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Article

A Church That Can and Cannot Change: The Dynamics of Tradition

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Abstract
After reviewing some previous contributions to the discussion of continuity and change in the Christian tradition, the article suggests another way of thinking about the problem by using Pierre Bourdieu's analytic notion of *habitus*.

With the election of Pope Francis, expectations were raised that he would lead the Catholic Church through reforms in many areas of church life, not only in matters of style but also of substance. Groups of theologians, clergy, and laity are pressing for reforms in areas of financial impropriety, sexual abuse by clergy, compulsory celibacy for priests, ordination of women, permitting divorced Catholics to receive communion, and same-sex marriage. Other groups are just as vociferously opposed to such proposals. Calls for reform are not new in the history of the church—*ecclesia semper reformanda* is an ancient dictum. But "reform," like "development," is just a soft word for change, and change always meets resistance.

Change is especially difficult in the church that claims to maintain continuity with its Founder and with the early church. Its very identity is tied to preserving the Good News as experienced by the first disciples. Its mission is to spread and witness to that

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gospel message. So, how can the church both maintain continuity with its origins and at the same time change? Why is change or reform such a problem for religious traditions when it is not in other areas of human life such as medicine, science, or the arts, where new developments, inventions, or innovations are generally welcomed as positive contributions? I suggest that resistance to change has to do with how the question has been posed or how the discussion has been "traditionally" framed.

Discussions of continuity and change in the church's tradition have focused almost exclusively on what can change and what cannot change, on what is essential and what is *adiaphora* or accidental. It is commonly acknowledged that the word "tradition" refers both to *that which* (*tradita*) is handed on and to the *process of handing on* (*traditio*). My thesis is that we have a better chance of dealing with the issue of continuity and discontinuity if we focus more on the latter than the former, on the *how* question rather than the *what* question. When we pose the question, what is essential and what is accidental, we pose the question in the abstract, prescinding from the social, cultural, and historical context. Such a posing also prescinds from the actual lived experience of the Christian community. History testifies to the fact that what seemed essential in one situation appeared nonessential later when the situation changed.[1] Such essentialist thinking ignores the dynamics of how development or change occurs, and it assumes a rather static notion of tradition.

In recent years, social scientists and theologians have emphasized a more dynamic and positive understanding of tradition. Building on the work of sociologist Edward Shils's *Tradition*,[2] theologian Robert Schreiter points to three major functions of tradition in any social group. It provides: (1) resources for identity, such as defining group boundaries, and offers a worldview explaining the origins and location of the group in the larger cosmos as well as its main values and beliefs; (2) a communication system providing cohesion and continuity through symbols and codes, stories, and memories and rules; and (3) resources for incorporating innovation into a society, enabling it to deal with new data and new experiences. In short, "tradition serves as a guarantor of the resources for cohesion and continuity over stretches of time."[3] It provides stability for a group or society.

But tradition itself is not static; it is dynamic, and therein lies the rub. How can a dynamic process provide stability? Or, how can a society maintain continuity with its past and still deal with new and unforeseen events? How can we maintain our identity and still change? How much change can a group sustain before it loses its identity? These questions have come to the fore again in recent controversies over the interpretation of Vatican II.[4] Some interpreters emphasize the innovations of the council in liturgy,

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1. John T. Noonan Jr., *A Church That Can and Cannot Change* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2005).
2. Edward Shils, *Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1981).
3. Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985) 105–7.
4. See, e.g., Ormond Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II: Some Hermeneutical Principles* (New York: Paulist, 2004); David G. Schultenover, ed., *Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?* (New York: Continuum, 2007); Massimo Faggioli, *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning* (New York: Paulist, 2012).

revelation and Scripture, ecclesiology, ecumenism, attitudes toward non-Christian religions, and most of all in regard to religious liberty. Others stress the council's continuity with the larger tradition and the desire to maintain continuity with earlier councils. Obviously there was both continuity and discontinuity. Ormond Rush has made a helpful distinction between "micro-ruptures" that did occur and "macro-ruptures" that did not.[5] But most of the disagreements in the council debates were about just this issue. According to John Courtney Murray, Vatican II's *Dignitatis humanae*, the Declaration on Religious Freedom, "was . . . the most controversial document of the whole Council, largely because it raised with sharp emphasis the issue that lay continually below the surface of all the conciliar debates—the issue of the development of doctrine."[6] It is this issue that I wish to revisit, emphasizing how development occurs.

