early Greek philosophy and history, “thus laying the founda-

¹⁰ So for instance K. Eschweiler, *Johann Adam Möhler's Kirchenbegriff* (Freiburg: Herder, 1930). See a refutation of his thesis regarding Möhler's dependence on Hegel by M. Preis, S.J., in *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie*, LVI (1932), 101 ff. Cf. also M. J. Congar, O.P., “Sur l'évolution et l'interprétation de la pensée de Moehler,” *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, XXVII (1938), 205-12.

¹¹ Minon, *art. cit.*, p. 366. Cf. Möhler's own defense against the accusation of the alleged similarity between certain of his views and those of Schleiermacher and Hegel, in *Neue Untersuchungen der Lehrgegensätze zwischen den Katholiken und Protestanten. Eine Verteidigung meiner Symbolik gegen die Kritik des Herrn Prof. Dr. Baur* (Regensburg: Manz, 1881), pp. 417 ff., hereafter cited as *Neue Untersuchungen*.

¹² P. Chaillet, S.J., “La Tradition vivante,” *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, XXVII (1938), 161-65. Cf. Minon, *art. cit.*, pp. 330 ff.

tion of his extensive patristic knowledge which in the years to come enabled him to break the spell of the Illumination and to lead himself and others nearer to the ages of faith."¹³ As his studies progressed his great familiarity with later ecclesiastical writers and the vast field of theological literature manifested itself more and more. Primarily Möhler was an historian, and his extensive historical research aided the dogmatic theologian. He truly saturated his mind with Catholic tradition.

A further inspiration to Möhler in his work were a number of outstanding contemporary Catholic scholars,¹⁴ including such men as Sailer, Gügler, Drey, Klee, Hirscher, and Döllinger, still a great champion of the Church. All of these belonged to the same school of thought, characterized in varying degrees by the union of extensive patristic learning and high philosophic speculation, by a great appreciation for the "living tradition" and a deep mystical conception of the Church's divine life and its functions. Möhler was at the same time their pupil and their master.¹⁵

Möhler was called upon to defend the faith. This he did especially in two great literary works which have gained him world fame: *Die Einheit in der Kirche*,¹⁶ written in 1825, and the *Symbolik*,¹⁷ published in 1832. Both books are still considered outstanding modern apologies for the Church.¹⁸

Die Einheit in der Kirche is an "attempt to expound the organization of the Church and its functions as directed by the Holy Spirit. It sets forth the spiritual unity of the faithful in belief, morals, and wor-

¹³ P. Guilday, *Church Historians* (New York: Kennedy, 1926), p. 241.

¹⁴ J. Geiselman, "J. A. Möhler und die Entwicklung seines Kirchenbegriffs," *Theologische Quartalschrift*, CXII (1931), 1-91.

¹⁵ Minon, *art. cit.*, pp. 369 ff.

¹⁶ *Die Einheit in der Kirche oder das Prinzip des Katholizismus, dargestellt im Geiste der Kirchenväter der ersten drei Jahrhunderte* (Tübingen, 1825). We cite the new edition of E. J. Vierneisel (Mainz: Matthias Grünewald, 1925).

¹⁷ *Symbolik oder Darstellung der dogmatischen Gegensätze der Katholiken und Protestanten, nach ihren öffentlichen Bekenntnisschriften* (Mainz, 1832). We cite the ninth edition (*unveränderte Original-Auflage*; Mainz: Kupferberg, 1884). It may be noted here that all the editions subsequent to the fifth retain the same pagination. References to the 5th ed. of the English translation made by J. R. Robertson (London: Gibbings, 1906), which in parts is very unsatisfactory, are added in parenthesis.

¹⁸ The present study is primarily based on these two works, since the other writings of Möhler were not available to the writer.

ship, and the visible unity effected by the hierarchy of the Church."¹⁹ As the subtitle clearly indicates, unity is to Möhler the basic principle of Catholicism and the most convincing argument against all adversaries. It is in this connection that the author treats the unity of faith. In spite of seeming changes, faith at the time of the Apostles was just the same faith that we find and live today. To demonstrate this fact, Möhler had of necessity to take up the question of development of doctrine. Though he deals with the question only in passing, as opportunity presents itself, *Die Einheit* has nevertheless been called "the pioneer monograph on the history of dogma in Germany. . . . There is no doubt that it constitutes the driving impulse which led a whole generation of German scholars to a fruitful study of the history of dogma."²⁰

His other work, the *Symbolik*, was written in answer to the attack of Protestant scholars on Catholicism in Germany. It is a discussion of the dogmatic differences between Catholics and Protestants. "Not since Bellarmine and Bossuet," to quote Guilday again, "did the Church have a champion who pressed the attack with such vigor upon the principles and consequences of the doctrines of the Reformers."²¹ In dealing with the controversial differences regarding Scripture and tradition, Möhler proves again that the Church in the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries was and is just the same as at the time of the Apostles, that she has never in any way perverted or changed the deposit of faith entrusted to her by Christ. The Church is eternally the same, because "she is the Body of the Lord, His visible form, His eternal revelation."²² From this it is obvious that Möhler could not avoid a consideration of the development of dogma.

Within six years the *Symbolik* had passed through five editions, and the Italian, French, and English translations carried the fame of the author over all of Europe. Towards the close of the century, however, it lost for a while its stirring interest. Doctrinal differences ceased to be of vital concern and were simply taken for granted. Dogmatic discussions between Catholics and Protestants became less frequent and less fruitful. But when the problem of doctrinal development was again advanced, the *Symbolik*, on account of its unique treatment of

¹⁹ P. Guilday, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 260 f.

