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A SYSTEMATIC PRESENTATION OF DEVELOPMENT OF
DOGMA IN THE THEOLOGY OF KARL RAHNER

by

Linda Rasinski

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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VITA

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to present the ideas of Karl Rahner on the subject of dogma and dogmatic development. In doing so we will begin by briefly discussing some aspects of Rahner's anthropology and ontology and then progress to the relationship of these subjects to revelation and dogma.

Karl Rahner has had a great influence on modern theology for many years. It is not surprising then that we turn to him for ideas on how to solve the Catholic dilemma of how doctrine must remain immutable while it apparently changes due to the forces of history. These ideas have been available to theologians in the United States for a number of years. However, Rahner's thought, although systematic in its scope, is not always systematic in its presentation. Bits and pieces of ideas, especially on the subject of dogma, are found scattered among his many writings, which include books and an amazing number of articles. The goal of this author is not to uncover ideas of Rahner's which have been hidden or unavailable until now, but to gather Rahner's thoughts from his many works and present them in a coherent whole so that their systematic relationship to one another may be seen. It is hoped that such a presentation will be

of use to the reader in making Rahner's positions concerning dogma and doctrinal development more clear and more accessible.

CHAPTER II

ONTOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY

In this chapter we will briefly consider some aspects of Rahner's ontology. It may seem strange for us to begin this way in a paper primarily dealing with Rahner's theories of dogmatic development. Actually this is the most logical way to begin. Any concern with dogma must deal in some way with revelation and revelation is God speaking to man. In briefly describing Rahner's ontology and anthropology we will attempt to answer the questions of what is God, that he should speak to man and what is man that he can hear God's word.

Rahner begins his inquiry into both Being and man's transcendence towards Being by analyzing the nature of a metaphysical question. Man is the being who necessarily asks questions about Being

Man cannot abstain from answering the question about being; an answer is always forthcoming, because the question belongs always and necessarily to man's existence. Always and of necessity man posits in his existence the 'Whence' for an answer, hence implicitly the question of being itself. ¹

¹Karl Rahner, *Hearers of the Word*, trans. Joseph Donceel, p. 27.

The question about being does not, however, simply tell us about man only. It also reveals some of the characteristics of Being itself.

In the metaphysical question about being we enquire first about all being as such. This implies that the nature of being is to know and be known in an original unity. We shall call this the self-presence or luminosity of being.²

This luminosity of being is the basis of Rahner's ontology. Every being, given its characteristic as a possible object of knowledge, has an essential orientation to possible knowledge and therefore to a possible knower. This orientation is true of every being simply due to the fact that it participates in being; that it exists. Therefore being and knowing form an original unity.³

. . . being means a knowledge that returns into itself, hence self-presence, reflection upon oneself, that is luminous in itself and for itself.⁴

This self-luminosity corresponds to the degree to which a particular being participates in being. The intensity of the existence of a being determines the degree of its self-presence.⁵ This relationship also works in the other direction. A being's degree of self-presence indicates the degree to which it has being.⁶

²Ibid., pp. 29-30.

³Ibid., p. 31.

⁴Ibid., p. 37.

⁵Ibid., p. 39.

⁶Ibid., p. 110.

Equating being with self-presence can seem to unnecessarily limit the scope of existence, particularly as we experience our own human existence as a richer, complex affair. Rahner acknowledges this point but responds that even this complexity can be reduced to his elements of knowledge and existence.

Sure, being is more than knowledge, it is life and action, decision and execution; but it is all this in such a way that all life and action, every decision and execution, insofar as they are (and insofar as they are not, they are nothing), are luminous for themselves, are self-present in knowledge, because, although they differ conceptually from knowledge, they are moments that belong intrinsically to being itself, to being that is self-present in its luminosity in all the dimensions in which it unfolds its nature.⁷

Even if all this has convinced us that being is self-presence or luminosity, we might raise a further objection. As existing men and women we participate in being. If being is so self-present why do we have to inquire about it. We must inquire about our own being even while we participate in it. Rahner's answer to this is that we must inquire into our existence, and existence in general, because the inner core of our being is finite. As human beings we participate in both being and non-being. Therefore our limited degree of being provides us only with an imperfect glimpse of the self-luminosity of being itself. We see enough to ask the question but cannot realize the full reality about which we

⁷Ibid., pp. 35-6.

8 inquire. In this scheme being and self-presence can be seen as fluid, part of a process undergoing "continual inner transformations" in particular beings as they participate in varying degrees of being and non-being.⁹

Only the pure act of being is the absolute identity of being and knowing, and perfectly realizes what is meant by the concept of being. In this case of an absolute identity of being and knowing in the pure act of being, in the absolute Being, there remain no more questions to be asked.¹⁰

Therefore only absolute Being affords pure luminosity; "Being, hence above all pure Being, is light and there is no darkness in it."¹¹

In addition to luminosity, Being-in-itself is personal. This is shown by the fact that contingent beings, such as ourselves, are held in existence. Contingent beings can only be held in existence by an act of will on the part of Being. We cannot deny that this is so or we would be denying our own existence. Being becomes personal in virtue of its ability for voluntary affirmation.

. . . the volitional necessary positing of something contingent, as it occurs in man's affirmation of his own existence, can only be understood if we affirm it as posited by a free voluntary act. Man is necessarily posited, because he is posited by a free will. We necessarily posit a contingent reality absolutely

⁸Ibid., p. 38.

⁹Ibid., p. 42.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., p. 43.

while in the same breath affirming the luminosity of being. This makes sense only if, by doing so, we ratify and endorse the act by which this contingent being has been freely and absolutely posited as absolute. This free, voluntary, original positing of the being that man is (for we are thinking of him in all our considerations) can only be the work of the absolute being, of God. ¹²

Now that Rahner has shown that man stands before God's free act, it remains to show how such free acts of God might be luminous or accessible to man. First of all, a free act of pure Being shares in the luminosity of Being, ¹³ for as we recall, being and knowledge exist in inseparable unity. This is because,

. . . a free act is originally not so much the positing of something else, of something external, of some effect which is distinct from and opposed to the free act itself. It is rather the fulfillment of one's own nature, a taking possession of oneself, of the reality of one's own creative power over oneself. Thus it ¹⁴is a coming to oneself, a self-presence in oneself.

Any free act of pure Being may be luminous due to its participation in the nature of Being. But Rahner goes beyond this and says that any act which proceeds from God must be love, especially as this act is directed toward a contingent object.

. . . the finite has its ground in the free, luminous act of God. Now a free self-present act is love. For love is the luminous will aiming at the person in its irreducible unicity. It is precisely such a will that

¹² Ibid., p. 75.

¹³ Ibid., p. 86.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 85.

God sets in action when he creates a finite being. It is his way of loving himself in his free, creative power. Thus the contingent is understood in God's love and only in it. ¹⁵

If the contingent is not seen to be affirmed in being and made luminous through the free love of God, it may erroneously be seen as being necessary, or unintelligible. Being could then only be seen as an abyss, out of which no glimmer of light or knowledge could shine. ¹⁶

God, then, is understood as luminous, directed to a possible knower, possessing will and capable of free and voluntary action directed in love toward contingent beings. For Rahner the philosophical term Being is identified with the theological term God. This is a God capable of revealing himself to man.