How can a group, a society, a church maintain continuity with its past, maintain its identity, while at the same time change? How does it happen? How can we understand this? And, granted that traditions are dynamic and do in fact change, which changes are legitimate, authentic, true, and which are not? Are there criteria by which we can distinguish or discern between the two? These questions are, of course, not new. They did not begin with Vatican II. So, I would first like to briefly recall the attempts of some earlier theologians who engaged these questions: Vincent of Lerins, John Henry Newman, and Yves Congar. I will then suggest some contemporary categories based on the work of sociologist/anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu that might help us rethink this issue today.

Some Previous Contributions

Vincent of Lerins

One of the first theologians to deal with this issue was Vincent of Lerins, a fifth-century monk of southern France, who wrote his *Commonitorium* around 434. Writing just three years after the Council of Ephesus, he was acutely aware that the language of that council and of Nicaea's in 325 was different from the language of the New Testament. These councils had used Greek philosophical categories (such as *homoousios*) to help clarify the relationship of Jesus of Nazareth to the one God, Yahweh, whom Jesus called Father. Ephesus had called Mary *Theotokos*, mother of God, language clearly not in the New Testament. Was such a change legitimate, in keeping with the teaching of the apostles and of Jesus himself? Such questions, writes Thomas Guarino, "led Vincent to think deeply about continuity and change, about identity and difference, about progress and adulteration, about antiquity and novelty. How is the precious deposit of faith preserved over time? How are illegitimate innovations identified?"[7] His response was to say that the criterion of the true faith was what was believed "always, everywhere, and by everyone" (*semper,*

5. Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II* 7.
6. Walter M. Abbott, S.J., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: America, 1966) 673.
7. Thomas G. Guarino, *Vincent of Lerins and the Development of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013) xxviii.

ubique, et ab omnibus).[8] This became known as the "canon" or "rule" of Vincent of Lerins, and over the centuries it was widely cited in theological manuals and textbooks. If taken strictly or almost literally, the rule would seem historically naïve and practically useless. For how could we possibly know what was believed "always, everywhere, and by everyone"? The rule also seemed to presume a very static notion of tradition.

A new translation and commentary by Guarino, however, provides a more nuanced reading of Vincent. Guarino argues that Vincent's canon should not be taken out of context—he was refuting heresies. "At the very beginning of his book," writes Guarino, "Vincent enumerates a long list of heresies besetting the church: Arianism, Donatism, Pelagianism, and the list proceeds on and on. With so many false teachers, how can Catholics identify the truth"?[9] In this context, Vincent's primary concern was to offer criteria to separate sound doctrine from error. But his first rule cannot be separated from his second rule: "over time, growth undoubtedly occurs in Christian doctrine."[10] There is development in the church, but development is always in continuity with what has preceded it.

> It is necessary, therefore, that understanding, knowledge, and wisdom should grow and advance vigorously in individuals as well as in the community. . . . But the progress made must be according to its own type, that is, in accord with the same doctrine, the same meaning, and the same judgment.[11]

Vincent uses the analogy of the growth of bodies—whatever appears in the adult was already present embryonically in the child, so nothing new appears in old age. Or what is sown as wheat is harvested as wheat. There is change but not in the meaning or the sense of what the church has always taught. Thus, Vincent's idea of the church's tradition is not quite so static.

Guarino also makes a good case that the first rule, "always, everywhere, and by everyone," is not as historically naïve as a literal reading might sound. Vincent had in mind primarily the councils mentioned above. The church gathered in council represented everyone from everywhere, and Nicaea and Ephesus were merely trying to "unfold" or "disclose" what was already present in Scripture, tradition, and the Church Fathers—in other words, "always." Guarino summarizes: "the Vincentian canon—*semper, ubique, et ab omnibus*—is concretized by, and instantiated in, a series of determinate theological places or warrants where one may visibly see *how* Christian doctrine . . . has been preserved."[12] These seemingly abstract characteristics of the Vincentian canon are to be properly understood as living warrants by which the living church specifies the "faith once delivered to the saints."[13] This more dynamic and concrete historical interpretation

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8. Ibid. 2.
9. Ibid. 11.
10. Ibid. 6.
11. Ibid. 15.
12. Ibid. 25.
13. Ibid. 42.

of Vincent's canon can help us appreciate why it was so influential in any discussion of the development of doctrine.