²² *Symbolik*, p. 356 (278).

tradition, Scripture, and ecclesiology, gained a new importance. It is under these headings that Möhler deals with the development of dogma, if only as a necessary complement for the correct understanding of these fundamental teachings. For the same reason the *Einheit* likewise was redeemed from its quasi-oblivion. The reason, no doubt, is that Möhler's ecclesiology, which finds its most forceful expression in this work, and is characterized by a preoccupation with mystical thought and historical continuity, is akin to certain trends in modern theology. Thus both the *Einheit* and *Symbolik* were soon recognized as classics in the field of dogmatic development. "It is especially for French theology," remarks Lösch, "that the name of Möhler has almost become the norm; from his works it draws its constant inspiration, as can be seen in De la Barre, J. Bellamy, G. Goyau, Ph. Godet, and L. de Grandmaison."²³

DEVELOPMENT A FACT AND A NECESSITY

To Möhler immutability of dogma as well as its development are given facts. The very nature of Christianity demands that the deposit of faith be immutable. There cannot be any change in the word of God which was revealed once and for all. On the other hand, Möhler is too much of an historian not to see that the Church has actually developed her dogma, that she has taught and phrased more explicitly in the course of time certain fundamental doctrines, that she has now a very elaborate system of dogmas which, certainly in this form, cannot be found in the Church of the first centuries. There is, therefore, undoubtedly a development. But how can this be reconciled with doctrinal immutability?

To answer this question and to show why we can speak of development and where precisely it is to be found, Möhler calls attention to a twofold aspect of tradition.²⁴ He distinguishes between tradition in the objective and in the subjective sense:

Tradition in the objective sense is the universal faith of the Church throughout all centuries, embodied in outward historical testimonies. In this sense tradition is usually termed the norm and standard of scriptural interpretation, the rule of faith.²⁵

²³ Lösch, *art. cit.*, p. 31.

²⁴ Möhler quotes Vincent of Lerins' *Commonitorium*, cap. 2 (*PL*, L, 640), and the acts of the Council of Trent, sess. XIII, cap. 2, as the main sources of his exposition.

²⁵ *Symbolik*, pp. 357 f. (279).

This *depositum fidei*, perhaps inadequately defined but definitely intended by the author, cannot admit any change. The body of the revealed truths committed to the guardianship of the Church was complete with the Apostles. It may not be added to or changed in any way, "for one doctrine of faith has subsisted and must subsist through the whole history of the Church. We will not and cannot believe otherwise than the Fathers have believed."²⁶ It is the Holy Spirit, the *principium vitae* of the Church, who safeguards and guarantees the oneness and sameness of this faith.

Since this Christian doctrine is the necessarily complete expression of the Holy Spirit who vivifies the whole body of the faithful, this body can never forget or reject any doctrine. Otherwise the Spirit, who always activates the body, would be thought of as inactive. Still less can it contradict any true doctrine because then the Holy Spirit would contradict Himself.²⁷

Taken in the subjective sense, however, tradition is rather the ecclesiastical consciousness of this faith, of Christ's promises and gifts. Möhler describes it as

... the peculiar Christian sense existing in the Church and transmitted by ecclesiastical education. Yet this sense is not to be conceived of as detached from its subject matter. On the contrary, it is formed in and by this matter, so that it may be called an enriched sense. Tradition is the word of God living perpetually in the hearts of the faithful. To this sense, in so far as it is the universal sense [*Gesamtsinn*], the interpretation of Holy Writ is entrusted. The declaration which it pronounces on any controverted subject is the judgment of the Church. And the Church, therefore, is judge in matters of faith.²⁸

In this passage Möhler already states, at least implicitly, that this

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 383 (300).

²⁷ *Einheit*, p. 24.

²⁸ *Symbolik*, p. 357 (278 f.). This *Gesamtsinn* Möhler speaks of is more frequently called *Gemeinsinn*; cf. *infra*, p. 436 ff. As regards tradition, modern authors adduce the same distinction. By them, however, tradition in the subjective sense is usually termed "active tradition." Cf. A. Dorsch, S.J., *Institutiones Theologicae Fundamentals* (Innsbruck: Rauch, 1928), pp. 680 f.; J. Schwane, *Dogmengeschichte der neueren Zeit* (Freiburg: Herder, 1890), IV, 273. J. Perrone, S.J., in his criticism on Newman's Latin dissertation on the development of dogma, cites this particular passage of the *Symbolik* as a confirmation of Newman's statement that the revealed word in itself and objectively is immutable, but that it can be perfected when it becomes subject to the human mind. He writes: "De hoc sensu subjectivo praeclare scripsit Möhler in sua Symbolica. Dicitur subjectivum prout in subjecto recipitur et fit nostrum." Cf. T. Lynch, "The Newman-Perrone Paper on Development," *Gregorianum*, XVI (1935), 405. See also J. Perrone, S.J., *Praelectiones Theologicae* (Paris, 1856), IV, 469 n. 2.

tradition in the subjective sense is subject to development, because it is "the word of God living in the hearts of the faithful." Thus it is conditioned by the powers of natural reason, by the abstract and inadequate concepts in which we express it, and consequently by human environment and human shortcomings. This development is possible only in so far as man's "consciousness" of the faith and of the gifts of Christ develops and progresses. It is an historical fact that such development has taken place and is still in progress. But more than that, it is demanded by the very nature of the Church as instituted by Christ.

"The necessity of development is just as evident as the fact of development is undeniable,"²⁹ because the Church, as Möhler sees it, is a living thing, a force always active and creative.