Now we will examine revelation from the viewpoint of man. What is man that makes it possible for him to hear a revelation from God if in fact such a revelation should occur? Man questions being; his own being, the being of others and Being in general. The fact that man questions being can reveal the basic structure of man's knowing and his relation to the objects of his knowledge. The questioning itself tells us something about man's relation to being. A question can only be asked if that which is in-

¹⁵Ibid., p. 86.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 86-7.

quired about is at the same time known and unknown. If we inquire about being this implies that we have enough partial knowledge of it, from our provisional knowledge of beings in general, to begin an inquiry; and that being is at the same time so hidden from us that we must question what it is. ¹⁷

How does man become aware of this knowable yet partially hidden being? It is through the process of abstraction. Knowledge, which is self-presence, begins with a subject going out of itself to an object and then returning to itself. The subject's awareness of its return to self constitutes it as a knower who is able to separate himself from the object of his knowledge. ¹⁸ This ability to abstract is a transcendental condition for the possibility of knowledge or thought. Rahner identifies it with what Thomistic epistemology calls the agent intellect. ¹⁹

Besides establishing the knower as subject, abstraction is the ability to grasp that the quiddity of the individual object is illimited; that it could possibly be a determination of other objects besides the particular object with which we are currently faced. Thus no object is considered only in itself but is dealt with by the human subject within the range of all possible objects. ²⁰ Abstrac-

¹⁷Ibid., p. 38.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 49.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 49-50.

tion makes possible the development of the subject as subject in an activity which Rahner calls judgment: the incorporation, comparison, contrast etc., of individual objects of knowledge under that which we call concepts. ²¹

And this grasping of the single object under the concept (the knowledge of the object as possessing the universal quiddity mentioned by the statement's predicate) is but the other side of what we have called the self-subsistence in knowledge of the knowing human subject. For it is precisely because through his concept the knowing subject knows something of something, because he can refer his universal concept to a this to which it applies, that he opposes this this to himself as his object and thus reaches his knowing self-subsistence. ²²

What, however, pushes the human subject beyond the individual object of knowledge? If an object is grasped as limited it is only because there is something which is trying to get beyond it. ²³

This is possible only if the activity which grasps this individual sense object reaches out prior to this grasping, beyond this individual object, for more than the latter is. ²⁴

Rahner calls this driving force behind the human intellect the Vorgriff. The Vorgriff is what makes abstraction possible. It allows for the individual object to be grasped within the universal concept, or abstracted. In this way man's self-subsistence as a subject becomes

²¹Ibid., p. 49.

²²Ibid., p. 48.

²³Ibid., p. 50.

²⁴Ibid.

possible.²⁵ The Vorgriff does this by pointing to a "more" beyond the present object of knowledge.

Now this 'more' can obviously not be a single object of the same kind as the one whose abstracting knowledge it is supposed to make possible. Otherwise the same question would come up again. This 'more' can only be the absolute range of all knowable objects as such. We shall call this 'reach for more' the Vorgriff.²⁶

As mentioned above the Vorgriff in itself cannot be an object of knowledge. Man can become aware of this "reach for more" only with the knowledge of the single object.²⁷ The subject then becomes aware of the Vorgriff, not as a thing, but rather as a horizon within which the object of man's thought can be known.²⁸ The Vorgriff tends toward being itself and therefore can include all individual beings within its horizon.

It is the dynamism of the spirit as it strives towards the absolute range of all possible objects. In this movement of the mind the single objects are grasped as single stages of this finality.²⁹

The Vorgriff's drive to the infinite implies the existence of an absolute Being. Through the unlimited range of the Vorgriff absolute Being is affirmed. At the same time this absolute Being is affirmed as real because the

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid., p. 51.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid., p. 51-4.

Vorgriff tends toward real being as its horizon and not merely possible being.³⁰ Since man's transcendence toward being provides the condition of all thought and action within our world, this reaching out for the absolute, which only God can satisfy, is not simply one human characteristic among others. Because of the Vorgriff man stands before God essentially in every aspect of his existence.³¹ To be human at all is to stand before God, with God as the horizon within which all acts of human life occur. To be human is to be a transcendent spirit.

Man constantly stands within the horizon of being as such. Yet, as was mentioned above, he inquires about it. Therefore God, as absolute being, is not transparent to us. We can know of God only through those finite objects which the Vorgriff makes accessible to our mode of knowing.

The absolute transcendence of man as a spirit would reveal the infinite. But this infinity of being stands revealed only in the illimited range of the Vorgriff. Now this Vorgriff does not represent the infinite in himself, it only co-affirms him as the ultimate whereunto of the illimited dynamism of the spirit that we call the Vorgriff. On the other hand the Vorgriff occurs and we know about it only as the condition of the possibility of conceptual knowledge of finite objects. It seems to follow that we know of God's infinity only in connection with finite beings.³²

³⁰Ibid., p. 55.

³¹Ibid., p. 58.

³²Ibid., p. 63.

Man only knows God through negation, as something more than his individual objects of knowledge and not as simply another object of knowledge. Therefore this hiddenness implies that a further revelation to man would be meaningful. There is still something to be revealed by God to man. ³³ Grace is also possible.

The only requirement for this . . . is that the objective openness of man's natural transcendence should not from the start anticipate all possible objects of revelation as due to man. ³⁴

And man, in his voluntary affirmation of his own existence, takes up a free attitude toward God. In his very question concerning being, he affirms his existence as both contingent and necessary.

Insofar as he must inquire he affirms his own finite 'thrownness', insofar as he must inquire, he affirms it necessarily. And as he affirms it necessarily, he affirms his existence in and despite its thrownness, as unconditioned, as absolute. . . . It is only in this necessity of a conscious relation to the non-necessary that man is the transcendence towards being that is luminous and affirmed as such. ³⁵

Man's necessary affirmation of his contingent being makes him aware that his existence is maintained by the free power of absolute Being. In this way he becomes aware of Being as person; as capable of volition and affirmation.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid., p. 60.

³⁵Ibid., p. 73.

He cannot now relate to Being as if it were some kind of flat, inanimate ideal. He now faces Being as something that disposes of man in freedom.³⁶ Being is seen as person and therefore can relate to man in interactions possible only between free autonomous beings. Through man's voluntary attitude toward himself, being has opened up for him.³⁷

Man necessarily affirms the luminosity of being because he necessarily assumes an affirmative stance toward himself, because, even when in thought or in action he says NO to himself, he still affirms himself as being, because in the very act of such a denial he still presupposes himself as the possible object of such an act, hence as being. But in such a necessary attitude towards himself man affirms himself as finite, as contingent, as fortuitous. Insofar as he affirms himself necessarily, his existence is for man, despite and in its contingency, something unavoidable, which he has to take up, in that sense something absolute. Despite its contingency it is not submitted to the decision of the finite being, to his choice between Yes and No; it raises an absolute claim to acceptance, it demands to be accepted and despite its contingency it has always already imposed this acceptance.³⁸

When we love the free act of God we can enter into its origin and generation. Therefore love is the "light of knowledge." And since our direct knowledge can only be of finite things (for only through these can we come to love and, through negation, to know the infinite), all knowledge is the "luminous radiance of love."³⁹ Man is therefore,

³⁶Ibid., p. 75.

³⁷Ibid., p. 81.

³⁸Ibid., p. 82.

³⁹Ibid., p. 87.

caught up in love, to the extent that he truly knows or understands anything.

. . . at the heart of the finite spirit's transcendence there lives a love for God. Man's openness towards absolute being is carried by the affirmation of his own existence. This affirmation is a voluntary attitude of man with regard to himself and, in final analysis, a reaching out of finite love for God, because, as love of the spirit, it can affirm the finite only as carried by God's affirmation of his own being. This implies that man's standing before God through knowledge (which constitutes man's nature as spirit) possesses as an inner movement of this knowledge a love for God in himself. Man's love for God is not something which may or may not happen, once man has come to know God. As an innermost moment of knowledge it is both its condition and its ground.⁴⁰

Man may be oriented essentially towards the love of God, but how is he to remain a being capable of voluntary affirmation while maintaining the freedom which makes volition possible? The answer lies in the range of man's possible responses to God's love. Man's transcendence provides the essential framework for his existence. He is spirit. However, as a free being, capable of acts of will and affirmation, man retains the capacity to act contrary to his most basic orientation. He can choose not to respond with love to God's own expression of love. Because there is a possibility of affirming or not affirming being; being exists for man as the absolute value.⁴¹ This in turn allows man to establish an order of values within the range of the absolute value.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 88.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 90.