John Henry Newman

The theologian whose name is almost synonymous with the development of doctrine and who was greatly influenced by Vincent of Lerins was John Henry Newman (1801–1890). He first published his now classic *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* in 1845 almost 1400 years after Vincent's canon. This book, John O'Malley observes, "put the problem of change on the stage of the theological debate to a degree unknown before. The problem would remain there to become a central point of contention at Vatican II."[14]

Newman, an Anglican priest at that time, was not primarily a theologian but a historian concentrating on patristics and the early church. As an Anglican, he was critical of Protestants for abandoning many features of the early church, and of Roman Catholics for many additions not found in early Christianity. He saw Anglicanism as the *via media*, the middle way, between the two. He was trying to find where the true Church of Christ was to be found among the churches of his day. As a young scholar, he had translated large sections of Vincent's *Commonitorium* and sought to use the canon as a rule to critique the churches as they then existed. According to Owen Chadwick, Newman found the canon "inadequate as a present guide to, or test of, true and authentic Christianity. The Vincentian Canon, he wrote, 'true as it must be considered in the abstract, is hardly available now or effective of any satisfactory result. The solution it offers is as difficult as the original problem.'"[15]

From today's vantage point, it may be necessary to remind ourselves that Newman was writing in the middle and latter part of the 19th century, just at the beginning of the rise of historical studies and historical consciousness, that is, the realization that everything is historically located and historically conditioned and changes over time. (recall that Darwin's *Origin of the Species* appeared in 1859). So Newman was arguing for the *fact* of development, of change, not so much offering a full-blown theory of development.[16] But he was also arguing that change is not all bad, not all a corruption of some original revelation. Vincent of Lerins had argued that novelty was a sure sign of heresy and that idea persisted right into the condemnation of the Modernists of the early 20th century. In striking contrast, Newman in one of his most oft-quoted lines said, "To live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed

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14. John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap of Harvard University, 2008) 77.

15. Owen Chadwick, *From Bossuet to Newman*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University, 1987) 141.

16. Nicholas Lash as cited in Aidan Nichols, O.P., *From Newman to Congar: The Idea of Doctrinal Development from the Victorians to the Second Vatican Council* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1990) 46.

often."[17] For him, change was a sign of vitality, not heresy. So, what may seem obvious to us today, Newman had to argue for in his day.

But if change in doctrine is a historical fact, how can there still be continuity with the deposit of faith? To explain this, Newman resorted to three main analogies. The first is with the appropriation of a living idea by a community. With the Christian revelation, Chadwick observes, "the church possessed her living idea or ideas; of their relations or consequences she could not be aware until she had tried them out in life, in the world, in the gamut of heresy and the gauntlet of philosophical onslaught."[18] In changed circumstances, the church apprehends some aspects of the original revelation of which she was not previously aware. The second analogy is with the individual's appropriation of her faith. "Just as a converted soul grows in the true understanding of the faith which at first he apprehends only in broad outline, so the Church, which at first perceived the content of her faith only in broad outline, grows in the slow understanding of its content."[19] Newman's third analogy is with the analysis of a poet's mind. In a poem, we may find "whisperings and imaginings" of what is in the poet's mind, but of which the poet herself was unconscious. In addition to referring to the original revelation as an "idea," Newman also used the language of "feelings" and of "experiences." Later he called this habitual and unconscious mode an *intimus sensus*, an intuition or instinct that gradually became conscious in the mind of the church. Development, for Newman, was not a process of logical deduction or argumentation; nor was it merely a change in language, a translation. "A true development is 'an addition which illustrates not obscures, corroborates not corrects, the body of thought from which it proceeds.'"[20] In sum, development was a growth in awareness, something truly new.

But were all developments authentic, or were some corruptions, and if so, how could we distinguish between them? Newman offered seven "tests" or "notes" characteristic of faithful developments:

> There is no corruption . . . if it retains one and the same type, the same principles, the same organization; if its beginnings anticipate its subsequent phases, and its later phenomena protect and subserve its earlier; if it has a power of assimilation and revival, and a vigorous action from first to last.[21]

It took Newman a large part of the rest of his *Essay* to explicate and illustrate these rather vague criteria with a variety of historical examples that I need not repeat here. Newman's historical research demonstrated how complex each situation in the history of the church was, and how difficult it is to determine what is a legitimate development and what is not. Hence, these seven criteria, taken together, are far from Vincent's

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17. John Henry Cardinal Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1878; Garden City, NY: Image, 1960) 63.