Since Christianity must be considered not as a dead concept but as a new, God-like life bestowed upon man, it is capable of evolution and development. . . . The fact that throughout the different periods of her existence the Church is conscious of her unchanging identity in no way demands that that consciousness become a stolid immobility. *The unity of her inner life must be preserved, otherwise she would not remain the same Christian Church. But this same life unfolds itself more and more, this same consciousness develops to greater distinctness and clarity. The Church arrives at the mature measure of Christ.*

These new forms, therefore, are in a real sense *unfoldings of life* within the Church, and tradition comprehends these successive unfoldings of the higher germs of life, while at the same time it preserves that life's inner unity. These seedlings of life can be clearly seen in Paul, they grow strong in John and throughout the first centuries, and appear in full bloom in the great councils of the Church.³⁰

This inner life, besides other elements, certainly includes the revealed word of God. The divine truth is one of the main life streams of the Church, throbbing with the same vigorous vitality which we observe in every organism.

In and through the Church the redemption announced by Christ has through the medium of His Spirit become a reality, for in her His truths are believed and His institutions are continued, and in this way have become living. Accordingly we can say of the Church that she is the Christian religion in its objective form, its living exposition. . . . As the Redeemer by His word and Spirit founded a com-

²⁹ Möhler made this statement in an article which was published by J. Geiselmann in *Geist des Christentums und des Katholizismus* (Mainz, 1938); quoted by P. Chaillet, "La Tradition vivante," *op. cit.*, p. 175.

³⁰ *Einheit*, pp. 33 f. (italics by Möhler).

munity in which His Word should always be living, He entrusted the same to this community to be preserved and propagated. He deposited it in the Church that it might spring forth from her ever the same, and yet eternally new and young in energy; that it might grow up and spread on all sides.³¹

Thus development of the Church, which by her very nature is a living thing, becomes a truly organic growth and a constant progress.

It is of the very essence of a truly organic nature which grows from within that by passing through different stages of development it approaches perfection. . . . The force [necessary to bring this development about] was ever at hand, as were also the embryonic forms through which it was to manifest itself. Occasions alone were needed to let this force develop and manifest its riches.³²

Though this idea of organic growth as applied to doctrinal development is only an analogy, the comparison, nevertheless, helps to show the vitality of the Catholic religion and to bring out most clearly the living and dynamic as well as the static and immutable aspect of the revealed truth. In the Church, as in every living organism, we find exactly the same life in all the different stages of evolution. From her very beginning she was in the possession of the full truth, and all development is but a further evolution of this same truth and a further manifestation of its riches.

There is only one single epoch in Christianity. It began with the appearance of Christ and the descent of the Holy Spirit. From then on there are only stages of a single progression, there is continuity and development.³³

As is obvious from the passages just quoted, unity must be the fundamental characteristic of Christian doctrine, a unity which is not the mere resultant of separable forces but the manifestation of a living energy, a dynamic idea. Development without unity is impossible, because this would not be development but change. "This unity," however, "applies to the substance only and not to the form."³⁴ The form in which this substance, the immutable but nevertheless living and dynamic Christian truth is clothed, "is in itself the human, the temporal, the perishable element, and might be exchanged for a hundred others."³⁵ This form must change, just as the outward appear-

³¹ *Symbolik*, pp. 333 f. (259). Cf. Vincent of Lerins, *Commonitorium*, cap. 22-23 (*PL*, L, 667 f.).

³² *Einheit*, p. 155.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 325.

³⁴ *Symbolik*, p. 369 (288).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 371 (290).

ance of a living organism will change as it passes through the different stages of its being.

But there is still a second factor that postulates this change, the fact that man was appointed the guardian of the divine word. Man must necessarily clothe the word of God in human concepts and images. His expressions, therefore, though they signify the Absolute, are not absolute; they correspond to the period in which they have been formed and they change with the changing historical setting. Thus we can speak of a history of revelation, which Möhler traces back to the very days of the Apostles.

The word of Christ immediately became faith in the Apostles, a human possession, and after His ascension existed for the world in no other form than in this faith of the Lord's disciples. . . . But once the divine word had become human faith, it had to be subject to all mere human destinies. It had to be constantly received by all the energies of the human mind and absorbed by the same. The preservation and communication of the word were, in like manner, dependent on human method. Even with the Evangelists, who wished merely to recount what Christ had spoken, wrought, and suffered, the divine word appears subject to the law here described. This manifests itself in the choice and arrangement of the matter, in the special plan which each Evangelist adopted, and also in the whole conception and execution of his task.

But the divine word became still more subject to this law when the Apostles were fulfilling their mission, executing the divine charge which they had received. For various questions of dispute arose, the settlement of which could not be avoided. This demanded human reflection and required the formation of notions, judgments and conclusions, things which could not be effected without taxing the reason and the understanding.

For everything which the human mind has received from an external source, and which is destined to become its own and with which it must be perfectly familiar, must first be reproduced by that mind itself. Thus the original doctrine, as the human mind had variously elaborated it, manifested itself in a quite different form: it remained the same original, and yet did not; it was the same in substance, and yet differed in form.

In this process . . . we may exalt as high as we will and extend as wide as we please the divine guidance given to the disciples of Christ. Yet, certainly, without human co-operation and without the peculiar activity of man, this process did not advance of itself.⁸⁶

Thus perceived, Catholic doctrine is at once divine and human, a truly dynamic synthesis of unshakable unity and constant develop-

⁸⁶ *Symbolik*, pp. 369 f. (289 f.); cf. *Einheit*, p. 22.

ment. This synthesis we find in the very beginning of the Church, but it is still progressing and will progress till the end of time. For at every given phase of the development the synthesis then arrived at will never completely satisfy the human mind, nor adequately express the full reality of the divine truth when clothed in human forms.