. . . in the awareness of values, the spirit, in its transcendence towards the absolute value, knows of the finiteness of the single values which it encounters and knows itself as actively self-subsisting with respect to such values, i.e. as endowed with freedom. In the affirmation of a value it is subject to necessity, and in this sense not free, only to the extent that the affirmation belongs to the conditions of the spirit's necessary openness to value as such. ⁴²

Because man is free to choose among values he can take a basic stance in his life toward absolute value. But just as man was brought to some awareness of the infinite through his knowledge of finite objects; in the same way, man's attitude toward God as absolute value results from his choice among the finite values available to him. His choices affect him to the extent that he becomes what he chooses in his daily existence, becoming good or evil according to what he chooses or rejects. ⁴³

Man does not first know God in a 'neutral' way and afterwards decide whether he will love or hate him. . . . The concrete way in which man knows God is from the start determined by the way man loves and values the things that come his way. . . . Thus every man has the God who corresponds to his commitment and the nature of this commitment. ⁴⁴

Rahner, in viewing man as a transcendent hearer of God's word proceeds from man's natural transcendence, not to any supernatural knowledge, but to "an analysis of man's capacity of hearing God's revelation, a capacity which makes

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid., pp. 91-2.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 92-3.

of him a real human being." ⁴⁵ Man's capacity to listen to God is a "potency" which does not demand its object but which may "be addressed by this object and invited to obey its call (obedientia)."⁴⁶ Rahner feels that his task, in view of his previously discussed anthropology, is to show how man's essential transcendental make-up gives him a positive capacity for an eventual divine revelation, without making it necessary that "the content of this revelation is only the objective correlate of this openness and may be determined by it."⁴⁷

A revelation which is to unveil the depths of Divinity and which is basically the first moment of the invitation addressed to man to share in the life of almighty God himself, is conceivable and possible only if man is understood as spirit, i.e. as transcendence towards being pure and simple. A more restricted horizon of human knowledge would at once a priori drive possible contents of a revelation outside this horizon and render them incapable of being revealed.⁴⁸

Since the horizon of possible beings which the spirit can attain to in its transcendence can extend in principle beyond all available objects of knowledge, limited only in that it cannot obtain the direct vision of absolute being or God, it is possible for man to accept any communication which God may freely decide to bestow on man.⁴⁹ A divine

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 7.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 16.

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 20-21.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 57.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 77.

communication is not, however, made necessary by man's ability to accept such a communication.

Since at the same time and for the same reason that he stands before God, he stands also before the God of a possible revelation, there always occurs something like a revelation, namely the speaking or the silence of God. And man always and naturally hears the word or the silence of the free absolute God. Otherwise he would not be spirit. Spirit does not mean a demand that God should speak, but, should he not speak, the spirit hears God's silence. ⁵⁰

It is only in this metaphysical sense that revelation can be necessary while remaining free; "For revelation in the theological sense does not consist in God's free choice between manifesting or shrouding himself; it is the actual manifestation of his hidden essence." ⁵¹

If God, in his supreme freedom, chose not to reveal himself, but to remain shrouded in silence, man would reach the peak of his spiritual and religious existence by listening to the silence of God. ⁵²

Up to this point we have been emphasizing God's freedom to manifest himself to man if he wishes, or to remain silent. Man also has a freedom with regard to revelation. Although it is part of man's basic make-up to be open to a possible revelation from God, this openness to revelation is also determined, in its concrete structure, by man's free attitude. ⁵³

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 78.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 79.

⁵²Ibid., p. 10.

⁵³Ibid., p. 94.

Man is the being who stands in free love before the God of a possible revelation. Man listens to God's word or God's silence to the extent that he opens up in free love for this message of the word or of the silence of God. He hears this possible message of the free God when he has not, on account of a wrongly directed love, narrowed the absolute horizon of his openness for being as such, when he has not, in this way, made it impossible for the word of God to say what it might please him to say, to tell us under what guise he wishes to encounter us. ⁵⁴

This statement is in accord with Rahner's theories of man becoming what he chooses. Man's choices, or in this respect, his "love", have concrete consequences for man as he stands before the God of revelation.

. . . the openness of man as a finite spirit for the free God of a possible revelation is not as such a purely theoretical concern of a neutral spirituality, but that it is, as such, as free decision, religio. In itself it is already the free yielding of man to this God of a possible revelation. ⁵⁵

Man in his transcendent aspect is,

. . . the free one who decides about himself and thus makes up his mind whether and to what extent he wishes to hear the truth and to let God's light shine in his spirit. ⁵⁶

We have now examined man as a transcendent being with an orientation toward being as such. This transcendent spirituality opens man to a possible revelation from God. There is, however, another aspect to man. Man is a material

⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 94-5.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 147.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 95.

being. He is a spirit in matter.

Because man exists within matter the limitations which matter imposes upon his existence and upon his knowledge of himself and other objects will affect his mode of receiving divine revelation, if and when such a revelation should occur. Therefore we will examine matter in itself, its concomitant aspect as the ground of spatiality and temporality, and its effect on man's way of knowing. We will see that materiality combined with freedom are the constituents of history and that man is basically a historical being. These considerations will cause us to realize that man's historicity provides the structures in which he lives and in which any revelation will occur. And finally we will see man as having to continually look to this history of his for a possible revelation.

Man as spirit cannot succeed in escaping from matter. This turning toward the material constitutes an inner moment in his spiritual existence.⁵⁷ The reason for this is that man is continually being called outward by his receptive way of knowing the world.

. . . man knows as receptive, and insofar as his knowledge is the reception of an object, not the apriori possession of some knowledge of himself, man is the act of being in matter.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 100.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 109.

Man does not start out with any innate knowledge proceeding from his essence. As a material being it is only by stepping out into the world that man can come to himself in the return to self which is abstraction.⁵⁹ This receptivity provides the structure for all possible human knowledge.⁶⁰

Now a knowledge which, as such, in its being, is the act of a possibility of being, that is distinct from it, real and wholly undetermined in itself, a knowledge that is the act of being in matter, the knowledge of a material being, is known as sense knowledge.⁶¹

As a spirit who must know through sense knowledge the spirit requires a sense power through which it may strive toward its proper goal of grasping being as such.⁶² Man's sensibility does not exist mainly for itself, but exists as a power which emanates from the spirit and for the purposes of the spirit.⁶³ The power of the spirit is the Vorgriff, mentioned above in our discussion of transcendence, but which here is seen in its connection with sensibility itself.

It is to be remembered that the Vorgriff is not a grasp of being itself but is only an anticipatory grasp of being which takes place and becomes possible only in the grasp of the appearance.⁶⁴ Man also is grasped within the

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 102-3.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 103.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 109.

⁶² Ibid., p. 113.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 125.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 127.

realm of appearance, for appearance includes man as he becomes aware of himself in his dealings with the world. ⁶⁵

Man discovers that he himself, along with his fellow men, is the most fascinating object of his knowledge.