18. Chadwick, *From Bossuet to Newman* 150.

19. Ibid. 151.

20. Ibid. 154, citing Newman, *Essay* 87–88.

21. Newman, *Essay* 177.

straightforward canon or rule: *quod semper, ubique, et ob omnibus*—we know an authentic development because it was what was believed always, everywhere, and by everyone.

Newman's effort to demonstrate that there had been developments in the teachings of the Christian churches was not the work of a purely disinterested historian, however. It was also a very personal, existential quest for him. He had first proposed the idea of development in a sermon in 1843, and his continuing historical studies were gradually leading him to the conviction that he could discern the lineaments of the early church more clearly in the Roman Catholic Church than the Anglican, and so he was received in that communion just before his *Essay*'s publication. He was then anxious to find out whether his proposal was acceptable to his new home. So he went to Rome to discuss his theology with the leading Roman theologians of that time, Giovanni Perrone and Carlo Passaglia. His reception was lukewarm. Newman took the unfamiliar language of neo-Scholastic Roman theology into consideration and in 1878 published a revised version of *An Essay on the Development of Doctrine*, but without substantial change. Contemporary historian Owen Chadwick, an authority on Newman, summarizes:

> The idea of development was the most important single idea which Newman contributed to the thought of the Christian church. This was not because the idea of development did not exist already. But it was a very restricted idea, so restricted that it posed insuperable problems for anyone who studied history with open eyes. Newman made it wider and vaguer, and thereby far more fertile in conception, and more useful to anyone who cared about intellectual honesty . . . . In the long view the *Essay* was more weighty than one man's introspection of his predicament.[22]

It was the predicament of Christendom.

Yves Congar

The theologian who contributed most to this discussion in recent times is undoubtedly the great Dominican ecclesiologist, Yves Congar (1904–1995). His book, *Vraie et fausse reforme dans l'eglise*, first published in 1950, was read by Angelo Roncalli while he was nuncio in Paris, and it led him to wonder: "A reform of the church—is such a thing really possible?"[23] Several years later as Pope John XXIII, he called a reform council, Vatican II. Congar was a *peritus* at the council and was very influential in the debates during the council and in drafting the final documents. While the council was still in session he published his magisterial *La tradition et les traditions*.[24]

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22. Owen Chadwick, *Newman* (New York: Oxford University, 1983) 48.
23. Quoted in Yves Congar, O.P., *True and False Reform in the Church*, trans. Paul Philibert, O.P. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2011) xi.
24. Yves Congar, *La tradition et les traditions*, 2 vols. (Paris: Arthème Fayar, 1960–1963); ET, *Tradition and Traditions: An Historical and a Theological Essay*, trans. Michael Naseby and Thomas Rainborough (New York: Macmillan, 1966).

In contrast to Newman, who had to argue for the *fact* of development, Congar was mainly concerned with calling for reform of the Catholic Church in the present and with criteria for distinguishing between true and false reforms. He could take for granted that change had taken place in the past, but also felt that the Church had absolutized some forms and formulations that were historically and culturally conditioned in a previous era. He wrote:

> Certain forms of worship, the inappropriate use of excessively analytic and abstract formulas for catechesis, the bourgeois structure and weak community links of parish life (at least in the majority of France), the clerical attitude of the priests, and practices and expectations that belong to an idea of "Christendom" that is for practical purposes anachronistic make the assimilation of new members coming from a new and different world effectively impossible.[25]

He was reflecting on his experience of the Church of his time, but much of it sounds all too familiar today.

Congar's main thesis was that the church has always reformed itself and must continue to do so today.