DEVELOPMENT OCCASIONED BY HERESY

Development of dogma, though demanded, as we have seen, by the very nature of Christianity as a living organism and by Christ's own disposition that it was to be propagated by human organs, nevertheless needs for its realization the influence of some outside stimulus. To expand and communicate her life, the Church, since she is also a human institution, must clothe it in concepts and formulas. She "depends upon a *doctrine*, pronounced by the Supreme Intelligence. *Concepts* and *ideas* lie at the bottom of its facts, so that through these concepts it calls up genuine feeling and true life."³⁷ But "all concepts and dogmas have value only in so far as they are expressions of the inner life,"³⁸ the riches of which, however, are so great that human language will never be able to disclose and describe them. "Christianity as a concept, which is necessarily limited, cannot comprehend and exhaust the inexplicable life; it will always be deficient."³⁹ For there are greater riches in life itself than in the expressions of life. "Life, properly speaking, can only be represented and conceived through life itself."⁴⁰

The Church is conscious of this fact and has, therefore, always been reluctant and almost afraid to express in rigid, lifeless formulas the faith by which she lives.⁴¹

Never did she proceed to a more precise exterior presentation of her inner life, afraid, as it were, that it might be profaned by the fleeting earthly forms, *never* did she desire to express her life in rigid concepts, doing so only when forced, when distortions developed, or a false and unchristian life tried to assert itself in a new system of teaching. Even then, in the beginning, she always restricted herself to the mere refutation of such teachings, without formulating her positive doctrine, until finally she could no longer avoid doing so.⁴²

The Church, therefore, left alone, would rarely be inclined to formulate and fix her doctrines. If she does so, she is compelled from with-

³⁷ *Symbolik*, p. 529 n. 1 (418 n. 2).

³⁸ *Einheit*, p. 33.

³⁹ *Loc. cit.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 342.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 95-98.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 97.

out. The most important stimulus in this regard, if not the *conditio sine qua non*, has usually been the attack on Christian doctrine by heresies.

The deeper insight of the human mind into the divine revelations in Christ seems determined by the struggles of error against Christian truth. . . . The Gnostic and Manichean errors led to a clearer insight into the character of evil. . . . Out of the Pelagian contest arose a fuller and more conscious recognition of human infirmity in the sphere of true virtue. In this way have matters gone on down to our own day.⁴³

Of this Möhler gives testimony on almost every page of the *Symbolik*. The doctrinal controversies of the sixteenth century led to dogmatic definitions "which embrace the whole spiritual as well as corporal existence of the Paradisaic man."⁴⁴ It was on account of the Reformers' teaching on the cause of moral evil that "the Catholic Church stressed with so much earnestness and emphatic energy the proposition that man was created with the endowment of freedom."⁴⁵ In opposition to Luther's doctrine on justification, the Church was forced to guard her faith by new definitions. Möhler's account of the genesis of these definitions is very illustrative and serves at the same time as a good example for showing the interrelation existing between the *Gemeingeist* and the *magisterium* in the formation of new dogmatic declarations.

The doctrine of justifying faith suffered the same fate as all the other fundamental doctrines of Christianity. For fifteen hundred years Christians had lived in and by this faith, had built many high and deep thoughts upon it and enshrined them in numerous writings. But all the time they felt within themselves deeper things, things which defied being confined in concepts or expressed in words. However, as long as no heretical view regarding this justifying faith was ever couched in bold language and believed by many, Catholics had not yet reached a completely exhaustive and crystal clear understanding of it. . . . But in opposition to Luther's teaching the Church now exalted to the highest degree of consciousness what from her origin had been taught perpetually and universally. This she now established in the form of a dogma and set it apart from mere individual opinions.⁴⁶

Thus in every attack made upon the Church by the different heresies new light was cast upon the truth, and the doctrine which was called in question received a new elucidation and confirmation. The doctrine

⁴³ *Symbolik*, pp. 371 f. (291).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 43 (37).

⁴⁴ *Symbolik*, p. 27 (25).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 145 f. (118 f.).

itself was in no way changed. Its reality, infinitely rich and infinitely great, was one and the same before it became a defined truth and after. But the conceptual formulas which stood for this reality were changed to fit the new historical setting created by the opposing heresy.

Whenever the Church explains and secures the original doctrine of faith against misrepresentations, the apostolic expression is necessarily changed for another which is the most fitted clearly to set forth, as well as to reject, the particular error of the time. . . . If the evangelical doctrine is assailed by a definite theological system and by a terminology peculiar to that system, the false notions cannot by any means be repelled in a clear, distinct, evident and intelligible manner, unless the Church has regard to the form of the error and exhibits her own thesis in a shape qualified by the garb in which the antithesis is invested, and thus makes her doctrine intelligible to all contemporaries.⁴⁷

The Church under the influence of heresy is thus forced to formulate her positive doctrine and, as has happened most frequently, to find a new form for the never changing substance of her teaching. There exists, then, a distinction between the "new dogma" and the "former doctrine," but this is—in Möhler's terminology—a mere *formal* distinction, since it appertains exclusively to the conceptual formulation of the divine truth.⁴⁸

FACTORS OF DEVELOPMENT

Here the question presents itself: how does the Church discern heresy from the true Christ-given doctrine? What are the means she uses and the principles which guide her in this endeavor to safeguard the divine word?