If a man has to be spirit and can be such only by turning towards the appearance, he cannot not be interested in the greatest and fullest possible appearance, in the eventual totality of appearances. For as the appearances increase in variety and number, that which is the spirit's end appears more clearly in them: being as such, that extends also beyond the world. Now the appearance which is in itself the most spiritual is man himself. Hence he is the appearance which, by itself, can be the fullest appearance for being as such. But that which man is appears only in the unfolding reality of possible humanity, in the history of man as such. That is why, on account of his spiritual nature, man, in order to be spirit, is essentially referred to history. ⁶⁶

Rahner, following Thomistic thought, does not define matter as a thing. It is a metaphysical component of a thing, but can never be considered as a thing in itself. ⁶⁷ In itself it is wholly undetermined and can be called a total potentiality for being. ⁶⁸ Despite its undifferentiation, or precisely because of it, it is the principle of individuation of all beings.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 138.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 144.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 108.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 109.

Because the whatness is general, matter appears as the ground which, on account of its emptiness and its indifference for any determined whatness, makes it possible for this multipliable whatness to be this or that well determined whatness. ⁶⁹

As a result the empty potentiality of matter is the principle behind number or quantity. And number and progression, which matter make possible, are the bases of spatiality and temporality. ⁷⁰

The quiddity, the object of our knowledge, appears to us as by itself universal, indifferent to be a particular this or that, hence as a determination which can come to stand as often as one pleases in the wherein of the matter that bears it. When such a form, such a quiddity, does in fact repeatedly subsist in matter, so that the same reality is several times repeated, it becomes possible to add up these several reproductions. Counting is possible only where that which is to be counted appears previous to the counting, as the repetition of the same. And since matter is the principle of the possible repetition of the same, we must necessarily consider it the principle of number. But number implies quantity. Matter is the principle of quantity, since the latter is but the multiple repetition of the same. ⁷¹

As the principle of quantity, matter also becomes the principle behind spatiality, which is based on the possibility of repetition and number.

Now matter is such a principle not only with respect to several things that are really distinct from each other; it must necessarily also carry out this, its essential principle. Hence it makes of the single thing something quantitative in itself. Now the repetition of the same

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 112.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 114.

⁷¹Ibid.

within one and the same thing is nothing but its spatiality, its being innerly affected by quantity, the real diversity of the same thing within its unity. Thus we may say: a being whose innermost make-up contains matter as an essential inner principle is spatial. ⁷²

In addition, matter in its undetermined possibilities, becomes the basis of time.

. . . the material being is one which always points towards the totality of the realization of its possibilities as the future of its inner movement and keeps striving towards it. Since these possible determinations, whose simultaneous realizations would constitute the realization of matter's illimited potentialities, exclude each other at least partially as simultaneous determinations of the underlying matter, the totality of the possible realizations of the potentiality of matter is always delayed and is never given all at once. The total realization of the possibilities of a material being is possible only in the succession of the latter's inner movement. In other words: the being is temporal. ⁷³

Time is therefore not an external standard imposed on beings but is an "inner protracting of the thing itself;" of being as it strives to attain the totality of its possibilities, each moment perishing in its turn as the movement goes on. ⁷⁴ Time and space are not something which man is thrust into, but are within him as elements of his very being. ⁷⁵ These elements thrust him into the history of humanity.

⁷²Ibid., pp. 114-15.

⁷³Ibid., p. 115.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 117.

It follows that a single man can never exhaustively and at one time actualize that which belongs to him by way of possibilities as a material being. That is why referring to other beings of his kind, which every man does as this particular individual, is not something unimportant; it is a referring to a multitude of men, to a humanity which only as a whole, can really make manifest that which is essentially given to each single man deep down in his possibilities, but only as possibilities. Man is real only in a humanity. ⁷⁶

It must be added that history for Rahner is something more than mere progression. It includes the essential element of freedom and originality. ⁷⁷ And there is human history only when this freedom can be combined with the elements of space and time which result from material existence.

. . . there is history in the human sense only where, in a togetherness of free persons in their multiplicity, the activity of freedom expands in a world, i.e. in space and time, where the intelligible acts of freedom must, in order to become manifest, extend in space and time, where they need space-time in order to be themselves. And precisely such a historicity is found in man because he is essentially a free, self-subsistent personality, which must freely realize itself, through a multiplicity of such personalities as the total realization of the very essence of such a personality in space and time. ⁷⁸

At this point man has been shown to be firmly situated as a transcendent being who lives out and strives with his transcendence within the boundaries of matter and historicity. How would it be possible for God to communicate with such a being if he chose to do so? There seems to be

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 116.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 117.

⁷⁸Ibid.

an immense gap between the supramundane, immaterial God and the human who can only grasp what is sensible as a proper object of his knowledge. Even immaterial concepts are grasped by man as things, as objects which possess being.⁷⁹ This gap must be bridged so that revelation does not become theoretically impossible within Rahner's system of thought.

Rahner bridges this gap by means of the concept of word.

In principle every being may be determined in function of that which appears. This determination can take place only through a negation.⁸⁰

This negation through the human word is the way in which man can look for the existence of extramundane reality, represented to him in a human way.

Every transcendent reality may in principle be represented to man not only in its most general determinations, but also according to its specific properties. It may be represented negatively through this historical appearance that we call word. The word itself is in its turn the synthesis of an innerworldly, historical reality and of a negation.⁸¹

The word will allow man to stand before being-as-such and know of its existence. The word brings man before the God of revelation.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 130.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 136.

⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 138-9.

. . . insofar as it always refers to an appearance, the human word can be the way in which every being may be revealed. Insofar as the human word refers to a concept which, through negation, represents an extramundane being, it may, when spoken by the extramundane God, reveal to man the existence and the inner possibility of such a being. ⁸²

It must be remembered, however, that man is not exactly standing directly before the extramundane God. He is standing before God as God is revealed in appearances. This causes man to turn to his own history, in search of just such an appearance, as the arena in which God might reveal himself to man.

In order to stand before being as such, man must turn towards the appearance. . . . the appearance means not only the single sense object of external experience, but the whole of innerworldly being, which comprises also the history of man, and, insofar as man is always man in mankind, also the history of mankind. ⁸³

And such a revelation would not only take place in the human word but is free and historical in its very nature.

Such a free action of God, which takes place within the empty, but already real space of a human being, is already historical by itself. It is not pre-historical, like the creation of the human being, which although free, had no partner, so that in it God acted only with himself. Moreover it is not universal and necessary. It is free, hence imprevisible. We can grasp and understand it only in itself. There is no point, no presupposition in the world, from which its actuality and its proper nature might be determined. ⁸⁴

⁸²Ibid., p. 137.

⁸³Ibid., p. 143.

⁸⁴Ibid., pp. 139-40.

By saying this Rahner situates revelation firmly within human history, but such revelation need not be occurring constantly within a human history. Certain historical moments may be more crucial in the process of revelation.⁸⁵ A man may even find the most significant events of revelation by looking at the life of another human being.

For the whole life of the single person, who can permanently possess a revelation only by turning back to a certain point of history that can never be repeated, who can possess it only in the words in which it has been expressed, it makes no essential difference whether he has to turn to one point of his own history or to one in the history of another person, so long as he can come to know that at this point of a human history a revelation has really taken place. There would exist an essential difference only if man were always able, in his own life, to repeat this revelation at will in its original form.⁸⁶

Rahner uses his discussion of revelation in its historical and transcendent aspects to make a summation of the whole of his anthropology. Man is the listener for a possible revelation of God.

. . . man is essentially the being who, in his innermost nature, listens to a possible verbal revelation of God in human history. Only he who listens in this way and only to the extent that he listens in this way, is that what he has properly to be: a human being.⁸⁷

Rahner feels that he has now reached the end of his metaphysical inquiry into the nature of man. The product of his inquiry has been to make man the being who exists in essential readiness for the word of God.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 141.