> The Church has to develop, then, and to make progress in the world along with the world. . . . The Church is obliged to follow the ceaseless development and variety of the ever-growing innovation and new situations of humanity. The Church has to move forward on the human journey.[26]

The church, he felt, faced the same temptations that Judaism had faced—insisting on maintaining forms linked to the past, or of turning means into ends. Again echoing Newman, he said that development is the law of life, and while respecting the past and continuity, development also respects mobility, growth, and adaptation.[27] The desire for safety, disguised as prudence or fidelity, can lead to timidity instead of to a wholehearted passion for the truth. The church should be missionary not only on the level of pastoral ministry but also on the level of ideas and truth.[28]

Congar offered four conditions that had to be met for reforms to be considered true or authentic. First, "the primacy of charity and of pastoral concerns." A genuine prophetic spirit needs to be pastoral, impelled by the love of God and neighbor. It was not by accident that Pope John XXIII wanted the Second Vatican Council to be both a reform council and a "pastoral" council. Thus, Congar's first condition seems to have been in the mind of the council from the beginning.

His second condition, "Remain in communion with the whole Church," was also guiding the thinking of the council and especially of Pope Paul VI. Reforms that cause schism are clearly not true reforms. For Congar, the emphasis must be on the *whole* church. Communion cannot be reduced to mere obedience to the demands of authority

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25. Congar, *True and False Reform* 44.
26. Ibid. 148.
27. Ibid. 153.
28. Ibid. 212.

but involves a whole way of leading the Christian life.[29] This is why, in the Middle Ages, the idea of reform was regularly linked to the idea of a council, for, in whatever form this may take, this is where the common will can form and "where authorities can respond to the living consensus of the whole body."[30]

Congar's third condition for true reform was "having patience with delays."[31] This is the condition with which many reformers have the most trouble, but, in some ways, it is the simplest. It merely requires a certain spiritual humility and docility. For, Congar writes, "Heresy comes in large part from a purely intellectual grasp of something—a grasp too impatient to wait for life to develop and for the gradual learning that comes from experience."[32] The experiments in the various attempts to inculturate the liturgy over the last 50 years are a good example.

Finally, his fourth condition, one based in his own lived experience as a historian, is a "return to tradition," or, as it is known, *ressourcement*. For him, this is not mere "textual archeology"; it is asking today's questions of the ancient texts and the whole tradition—tradition that is not mere routine nor only something of the past. For Congar, "tradition is essentially the continuity of development arising from the initial gift of the church, and it integrates into unity all the forms that this development has taken and that it actually manifests."[33] It includes Scripture, the Fathers, the liturgy and prayer of the whole church, the doctors and spiritual masters, development of piety and doctrine, the thinking of the church today. This *ressourcement* movement of the 1940s and 1950s was part of what made Vatican II possible. The study of the history of the Roman rite was a good example. Congar's more dynamic understanding of tradition helped make this possible and was perhaps his most important contribution to the council and to this ongoing discussion.

I have recalled the contributions of these three theologians because anything we might say today builds upon their work—as the saying goes, "We stand on the shoulders of giants." But I also recall their work to indicate that the problem of change, reform, and novelty, combined with continuity with the past, is not a new one; it did not begin with Vatican II. This survey also shows a shift in emphasis from *continuity* in Vincent of Lerins (always, everywhere, and by everybody), to the *fact* of historical development in Newman, to the *necessity* for continual reform, change, with Congar. There has been development in the church's thinking about development!

A Contemporary Suggestion

To help think through this problem, theologians have appealed to various analogies or metaphors. So Vincent of Lerins appealed to the organic or biological analogy, which is perhaps the most familiar of his analogies. We all have an experience of continuity and

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29. Ibid. 236–37.
30. Ibid. 242.
31. Ibid. 265.
32. Ibid. 267.
33. Ibid. 294.

change in our own physical and psychological persons. We know that we are the same person now that we were some years ago, but we also know that we have changed, sometimes dramatically. What we have become was somehow or other there from the beginning. This organic analogy, however, does not take sufficient account of human freedom; it sounds like change is automatic—preprogrammed, if you will. Newman's analogies were more intellectual—the gradual growth of an idea in an individual or a community, or the insight into a poet's mind. Others have used the analogy of a treasure to be preserved—"deposit of faith" language. Revelation was a gift to the church at the beginning and could be drawn upon as new situations arose. The church's task was to guard the deposit and see to it that nothing was lost. That implied a very static notion of tradition.