From Möhler's writings can be gathered several factors in dogmatic development, that is, agents active in the defense of the Church and concerned with the explanation, clarification, synthesis, and growth of her teaching.⁴⁹ The influence of any of these factors, however, cannot be reduced to a uniform law, nor are they independent of each other. Yet each plays a vital role in, and contributes to, the final constitution of dogmatic affirmations.

The profound study of dogma and the constant work of the Fathers and theologians have always been indispensable in the defense and

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 370 f. (290).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 368 (288).

⁴⁹ Regarding factors of development cf. *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, IV/2, 1619 ff.; E. O'Doherty, *Doctrinal Progress and its Law* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1924), pp. 55 ff.

development of Christian teaching. By their efforts the doctrine

... has often been more deeply investigated, contemplated in all its bearings, and viewed in a more comprehensive connection, so that Christian science makes continual progress and the mysteries of God are ever more clearly unfolded. . . . More extensive philological acquirements and the more abundant aids of every kind which modern times furnish enable us, without in the least deviating from the unanimous interpretation of the Fathers, to explain many things in a better and more solid manner.⁵⁰

This research and the progress made by it will never come to a pause, because the riches contained in revelation "will never be completely measured or exhausted. . . . Each penetration reveals new perspectives."⁵¹ The Church on her part "has always viewed with pleasure the attention and love bestowed on the consideration of the holy work and has permitted, within the determined limits which revelation itself has marked out, the freest scope to speculation."⁵²

In thus safeguarding and at the same time developing her teaching, the Church first and before all uses the argument from prescription and tradition. This alone, Möhler holds, would suffice, since she knows herself to be in the possession of the true faith and is always conscious of the identity of this faith she professes and lives with that of the apostolic times.⁵³ Möhler describes the argument from tradition as

... the appeal to the Christian consciousness which has always existed and has been universally realized. Although the claims of those who do not have this consciousness are refuted by this appeal to it, they do not thereby attain to it. There is no other possible procedure against those who do not possess this consciousness and do not profess the faith.⁵⁴

This argument from tradition is of far greater importance than any scriptural proof, since tradition precedes Scripture in time as well as in completeness.⁵⁵ "Scripture was obtained from the living tradition."⁵⁶ Though it would be erroneous to consider Holy Writ as subordinated to tradition, the latter is nevertheless the guiding norm and standard of scriptural interpretation. The Church, it is true, never neglected to employ Scripture for the refutation of heretics, but in doing so she was always guided by tradition, because in using exclusively scriptural proofs

⁵⁰ *Symbolik*, pp. 383, 385 (300, 302).

⁵² *Symbolik*, p. 29 (26).

⁵⁴ *Einheit*, pp. 29 f.; cf. also pp. 31 f.

⁵⁶ *Einheit*, p. 39.

⁵¹ *Neue Untersuchungen*, pp. 395 f.

⁵³ *Neue Untersuchungen*, pp. 375 f.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 34. *Symbolik*, pp. 373 ff. (292 ff.).

... one learned investigation was but opposed to another. Man stood against man, and the Bible on both sides. ... Thus the objectivity of Christianity would necessarily have disappeared, if besides the Bible there had not been a rule of faith, namely, universal tradition. Without this rule it would always be impossible to determine with positiveness, safety, and universal binding force the doctrines peculiar to Christianity.⁵⁷

During the first centuries [heretics] rejected everything by an appeal to Holy Writ. The Church, on her part, had step by step to defend the whole of Christian doctrine by clinging to tradition. With the Bible in their hands (that is by making improper use of it) so-called Christians from the very first rejected the Church's teaching on God in all its aspects, on God the Son in every point, on the Holy Spirit, on freedom and grace, and so forth. It was only by the spirit of the Church and her tradition that these teachings were preserved.⁵⁸

To grasp the full significance of these passages, we must recall Möhler's concept of tradition. In its objective sense it is "the universal faith of the Church throughout all centuries." But the full reality of this tradition necessarily includes the subjective assimilation and consciousness of this faith, whereby "the word of God lives perpetually in the hearts of the faithful" and thus becomes a "peculiar Christian sense existing in the Church and transmitted by ecclesiastical education."⁵⁹ Catholic tradition is thus, in the words of Peter Lippert,

... everlasting movement. The treasure of tradition upon which we live is not something mechanically handed down to us, no relic of a bygone age which we preserve for its artistic value; it is a living stream that flows through our souls, a unique and uniform consciousness with which we are filled, and which has to be created anew in each one of us, every day, every year, in every century.⁶⁰

It is to this living tradition that the heretics as a rule are directed, for "the word perpetuated in the Church since her first establishment and the universal faith of the faithful" clearly decide any controverted question.⁶¹

What, however, is this peculiar Christian sense to which Möhler attaches such great importance?⁶² It is taught, he writes,

... that the Divine Spirit, to whom is entrusted the guidance and vivification of the Church, becomes by His union with the human spirit in the Church a pecu-

⁵⁷ *Symbolik*, pp. 362 f. (283 f.); cf. *Einheit*, p. 24. ⁵⁸ *Einheit*, p. 41.

⁵⁹ *Symbolik*, pp. 356 f. (278 f.); cf. *supra*, p. 427 ff.

⁶⁰ P. Lippert, S.J., *The Essence of the Catholic* (London: Burns Oates, 1930), p. 72.

⁶¹ *Symbolik*, p. 362 (283).