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 144.

When the potentiality of man and the luminosity of God come together in the actual event of revelation they do so in the free activity of both the speaker and hearer of the word.⁸⁸ Since a free activity is "always unpredictable, hence final and unique" revelation cannot simply be an extension of man's natural knowledge of God which he receives through creation.⁸⁹

Because of this freedom God can manifest his personal countenance and reveal his nature in a way which cannot be discovered apriori in some other manner.⁹⁰

Rahner is careful to safeguard the gratuity of revelation, but he also emphasizes that there is nothing to impede a revelation coming to man if God should will to reveal himself.

The first statement of our general ontology said that to the extent that being is being, it is presence to itself, luminosity. It followed that pure Being could not contain anything that, because of its absolute 'irrationality' was unable to be expressed in the word of a revelation.⁹¹

Rahner, speaking from the concrete experiences of Christianity and not from any a priori ontological presuppositions, points toward the actual historical incidence of revelation.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 148.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 77.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 81.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 80.

Pure being is always already known not only as the final whereunto of man's absolute transcendence, but also as the supremely free will that carries the finite beings. It manifests itself freely and personally by freely acting upon its creature. This free and personal manifestation has not come to an end with the creation of the finite spirit. ⁹²

We have seen that while there is nothing in God's nature which precludes the giving of a revelation; God can act as a free person and either manifest or not manifest himself to man as he wills. In revelation a relationship between man and God is established in which God has actual possibilities with regards to activity directed toward man, and man has the power of knowing this activity if it does occur. ⁹³

Man's transcendence towards the being that is absolutely luminous and totally intelligible is at the same time at least the openness for a God who can act freely with regard to man in a way which man cannot discover by himself. Hence the transcendence towards pure being is a standing before the inscrutable mystery whose way cannot be investigated and whose decisions cannot be probed. . . . the knowledge of God as the absolute being implies that we must consider the possibility of a divine activity which goes beyond the free creation of the finite spirit. ⁹⁴

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Ibid., p. 77.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 78.

CHAPTER III

REVELATION, DOCTRINE AND DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT

In the previous chapter we discussed Rahner's ontology and anthropology and saw how these lines of thought led to man's ability to hear a divine revelation. Our purpose now is to discuss revelation in its dynamic implications for doctrinal development. Then we will more specifically consider the various mechanisms which Rahner establishes for such development.

Human history is the ground in which God works among men and is not opposed to God; as if God can only be seen to work in the miraculous event which lifts man out of normal historical reality. God moves in history and does so by being its goal; thus granting history its dynamism. Therefore man can look to his own historical reality for signs of transcendence.⁹⁵ By justifying the legitimacy of historical activity in this way Rahner establishes an evolutionary view of the world and of revelation, which he feels is in line with Christian thinking at its most basic level.

⁹⁵Karl Rahner, Revelation and Tradition, p. 12.

. . . what is needed is not so much a transposition of the Christian understanding of the world and man into a evolutionary view of the world, but rather the bold and radical carrying through to its logical conclusion of that view of the world which essentially and in principle has been present all along in Christianity, and still is present in it, as opposed to those portrayals of the world which have been superimposed upon it and are alien to it, and to which Christianity itself has formerly been exposed as a result of the influence of a Hellenistic view of the world.⁹⁶

Man's perception of the word of God is always posited within a historical standpoint, for man is a historical being. In addition to this, the concepts through which God's revelation is mediated to man, and this is besides the mediation of linguistic forms themselves, are part of man's experience of divine communication.

For revelation is not revelation of concepts, not the creation of new fundamental axioms, introduced in a final and fixed form into man's consciousness 'from outside' by some supra-historical transcendent cause. It is revelation by means of concepts taken from the history of human civilization (although, of course, the latter stands continuously in the light of the grace of the self-revealing God). Thus these concepts always have a pre-history, they are connected by thousands of root-fibers with the whole of man's historically developed understanding of himself.⁹⁷

Examples of such concepts are: the ideas of flesh, the significance of blood, and the meaning of the redeemer.

⁹⁶Karl Rahner, "Christology in the Setting of Modern Man's Understanding of Himself and of His World," Theological Investigations vol. 11, trans. David Bourke (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974), p. 222.

⁹⁷Karl Rahner, "The Historicity of Theology," p. 68.

Throughout history these concepts have changed and gradually become more or less significant as history has altered man and civilizations.

Rahner does not imply that revelation is completely subservient to the historical mediations of concepts and language. Revelation maintains its value as God's eternal truth even while it is couched in the terms and understandings of the historical era in which it is received.

. . . the divine sovereignty of revelation consists not in the fact that it presupposes no conditions already existing in history, that it has no perspectives of understanding such that they are historically conditioned and subject to variation and change, but rather in the fact that it is not, ultimately speaking, subject to these historical conditions even though it is posited in them. ⁹⁸

Besides the history of man, revelation has its own history, beginning with its reception by man. Otherwise it might be thought that revelation is received by man fully formed.

If transcendence always has its very being in history, is always mediated historically, and if man has a transcendent condition which is constituted as a permanent feature of his life as a person precisely by what we call divinizing grace by God's self-communication (not by some other causal operation), then precisely that absolute transcendence directed towards the absolute intimate presence of the ineffable mystery giving himself to man has a history and this is what we call the history of revelation. ⁹⁹

⁹⁸Karl Rahner, "Christology in the Setting of Modern Man's Understanding of Himself and of His World," p. 215.

⁹⁹Karl Rahner, Revelation and Tradition, p. 13.

Revelation is the core of human history¹⁰⁰ and as such it directs history to a transcendent goal. It unfolds continually, as it strives to reach its final goal in the direct vision of God. Until this final vision is achieved even God's enduring truth is only partially understood and changes through the unpredictable twists of human history.¹⁰¹

Rahner finds the prototype of an original statement of revelation in Scripture. However, even in the Scriptures there can be found a difference between the original event of revelation and human reflection upon that event.¹⁰² This reflection on the event is necessary because revelation must be heard if it is to become actual and historical.

. . . there is no proclaimed revelation except in the form of a believed revelation. A believed, i.e. heard, revelation, always already includes also - in so far as it is a revelation understood, accepted and assimilated - a synthesis of the Word of God and the word of a particular man which he in particular can and indeed must speak in his historical situation and from his particular standpoint. . . .¹⁰³

Rahner emphasizes the importance of scripture to dogma by saying that a definition of dogma is "the development of the correctly understood contents of Scripture."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁰¹ Karl Rahner, The Christian of the Future, p. 25.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 61.

¹⁰⁴ Karl Rahner, Kerygma and Dogma, p. 67.

Yet there have historically been two well-springs of Catholic faith: the second being tradition. This has prevented Catholics from formulating a sola-scriptura principle such as operates theoretically in some Protestant theologies. Rahner confronts the problem of how to evaluate the importance of Scripture within Catholic doctrine by formulating a sola-scriptura principle within a specific framework of Catholic understanding.

. . . it is entirely possible to formulate a Catholic sola-scriptura principle with regard to the Church's deposit of faith, provided that we understand this in a Catholic sense and therefore understand it to involve also an authoritative attestation and interpretation of holy scripture by the living word of the Church and her magisterium, and an attestation of scripture itself and its authoritative interpretation which cannot be replaced by scripture itself. 105

The truths of the Catholic faith can be found in the scriptures but this can be interpreted in different ways. Does Rahner mean this in a very literal way so that the exact words of scriptural passages can be applied to situations occurring many hundreds of years after the canon of scripture was established, or does he mean that there is something in scripture which is always reaching beyond itself and so becomes applicable to all times and places? Rahner views scripture in the sense that scripture holds the dynamism for its own interpretation and that as a dynamic entity it demands a dynamic response to its word.