I would like to suggest another analogy with the help of French sociologist/anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) and his analytic concept of *habitus*. *Habitus* is the Latin word from which we get the English "habit." Speaking of "habit," however, does not express all the richness that Bourdieu wants to convey. *Habitus* is a technical term in Bourdieu's sociological theory.[34] Permit me to cite his own formulation and then show, by using the example of learning how to play a game, why his formulation might be helpful in dealing with the problem of continuity and change.

Habitus, for Bourdieu, is "the strategy-generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations," "a system of lasting and transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks."[35] To designate his key concept, Bourdieu also used the wording "cultural unconscious," "habit-forming force," "set of basic, deeply interiorized masterpatterns," "mental habit," "mental and corporeal schemata of perceptions, appreciations and action," and "generative principle of regulated improvisations."[36] His concept of *habitus* includes *dispositions* (the most operative word) that are internalized—not innate but learned through the process of socialization—from past experiences, and that enable agents to generate actions suitable to new situations. The concept of *habitus* includes the past, shared experiences that give rise to new actions in the present. It emphasizes the activity of free agents passing on (tradition as a process) what they have learned and incorporated into their lives together from previous experiences and previous generations.

Aristotle had used the notion of *habitus* to indicate how individuals acquire virtue; Bourdieu attributes it to social groups: "To speak of habitus is to assert that the individual . . . is social, collective. Habitus is a socialized subjectivity."[37] He was interested in how cultures are passed on and develop over time, as well as in accounting for

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34. I have dealt with Bourdieu's two other major analytic concepts in a previous article. See T. Howland Sanks, S.J, "*Homo Theologicus*: Toward a *Reflexive* Theology (with the Help of Pierre Bourdieu)," *Theological Studies* 68 (2007) 515–30.

35. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (New York: Cambridge University, 1977) 72, 95.

36. David Swartz, *Culture & Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1997) 101.

37. Pierre Bourdieu and Loic J. D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992) 126.

agency or the part that human freedom plays in the process. As situations change, these collective dispositions generate new actions or practices, not just ideas or verbal formulations. But dispositions are not to be understood merely as rules for action. Perhaps an example will help clarify how they work.

Bourdieu says that *habitus* is a *practical sense*, "a socially constituted 'sense of the game.'"[38] We acquire a sense of the game first by having someone teach us—tennis, for example—by actually getting on a tennis court, learning how to hold the racquet, trying to hit the ball, missing frequently. We practice against the wall. We practice serving, and the more we practice, the more we get a feel for the game. We may watch Roger Federer or Serena Williams and try to imitate them. We may learn how to keep score, that peculiar tennis lingo—"15, 30, 45, deuce, advantage, game, set, and match." We learn that the lines are part of the court, and not to foot-fault when serving. We get a "sense of the game," not just by reading the rulebook but by actually playing. Good tennis players know instinctively when to lob, when to go to an opponents' backhand, when to rush the net, and when to stay back. Players have ingrained dispositions, propensities, and instincts of just what to do and when. They have the *habitus* of tennis. These ingrained dispositions are what enable the player/actor/agent to improvise, and over time these improvisations can become routinized and eventually change the game itself. But it is the changing situations that require or force the player to adapt her game. In tennis, the game can be played on different surfaces, clay, grass, or hard courts, in diverse weather conditions, with changing equipment, and against a variety of opponents. Players have to adapt to all these changed circumstances. No two tennis games are exactly alike, but they are all recognizable as tennis and not something else. *Habitus* is what enables continuity and novelty in playing the game. The game is reproduced each time it is played, albeit by different players and in different circumstances. Thus, over time a *tradition* of tennis develops.

And so it is, analogously, with religious traditions. Living, dynamic processes embodied in actual persons who engage in a variety of practices over time become ingrained dispositions to act in determinate ways. Traditions are not merely found in written texts, verbal formulas, or creeds, though these may develop to help protect and preserve the traditions. Christianity was a way of life before there was a statement of beliefs. After all, the first designation for Christians was "followers of the Way" (Acts 9:2; 18:26; *passim*). In discussing continuity and change in the Christian tradition, I fear that we have overemphasized texts and verbal formulations—*what* must be repeated *verbatim* and *what* new words are allowed. But the tradition is to be found in more than texts. It is first and foremost in the lived practices of the whole people of God.