⁶² J. Geiselman, *art. cit.*, pp. 47 ff., traces the origin and development of the idea of the *Gemeingeist* and shows the prominent place it occupied in the writings of Catholic theologians at Möhler's time.

liarily Christian intuition, a deep sure guiding feeling, which, as it abides in truth, leads also into all truth.⁶³

Here the community aspect of the Church, so characteristic in Möhler's ecclesiology, becomes quite apparent. Christ founded a visible Church, a Christian *community*.⁶⁴ Since He is God, all the collective acts of this community are

. . . an unerring standard of thought and action for all those who follow such a Founder, because the breath of life which proceeds from Him guides like a natural impulse the movements of the whole community. . . . In the same way we must judge the infallibility of the Church in interpreting the divine word: all the development in dogma as well as in morality, which can be considered as resulting from formal collective acts [of the whole community], are to be revered as the teachings of Christ Himself, and in all these developments His spirit manifests itself anew.⁶⁵

Even the individual Catholic shares in this infallibility, but only when his feelings, thoughts and will are in harmony with those of the community.⁶⁶ This peculiar Christian intuition of the divine truth, however, does not consist, Möhler holds against Luther, "in a purely internal act, in the testimony of the Holy Spirit," as the Protestants understand it. No, the interior certainty and consciousness of the truth is always based on an *external* testimony and an *outward* authority and, therefore, preceded by an *outward* certainty. "Thus did the invisible spring out perpetually from the visible Church," and for this reason we find "the respect for tradition in the Catholic and the rejection of it in the Protestant Church."⁶⁷

The *Gemeingeist*, however, cannot be conceived of without the Holy Spirit, because tradition, alive in the community ever since the time of the Apostles and indelibly stamped on the hearts of the faithful, is not

⁶³ *Symbolik*, p. 355 (277).

⁶⁴ *Symbolik*, p. 332 (258). *Einheit*, pp. 7 ff., 224. P. Chaillet, S.J., "Centenaire de Moehler," *Revue apologetique*, LXIV (1938), 529 ff.

⁶⁵ *Symbolik*, pp. 359 f. (281).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 336 (261).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 420 f. (330 f.). Regarding this particular point L. de Grandmaison, S.J., writes: "The sense of infallibility which the author of the *Discours sur la Religion* [Schleiermacher] attributed to the individual conscience under the action of the Divine Spirit immanent in the world, the theologians of Würtemberg attributed to the whole body of the faithful united with their leaders [i.e. the *magisterium*]" ("Jean-Adam Moehler. L'Ecole catholique de Tubingue et les origines du Modernisme," *Recherches de science religieuse*, IX [1919], 393).

the result of human efforts but exclusively the work of the Holy Spirit. He, after He has founded the Church, animates and guides her. It is He who is the active and directive force in the living tradition.⁶⁸

Through the Holy Spirit Christ vivifies the faithful. Through Him they are held together and formed into a whole, so that the *one* spirit of the faithful [*Gemein-geist*⁶⁹] is the result of the *one* Divine Spirit. . . . The whole community of the faithful, the Church which He has formed, becomes by His guidance the perennial treasury, ever fresh and new, of the principle of life, the inexhaustible source of nourishment for all. . . . As Irenaeus expressed it: 'Where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church, and every kind of grace. But the Spirit is truth. Those, therefore, who do not partake of Him, are neither nourished into the life from the mother's breasts, nor do they enjoy that most limpid fountain which issues from the Body of Christ.'⁷⁰

Thus there exists in the Church a truly mystical union effected in and by the Holy Spirit.⁷¹ Möhler again and again stresses the importance of this "mystical principle" of unity. The Holy Spirit assembles all His forces and directs the whole vital process and intellectual progress which are the answer of truth to error and heresy. Thus under His impulse and infallible guidance the authentic Christian *gnosis* develops and the Christian life bears fruit.⁷²

THE AUTHENTICITY OF DEVELOPMENT

A last question of utmost importance presents itself now: how can we be sure of the legitimacy and authenticity of this development? That is, how can we distinguish between an authentic development and an alteration or corruption of the original doctrine? Or, as Möhler himself puts the question: "How is the divine word to be preserved against erroneous conceptions?" He answers: "The universal sense decides against particular opinion, the judgment of the Church against that of the individual."⁷³

"By the Church on earth Catholics understand the visible community of all faithful, founded by Christ."⁷⁴ This Church is an historical fact, clearly established by the historical records of the life of Christ and of the acts of the chief Apostles. But this is not all. Möhler fully

⁶⁸ *Einheit*, pp. 182-87, 39.

⁶⁹ Cf. J. Geiselman, *art. cit.*, p. 48.

⁷⁰ *Einheit*, pp. 8 f. Möhler quotes Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, lib. III, c. 24, n. 1 (*The Ante-Nicene Fathers* [New York: Scribner, 1926] I, 458).

⁷¹ *Einheit*, § 1, pp. 7-18.

⁷² Minon, *art. cit.*, pp. 343 f.

⁷³ *Symbolik*, p. 356 (278).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 331 (258).

understood and represented in a masterly fashion "the Pauline doctrine of the Church as the Body of Christ and the way in which this links up with the Catholic conception of the visible Church, and the general economy of the Incarnation, proclaimed by St. John."⁷⁵

The visible Church is the Son of God, everlastingly manifesting Himself among men in human form, perpetually renovated and eternally young, His permanent incarnation, just as in Holy Writ the faithful are called the Body of Christ.⁷⁶

The Church is the Body of the Lord. She is in her universality His visible form, His permanent, ever renovated humanity, His eternal revelation. He dwells wholly in the whole of the community. All His promises, all His gifts are bequeathed to the whole community and not, since the time of the Apostles, to any individual as such.⁷⁷

The Church, therefore, as representing Christ, is the living exposition of the divine revelation⁷⁸ and thus invested with Christ's own authority and infallibility.