¹⁰⁵Karl Rahner, "Scripture and Tradition," p. 107.

This dynamic human response to the word of God began even while the kerygma was being proclaimed.

. . . theological interpretation of apostolic times is already at work in the handing down of the words of Jesus, giving them its own precision and adapting them to the special circumstances of the assembly. ¹⁰⁶

This adaptation and response to the preaching of Jesus is evident in the written words of scripture. Scripture includes human reflection about faith and the possibility of further drawing out of Christian truths. ¹⁰⁷ This historical process of dynamic response to scripture continued throughout the history of the Church.

Many assertions, guaranteed as inerrant at once by the Church of apostolic times and by the inspiration of Scripture, are theologically derived from the original revelation. Since this is so, and since this derivative theology within the Scriptures still makes the just claim on us to be accepted as obligatory doctrine of faith, while it is itself a stage of development with regard to its own origin, there is therefore in Scripture itself a real development of dogma, and not merely of theology. Thus the development of dogma within Scripture is the authenticated exemplary instance for the development of dogma in general, an example which is in itself obligatory for all who accept Scripture as a whole as authentic testimony of faith. ¹⁰⁸

The reason that Scripture holds the possibility of development is that scripture, as God's word, is inexhaustible. ¹⁰⁹ Scripture is an "original word" which is spoken

¹⁰⁶Karl Rahner, "Exegesis and Dogmatic Theology," Theological Investigations vol. 5, trans. Karl-H. Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), p. 75.

¹⁰⁷Karl Rahner, Kerygma and Dogma, p. 69.

¹⁰⁸Karl Rahner, "Considerations on the Development of Dogma," p.7.

¹⁰⁹Karl Rahner, "Current Problems in Christology," p.155

in a concrete situation and yet carries within itself meaning and significance for every situation. ¹¹⁰

If, therefore, every word suggests also what it contains that is unsaid, then it carries a superfluity of meaning which is not actually knowable at every moment, a meaning which is revealed only in a history of hermeneutic experience and emerges more openly in language in the course of the dialogue that is history. ¹¹¹

The problem of modern man is to come to understand the meaning of scripture for him and try to make it truly his own in his historical situation. ¹¹²

The answer would have to be that, in the light of contemporary 'faith consciousness' and preaching of the Church, the need for a translation of the Christian message into 'modern terms' (which is already shown as necessary by the New Testament itself) shows that by pointing out the dangers of such an undertaking (adapting and falsifying what has been revealed), we might gain the proper criteria for judging such attempts, which can proceed only out of the harmony of contemporary religious consciousness with the faith and doctrine of all ages and all generations of the Church and its experiences in interpreting the 'gospel'. ¹¹³

We will now examine Rahner's thoughts on tradition and its significance for doctrine and for doctrinal development. The truths of the Church are not handed down by scripture alone. Tradition plays a part in the Church's memories

¹¹⁰Karl Rahner, Kerygma and Dogma, p. 71.

¹¹¹Ibid., p. 70.

¹¹²Karl Rahner, "Theology in the New Testament," p. 37.

¹¹³Karl Rahner, Kerygma and Dogma, p. 53.

of her past and even in the authenticating of scripture itself; for scripture can only be understood by the Church in which it originated.¹¹⁴ Tradition is the guidepost for decisions concerning the nature of the Church and is a way of preserving the apostolic experience for succeeding generations of Christians.

Their own experience is preserved and present together with their Word. Spirit and Word together form the permanent active potentiality of an experience which is in principle the same as that of the Apostles even if, because it is supported on the Apostles' Word handed down in Tradition, it is an experience, resting on that of the Apostles and prolonging theirs, which has historical roots and can never continue to live if it is cut off from connection with the Apostles through Word, Sacrament and the handing down of authority.¹¹⁵

In the above consideration of scripture it was noted that scripture, in its dynamic relation to the hearer of the Word, contains a dynamism that forces interpretation and the ever-new appropriation of that Word by the listener as he is confronted by it. Rahner finds the same mechanism operating in the handing down of apostolic experience through tradition. Tradition contains an inner dynamism which provides the impetus for its own development.

This element of being handed on, constitutive in the traditio, which is the handing on to truth and reality together, brings with it basically at once the development

¹¹⁴Karl Rahner, "I Believe in the Church," Theological Investigations vol. 7, trans. David Bourke (New York: Herder & Herder, 1971), p. 108.

¹¹⁵Karl Rahner, "The Development of Dogma," p. 68.

of dogma. For such a traditio takes place at a given moment of space and time, is necessarily historical, and absorbs the recipient and his historical uniqueness, which is also a property of his knowledge, into the process of traditio itself. ¹¹⁶

As tradition has developed it has been the role of the Church's magisterium, in its office as definitive teacher of the faith, which has been emphasized. To some it seems that it is solely the magisterium which has input into development of tradition. Rahner would disagree with this view. Tradition develops and moves within history through and in connection with the collective life of the Church as a whole.

The de facto bearers of the teaching office are, at least in respect of the content of their teaching, dependent upon a Church who is not constituted simply by the one-sided functions of the official authorities in the Church. This faith, this history of faith, this development of dogma on which the teaching office depends in the concrete, are factors to which all members of the Church contribute, each in his own way, by their lives, the confession of their faith, their prayers, their concrete decisions, the theology which they work out for themselves, and their activities in all this are far from being confined merely to putting into practice truths and norms deriving from the teaching office itself. ¹¹⁷

Understanding the dynamism which is present within tradition is important in coming to understand doctrine. By studying the long, and sometimes convoluted, history of some of the Church's teaching we can gain a greater appre-

¹¹⁶Karl Rahner, "Considerations on the Development of Dogma," p. 24.

¹¹⁷Karl Rahner, "The Teaching Office in the Present Day Crisis of Authority," p. 8.

ciation of the meaning of a particular truth and its significance to the faith as the Church's consciousness of itself has grown to maturity through history. ¹¹⁸

Up to this point we have been discussing the dynamic characteristics of revelation which allow for and even require, its development. This dynamism has continued as revelation has been handed down through history by way of scripture and tradition. At this point it is necessary to establish what distinguishes a statement of revelation from a statement of dogma and what connection there may be between these two types of statements.

Rahner states that "A dogmatic statement is not identical with the original Word of revelation and the original statement of faith. ¹¹⁹ He finds the unique quality of statements of revelation in their function as unique historical salvation events.

. . . there are certain events and statements . . . which form the enduring and unsurpassable norma normans, non normata for all later dogmatic statements. . . . Even if and when these statements have also all those elements which we have elsewhere attributed to dogmatic statements, they nevertheless have one thing no other statement has - they belong to that unique historical event of salvation itself to which all later proclamation and theology are referred. They are in this very definite sense more

¹¹⁸ Karl Rahner, "The Immaculate Conception," Theological Investigations vol. 1, trans. Cornelius Ernst (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961), p. 201.

¹¹⁹ Karl Rahner, "What is a Dogmatic Statement?," Theological Investigations vol. 5, trans. Karl-H. Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), p. 60.

than theology, and even more than absolutely binding theology. They are not merely any statement of faith but here that statement which remains the permanent ground of all other, future statements - they are what is handed down and not the unfolding tradition of what has been handed down. ¹²⁰

The characteristics of dogmatic statements are found to be somewhat separate from, but in connection with, revelation. Rahner defines a dogmatic statement as a developing or unfolding of the "basic subjective reflection which already takes place in the mere obedient listening to the Word of God, i.e. in faith as such." ¹²¹ In this unfolding the dogmatic statement is inextricably bound to the existence of the Church. It can only exist because there is and must be a Church, ¹²² and because in this Church there must be a commonality of belief and of profession of belief. ¹²³ Because of the ecclesiastical character of dogma, the magisterium functions as mediator of revelation in a special way. The magisterium is the link between original statements of revelation and statements of dogma.