There is, of course, a dialectical relationship between the tradition as codified in texts and the actual lived practices of the community. Each modifies and corrects the other over time. Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* helps us account for this. To be

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38. Ibid. 120–21.

more specific, the most fundamental command of Christianity is love of God and love of neighbor. This has been practiced not only by Samaritans on the road to Jericho, but in the early Christian communities in caring for the sick by establishing hospitals, feeding the hungry, and ransoming captives, which led to the saying preserved by Tertullian, "See how they love one another!"[39] As new situations arise, new ways of practicing love of neighbor are found—today in camps for refugees, hospices for victims of AIDS, Mother Teresa in Calcutta, and large organizations such as Catholic Relief Services. To shift examples, the love of God expressed in prayer and worship has been done in a variety of languages—Greek, Latin, Slavonic, Spanish, and so forth—and in diverse settings from house churches to basilicas, to Gothic cathedrals, to base Christian communities. It is the Christian *habitus* that generates various ways of practicing love of God and love of neighbor, and that enables us to continually reproduce a Christian way of life and that identifies specific social groups as Christian.

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, similar to Aristotle's *phronesis* (practical wisdom) and Newman's *intimus sensus*, helps explain *how* we can experience both continuity and change in the Christian tradition. Bourdieu answers the question of *how* this is possible, rather than *what* can (or cannot) change without losing something essential. Rather than think in terms of substance and accidents and verbal formulas, his concept of *habitus* emphasizes actions or practices. It is *traditio* as the dynamic process of handing on rather than the *tradita*, the things being passed on. Bordieu's *habitus* also emphasizes that it is the whole community, the people of God, "a cloud of witnesses," who are the bearers of the tradition rather than a few designated officials in the community.

But some may object that I have not mentioned the magisterium at all. Do we not need some locus of authoritative teaching? To return to my tennis-game analogy, yes, we need an umpire in the chair to keep score and settle disputes, but the umpire is not the one playing the game. In fact, most real games are played without an umpire. It is the players who carry on the tradition of tennis, not the umpire. And so, in the history of Christianity the umpires—bishops, councils, and the bishop of Rome—were appealed to settle disputes, but their decisions are not the whole of the tradition. In fact, they are a relatively small part of it. Of course, umpires can make bad decisions and have, in fact, historically done so. This is where the analogy is limited: the Christian community believes that the Holy Spirit assists the church, whereas no tennis player thinks the Holy Spirit guides the umpire.

Finally, the criteria for distinguishing true from false reform in Bourdieu's way of thinking are the practices generated by the Christian *habitus*. Do changes or reforms give rise to more or better ways of loving God and loving neighbor or not? In a familiar word, "By their fruits you shall know them" (Mt 7:16 par.). But it usually takes a great deal of time for reforms to bear fruit.

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39. Tertullian, *Apology* 39.

Reform in the church can happen, has happened, and needs to happen continually—
ecclesia semper reformanda, as the old adage has it.[40] But we must be wary, as Congar
reminded us, of the twin temptations of insisting on forms linked to the past or of turning
means into ends, of timidity disguised as prudence or fear disguised as fidelity. Reform
must, as Pope Francis has reminded us, be pursued "gently, firmly, but tenaciously."[41]

Finally, we need to remind ourselves that the gospel was given to the whole church,
and it is the whole church that has the responsibility to continually hand it on (*traditio*)—
that is, those of us who today have the *habitus* of the Good News of the love of God and
the love of neighbor. Insofar as we carry out this *habitus* in concrete practices, we are the
bearers of tradition, not only an inheritance from the past, but as a task for the present
and the future. As intimated in my opening paragraph, this is just what Pope Francis, by
his example, is trying to tell us.

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Theology (with the Help of Pierre Bourdieu)," *Theological Studies* (2007).

40. According to Theodor Mahlmann, the phrase was first used by Karl Barth. See Mahlmann,
    "'Ecclesia semper reformanda': Eine historische Aufarbeitung; Neue Bearbeitung,"
    in *Hermeneutica Sacra: Studien zur Auslegung der Heiligen Schrift im 16. und 17.
    Jahrhundert*, ed. Torbjörn Johansson, Robert Kolb, and Johann Anselm Steiger (New York
    2010) 382–441, at 384–88.
41. Interview with Eugenio Scalfari, in *La Republica*, October 1, 2013, http://www.repub-
    blica.it/cultura/2013/10/01/news/pope_s_conversation_with_scalfari_english-67643118/
    (accessed January 25, 2015).