If the Church is not the authority representing Christ, then everything relapses into darkness, uncertainty, doubt, distraction, unbelief, and superstition. Revelation becomes null and void, fails in its real purpose and must henceforth be even called in question and finally denied.⁷⁹

Christ is in the Church and the Church in Him. On this account the Church, from the Catholic point of view, can as little fail in the pure preservation of the word as in any other part of her task. She is infallible.⁸⁰

Such an exalted authority postulates the very highest degree of certainty as regards the absolute truth of her doctrine and the legitimacy of her authoritative decisions. This the Church has, because without this certainty and the consciousness of her infallibility she would not be her true self.

The certainty which she has of the truth of her own doctrines and definitions is an immediate one; for she has received her dogmas from the lips of Christ and the Apostles. By the power of the Divine Spirit they are indelibly stamped on her consciousness, or, as Irenaeus expresses it, on her heart. If the Church were to endeavor to seek her doctrines by learned investigations, she would fall into the most absurd inconsistency and annihilate her very self. . . . She would have to go

⁷⁵ P. Rousselot, S.J., and Others, *The Life of the Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1933) p. 281.

⁷⁶ *Symbolik*, p. 356 (278).

⁷⁷ *Symbolik*, pp. 332 f. (259).

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 340 (265).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 342 (266 f.).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 335 (261).

in search of herself, and this only a madman would do. She would be like a man who by examining papers written by himself would try to discover whether he really exists or not.⁸¹

It is from the Church thus understood, from the Church which is in Christ and in which Christ lives and works forever, that all life springs forth. "All developments in dogma as well as in morality can be considered as resulting from formal acts of the whole community."⁸² The Church, we must conclude therefore, is the living witness to Christ and thus plays a decisive part in the genesis of Catholic faith. She is the ultimate criterion for the authenticity of the development of dogma. But again, what precisely is this Church Möhler has in mind?

This Church "is not the *coetus doctorum*. Why should the operation of the Holy Spirit confine itself to this class? Neither is it the hierarchy alone, because at times it has been defective. It is rather the whole body of the faithful."⁸³ This conclusion at which Minon arrives seems justified in the light of the passages just quoted. From this some writers have tried to prove that Möhler under Protestant influence has unduly exaggerated the community aspect of the Church to the detriment of the *magisterium*. Against them it must be said that Möhler has not overlooked the role the *magisterium* has played and must necessarily play as guardian of Christ's doctrine. But there is doubtless a development in Möhler's concept of the functions of the hierarchy with regard to the development of dogma, just as there is a decided development in his concept of the Church.⁸⁴ In an article he published two years previously to the *Einheit* Möhler states:

Even if such unfortunate times should come in which the hierarchy were no longer the perfect expression of the living tradition, this tradition would, nevertheless, not be irretrievably endangered, because it has already taken flesh in the symbols, the cult, and the ascetic and mystic life of the Church. The Christian doctrines, once they have come to the state where they are being lived in the community, cannot perish anymore.⁸⁵

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 378 (296); cf. *Neue Untersuchungen*, pp. 374 f.

⁸² *Symbolik*, p. 360 (281).

⁸³ Minon, *art. cit.*, pp. 344 f. Minon gives further references to other writings of Möhler to substantiate his statement.

⁸⁴ J. Geiselman, *art. cit.*, pp. 1-92; Minon, *art. cit.*, pp. 345-52.

⁸⁵ *Theologische Quartalschrift* (1823), pp. 498 ff.; quoted by P. Chaillet, S.J., "La Tradition vivante," *op. cit.*, p. 170.

Daring as this passage may sound, it merely indicates where the young Möhler placed the stronger emphasis. Though he extols the importance of the *Gemeingeist*, he does not intend to discard the *magisterium* as the guardian of faith and, consequently, as a criterion of development. In supplementary notes to the chapters of the *Einheit* in which he deals with the unity of the Church as symbolized in, and effected by, the bishop, Möhler writes: "There is a close connection between our considering the *magisterium* as of divine institution and the preservation of doctrine as a thing divine; and this connection is closer than one would think at first sight."⁸⁶

Though these notes were not incorporated into the *Einheit*, they are nevertheless indicative of Möhler's mind. The *magisterium* is a necessary organ of the Mystical Body of Christ. The bishops are ordained by the Holy Spirit to rule the Church of God and to teach and guard the faith.⁸⁷ Without them there would be neither tradition nor the true Catholic *Gemeinsinn*.

Without the definite, [divinely] instituted and permanent *magisterium* it was impossible to conceive of an uninterrupted tradition, which, as we have heard, is absolutely necessary to prove the identity of the higher consciousness of the Church throughout the different periods of her existence; for if chance were to determine who was to preach the Gospel and how it was to be preached, the outcome would have been a diversity, not a unity of doctrine. A chaos of individual opinions would have resulted, but not tradition as we have to understand it.⁸⁸

However, all through the *Einheit*, the *magisterium* is but one organ of the body of the faithful, one organ of the Body of Christ, however indispensable its functions may be. Seven years later, in the *Symbolik*, the emphasis is definitely shifted from the *Gemeingeist* to the *magisterium*. The argument for the visible and authoritative *magisterium* is treated briefly, but with great force and eloquence.⁸⁹

The fact that the deeper consciousness of the Christian truth, in itself eternally one and unchangeable, is the result of struggle and strife and consequently of history, explains the necessity of a living, visible authority which in every dispute can, with certainty, discern the truth and separate it from error. Otherwise we would have only the variable, the disputed, and at last Nihilism itself.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ *Einheit*, p. 336. ⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 137 ff., 141, 144. ⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 134; cf. *supra*, p. 429.