. . . the Church and its magisterium recognize that they are not the mediators of a revelation which is now being granted for the first time. They do not look on their office as prophetic, but as one that has only to guard,

¹²⁰Ibid., p. 62.

¹²¹Ibid., p. 48.

¹²²Ibid., p. 52.

¹²³Ibid., p. 53.

transmit and explain the divine revelation which came in Jesus Christ at a given point of past history. Thus the function of the Church and the magisterium differs in quality from the process of the original revelation, though the task of the Church is not to be conceived as merely that of repeating the original revelation, and presenting it as something uttered once long ago. The Church presents revelation as something that takes place 'now' as it is uttered by the living voice and offers itself to be appropriated this day in the hearing of believers. Thus the Church and the magisterium distinguish their function - by differentiation, not separation - from the process of revelation itself, and see their function as that of teaching men authoritatively in each age. It is true that the very fact of the Church and the magisterium, once it has been recognized by faith, is the immediate guarantee of a legitimate connection between the original revelation and the pronouncement of the magisterium. ¹²⁴

Because Rahner strongly emphasizes the magisterium's role with regard to dogma we will, in the next few pages, more closely examine his ideas about the magisterium, the pope, and their respective functions as doctrinal regulators.

Rahner views the magisterium as that place within the Church where, through the magisterium's "authoritative pronouncements," the Church comes to its most definitive awareness of itself. ¹²⁵ The magisterium has authoritative priority over the faith of individual believers, ¹²⁶ and also over the beliefs and convictions of individual theologians

¹²⁴Karl Rahner, "Considerations on the Development of Dogma," Theological Investigations vol. 4, trans. Kevin Smyth (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), pp. 3-4.

¹²⁵Karl Rahner, On Heresy, (New York: Herder & Herder, 1964), p. 19.

¹²⁶Karl Rahner, "I Believe in the Church," Theological Investigations vol. 6, trans. David Bourke (New York: Herder & Herder, 1971), p. 109.

within the Church.¹²⁷ This authority is necessary to insure unity of Creed in the Church.¹²⁸

The function of the magisterium is two-fold.

First it can in certain circumstances guarantee the correctness of this theological activity even where (in principle or up to now de facto) the activity, just as such, has led to no strict consequence but only to a conventientia. (We have at least left this possibility open). Moreover it guarantees not only that the consequence is correct, but also that it is still God's Word.¹²⁹

The magisterium has the final authority regarding assertions or articles of belief; whether it is in putting forth a definition or in ruling that some assertions are not compatible with Christian teaching.¹³⁰ And not only can it do this on the substance or content of doctrinal assertions but it also can definitively rule on the validity of the language in which the doctrine is expressed.

God's truth is ever one and the same, definitive. It is proclaimed by the Church's magisterium. When and where that magisterium has expressed the truth entrusted to her by Christ in a form that binds the conscience of the faithful, that truth in that form is true and valid for all time. . . . And this despite the fact that no formulation of the truths of faith in human words is ever adequate to

¹²⁷Karl Rahner, "Theology and the Church's Teaching Authority After the Council," Theological Investigations vol. 9, trans. Graham Harrison (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), p. 95.

¹²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹²⁹Karl Rahner, "The Development of Dogma," Theological Investigations, vol. 1, trans. Cornelius Ernst (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961), p. 75.

¹³⁰Karl Rahner, "Theology and the Church's Teaching Authority After the Council," p. 89.

the object referred to by them, and that at least in principle, any of them could be replaced by an even better, more comprehensive one. ¹³¹

Although the magisterium has absolute authority over the content and form of doctrinal statements, Rahner notes that many times this authority is exercised in a way which is less than an absolute manifestation of the magisterium's power.

. . . in very many cases in which the authoritative magisterium is exercised it is not brought to bear with this absolute force, and the obligation which it lays upon the faithful, is not the assent of their faith properly so-called, but merely a qualified assent for in such exercises of the official teaching authority of the Church the doctrine that is stated though authentic, is not in itself irreformable. Rather it is a doctrine that is formulated as conscientiously as possible by the teaching authority to protect the essential and proper substance of the faith. ¹³²

Perhaps part of the reason for the magisterium's reluctance to impose its full authority upon doctrinal thought is that today there are so many diverse theological languages and schools of thought.

. . . today the Church and her teaching authority are forced, to a notably larger extent than formerly, to leave to the individual theologies the responsibility for seeing that they genuinely do maintain themselves in agreement with the Church's creed; that their interpretation of this creed is not such as to interpret away the creed itself while paying it mere lip-service,

¹³¹Karl Rahner, On Heresy, p. 60.

¹³²Karl Rahner, "The Teaching Office of the Church in the Present Day Crisis of Authority," Theological Investigations vol. 12, trans. David Bourke (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974), p. 4.

not such as to empty it of its content, but such as really to maintain its truth. ¹³³

However, Rahner is firm in emphasizing that this theological pluralism does not preclude the possibility that the Church's magisterium, to protect unity of creed, may in fact pronounce anathemas against teachings which it determines to be incompatible with orthodox Catholic doctrine. ¹³⁴ Again, while the reality of the pronouncement of anathemas remains, theological pluralism may affect the form in which this type of official judgment is exercised. ¹³⁵

Having considered the magisterium and its function with regard to doctrinal statements we will now turn our attention to the function of the pope as a focus of the magisterium's power, and to his role in defining doctrine.

Like the magisterium, the pope in Rahner's thought is a point at which "the collective consciousness of the whole Church attains effective self-awareness" and does so in a way which exerts authority over individual members of the Church. ¹³⁶ The papal function, is to clarify this self-awareness. A question might be: if there is a collective consciousness in the Church, why is it necessary for a

¹³³Karl Rahner, "Pluralism in Theology and the Unity of the Creed in the Church," Theological Investigations vol. 11, trans. David Bourke (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974, pp. 17-18.

¹³⁴Ibid., p. 13.

¹³⁵Ibid., p. 14.

¹³⁶Karl Rahner, "Considerations on the Development of Dogma," p. 34.

body such as the magisterium, or an individual, such as the pope to clarify or become a focal point for this self-understanding? Rahner answers that,

. . . the faith of the whole Church, existing prior to the definition, does not by any means imply that every individual member already explicitly believes the proposition in question as something revealed by God. It only means that this faith exists in the Church as an attribute of this moral person which is the Church as a whole. The function of the papal decision is precisely to ascertain this faith and so to impart this general faith of the whole Church to those who do not yet believe. ¹³⁷

Papal definition rests traditionally on the promise of Christ to keep his Church from error through the power of the Spirit. It is this promise that enables the pope to make doctrinal pronouncements. ¹³⁸ However, there is some restriction on the activity of the pope. He must decide a doctrinal question using ideas that have not simply occurred to him as an individual, but which rest on the tradition existent within the Church.

One might say that some other sufficiently certain theological judgment would be enough, for instance, that on various grounds, something was implicitly contained in the heritage of faith. But in point of fact it is unthinkable that this would be discovered for the first time at this precise moment by the Pope. And so the theological reason which the Pope has must also be known and active elsewhere in the Church. ¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Ibid., pp. 33-34.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 32.

¹³⁹ Ibid., pp. 32-33.