⁸⁹ *Symbolik*, Chapter 37. ⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 372 (291).

Discussing the Lutheran doctrine of the Bible as the only source and arbiter in matters of faith, Möhler states: "Besides Holy Writ, which objectively is unerring, the living authority of the Church has been instituted, in order that we may obtain for *ourselves subjectively* the divine word as it is *in itself*."⁹¹

When refuting the Protestant teaching of an essentially invisible Church, he writes:

Perpetually did the invisible spring forth from the visible Church. This order of things is implied in the very notion of an external, historical revelation, the whole peculiar essence of which requires a definite, perpetual, and outward ministry which must be adhered to by all who want to become acquainted with that revelation. By the testimony of this ministry, and thus by an outward testimony, the external revelation is preserved in its truth, purity, and integrity.⁹²

Not less explicit is Möhler's statement in *Neue Untersuchungen*, where against Baur he declares the public, visible *magisterium* to be the criterion of the divinity of the Church and of her doctrines:

Christ has founded a visible Church, has instituted a public, visible *magisterium*, and this He has invested with *His own* authority. This *magisterium*, therefore, enjoys the same authoritative credentials which Christ Himself has, and the judgment this *magisterium* pronounces on the meaning of Christ's doctrine can, consequently, claim for itself the authority of Christ Himself.⁹³

Still, even in the *Symbolik*,

... the *magisterium* is for Möhler but one element in the Church. And even those texts which point to the Church and seem to connote an exclusive recourse to the *magisterium*, must be interpreted not according to our psychology but according to the mentality of Möhler and his time, according to the spirit of Romanticism which attached so great an importance to the *Gemeingeist*.⁹⁴

This criticism seems fully justified. Möhler throughout his literary career was faithful to his conception of the Church as an organic whole and a living community in which all the members have their specific functions and contribute to the development of the whole. This led him to understate somewhat the prominence we must necessarily concede to the *magisterium*. In thus judging him, however, we must not forget that he lived at a time when Febronianism was still in the

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 397 f. (312).

⁹³ *Neue Untersuchungen*, p. 373.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 420 (330).

⁹⁴ Minon, *art. cit.*, p. 357.

air, and furthermore, that he died thirty years prior to the Vatican Council. But even today we will admit that the living community and the *magisterium*, seen in their proper relationship, have both their own specific functions and importance in the development of dogma. This Karl Adam pointedly brings out:

Certainly it is the Church authority under the guidance of the Holy Ghost which by its ordinary and extraordinary teachings strews the seeds of revealed truth in the field of the Church, and like a careful gardener protects their sprouting, guards the tender shoots from foreign growths and prunes away all evil tendencies. The teaching authority, guarded by the Holy Ghost, is therefore the decisive *active* factor in dogmatic development. But—to keep our metaphor—the gardener does not do the whole of the work. For the very reason that the seed of revealed truth is a living and organic thing, it requires for its progressive growth a fertile field, a maternal soil, which may foster the seed committed to it and bring it to maturity. The living community is this fertile soil. Theologians speak of a passive infallibility of the faithful, and in the same way the community may be called the *passive* factor in the formation of dogma. The living community of the faithful, hearing and obeying the revelation which the teaching authority proclaims, itself shares in the infallibility of the Church as it accepts this revelation, cherishes it and bears fruit. Such is the nature of the influence which the community exercised in the development of dogma.⁹⁵

CONCLUSION

In the early part of the nineteenth century, development of dogma was a burning question. A concise dogmatic exposition of the Catholic doctrine on development was absolutely necessary. In Möhler the Catholic Church in Germany found her greatest champion. In an exhaustive treatment of all the factors involved, he gives a theologically sound, clear, and utterly convincing proof for the Catholic position. Development of dogma as well as its immutability are given facts to him. In reconciling both, Möhler cannot claim any new discoveries. In its last analysis, his view on development of dogma and the authenticity of this development can be expressed in the time-honored words of the *Commonitorium* of Vincent of Lerins: "Curandum est ut id teneamus quod ubique, quod semper, et quod ab omnibus creditum est."⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Karl Adam, *The Spirit of Catholicism* (New York: Macmillan, 1930), 135.

⁹⁶ In the *Symbolik* Möhler repeatedly refers to Vincent of Lerins. On p. 384, n. 1 (301, n. 1), he remarks: "How desirable it were that we could find everywhere such clear ideas

It was never Möhler's intention to develop a new theory. He has no theory of his own and is not original in his basic ideas. But he is original in formulating and expressing the traditional doctrine in the language of the current philosophic thought. And he is original, too, in so far as he is among the first to advance the ever dynamic aspect of Catholic doctrine, as also its vitality and adaptability to changing philosophical trends. The "living tradition" is his argument for, and the core of, development. Into it enters a truly mystic element, the vital assimilation of the immutable divine truth and the deep consciousness of it—both the fruit of the inhabitation of the Holy Spirit. Thus development of dogma is the formal act of the Mystical Body of Christ.

of the progressive development of Christian dogmas as are here advanced by Vincent." Möhler was thoroughly acquainted with Vincent. In 1823 he gave a very concise explanation of Vincent's *quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus*, in an article in *Theologische Quartalschrift* (p. 474). During the summer of 1826 he lectured weekly on the *Commonitorium*; cf. St. Lösch, *art. cit.*, p. 31. Lösch writes in this connection: "For Möhler the development of dogma follows the lines of Petavius—Vincent—Irenaeus" (*Ibid.*, p. 138).