Up to this point Rahner has dealt with the pope and teaching office primarily in the present. He also has some thoughts on the function of the magisterium in the future. According to Rahner, the continuing situation of theological pluralism and diverse theological languages will place the future magisterium in a position where any "fresh positive expressions of doctrine" will be difficult to present. ¹⁴⁰

. . . it is conceivable that genuine 'progress' in dogmatic development in the future will move, not so much in the direction of a wider, more exact unfolding and precise definition of traditional dogma, but simply in that of a more living, radical grasp and statement of the ultimate fundamental dogmas themselves. . . . In short, it is conceivable that the 'change' in the Church's teaching on dogma and morals may move in the direction of quite considerable 'decontrol' and a general tendency to leave questions open. ¹⁴¹

Also, the Church of the future may increasingly find that its role in defining is taking on the character of simplification; of emphasizing and clarifying the most central points of Catholic doctrine, rather than generating pronouncements on new doctrines.

The situation of the Church today in terms of theology and speculation is such that we may presume that any authentic, and still more definitorial decisions on doctrine on the part of the Church will in the future consist not so much in fresh explicitations and developments of the ancient teaching of the Church as in the special emphasis which she gives to particular points of doctrine

¹⁴⁰Karl Rahner, "Pluralism in Theology and the Unity of the Creed in the Church," p. 19.

¹⁴¹Karl Rahner, The Christian of the Future, trans. W.J. O'Hara (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967), p. 34.

in order to maintain their truth against false interpretations. ¹⁴²

When the Church, through its magisterium, expresses revelation in definitive propositions it becomes dogma. ¹⁴³

But once dogma is posited does it remain eternally the same or can it somehow change? We will now proceed to examine how Rahner treats the subject of dogmatic development. We will approach this question in two stages. In the first stage some general remarks on why Rahner feels that dogma can and must develop will be presented and in the second, we will examine the mechanisms through which it does develop.

For Rahner, a dogmatic definition does not signal the end of thought and reflection upon the content of the dogma. ¹⁴⁴ Rahner feels that dogmatic formulations are indeed universally and continually binding upon the faithful but that the fact of being defined does not necessarily make everything within the definition perfectly clear. ¹⁴⁵ All dogmatic formulas are expressed in historical language and

¹⁴²Karl Rahner, "The Teaching Office of the Church in the Present Day Crisis of Authority," p. 22.

¹⁴³Karl Rahner, "Theology in the New Testament," Theological Investigations vol. 5, trans. Karl-H. Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), p. 133.

¹⁴⁴Karl Rahner and Karl Lehmann, Kerygma and Dogma, (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969), p. 72.

¹⁴⁵Karl Rahner, "The Position of Christology in the Church Between Exegesis and Dogmatics," Theological Investigations vol. 11, trans. David Bourke (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974), p. 204.

as such participate in the stream of all historical development.

Anyone who takes seriously the 'historicity' of human truth (in which God's truth too has become incarnate in Revelation) must see that neither the abandonment of a formula nor its preservation in a petrified form does justice to human understanding. For history is precisely not an atomized beginning-ever-again; it is rather (the more spiritual it is) a becoming-new which preserves the old, and preserves it all the more as old, the more spiritual this history is. But this preservation, which recognizes the true uniqueness of something which has taken place once for all, is only historical preservation when the history goes on, and the movement of reflexion departs from the old formula which has been reached in order to discover it (just this old formula itself) again. ¹⁴⁶

The key to Rahner's understanding of language and dogma is that dogmatic language or formulations are not identical with the object of faith itself. Because any formulation is subject to the vagaries of human language, which is in itself an interpretation of what is spoken of, it is possible to come upon new formulations of dogmatic statements which do not change the content of any old forms but become more in touch with contemporary understandings and more in contact with other disciplines. ¹⁴⁷ This is not less true of dogmas than of other statements, but is more true because of the need for dogma to make "present and actual the

¹⁴⁶Karl Rahner, "Current Problems in Christology," p. 150.

¹⁴⁷Karl Rahner, "Heresies in the Church Today?," p. 121.

Christian message" by translating itself into the many different languages which the world speaks at different times. ¹⁴⁸
 Those who feel that doctrinal language has eternal validity in itself may be forgetting that the language within which the doctrine is expressed is itself a decision.

Because a dogmatic statement has this Church significance it also always involves a terminological ruling on community language, which may, on the one hand, be binding, and on the other must be taken account of in the interpretation of the Church's explanations and must not be confused with the object itself, or with a statement ¹⁴⁹ that is only possible because it is based on the object.

Because dogmatic terminology is human terminology and is therefore conditioned by man's language and the human understanding of the world which his language reveals, ¹⁵⁰
 the terminology is going to be exposed to historical forces which sometimes are beyond the control of the Church's magisterium. The magisterium may in part be able to influence the understanding of a terminology but it can never be in complete control of it. ¹⁵¹ The Church must be aware of the limitations and historical nature of its pronouncements.

. . . the word which is inadequate for expressing the thing-always, solely, inevitably and most frequently indeed, in its communal use-brings out certain characteristics of the matter referred to and equally inevitably leaves other characteristics in the background.

¹⁴⁸Karl Rahner, Kerygma and Dogma, p. 67.

¹⁴⁹Ibid., p. 92.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., p. 105.

¹⁵¹Karl Rahner, "What is a Dogmatic Statement?," Theological Investigations vol. 5, trans. Karl-H. Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), p. 57.

It creates new relations to certain other matters, and equally does not bring out certain existing relations with other realities of the faith. The historically conditioned, limited terminology lends historical finiteness, concreteness, and contingency to the statement of faith itself, particularly in its theological form. Added to this there is the fact that it is basically impossible to furnish every time an absolutely unequivocal, reflectively expressed definition of associated terms, together with the terminology used. . . . This is the reason why ecclesiastical declarations of doctrine, ecclesiastical statements of dogma, also contain implicitly a determined terminology. ¹⁵²

When we realize the historical nature of doctrinal terminology, it is possible to become aware of the complexities of defining anything with absolute clarity. A definition of terms does not really solve the problem since those words with which we define terms are themselves historically conditioned and may also be in need of a definition. One can become enmeshed in what Rahner refers to as "the vast, labyrinthine history of these terms, which can by no means be adequately 'defined.'" ¹⁵³

Because of the limitations which history places on all use of language, Rahner comes to the conclusion that the Church's doctrinal formulations use terminology whose suitability but not truth are open to question. ¹⁵⁴ A refusal to bow to the historical nature of language and the subsequent

¹⁵²Ibid., p. 55.

¹⁵³Karl Rahner, "The Historicity of Theology," p. 68.

¹⁵⁴Karl Rahner, Kerygma and Dogma, p. 92.

need for flexibility in terminology can lead to mistaken belief.

The particular linguistic formulation which has been handed down cannot be the measure of correct belief. The very holding on to traditional modes of expression often leads, on the contrary, to heresy (as, for example, monophysitism, and monothelitism are, according to the latest researches of J. Lebon and others, 'heresy' because they refused to undergo a linguistic and conceptual differentiation at a time when the traditional formulas had in fact become ambiguous). ¹⁵⁵

To avoid the danger of adhering to terminology too zealously and letting the true meaning of the doctrine become twisted it is necessary to revise doctrine in a "forward direction," a direction toward more adequate expression for the contemporary historical period. ¹⁵⁶ Truth must wear the mantle of its age if it is to be a living truth.

If it does not, or does so insufficiently, it does not become more timeless and more universally valid. It probably will merely bear the style of the mind of an earlier age which has become a habit, and which is wrongly regarded as an expression of the eternally identical validity of the truth of the gospel, because it is old and well known. This hardening of the form in which the truth of the gospel is expressed is then itself nothing but the dangerous symptom of an indifference to this truth, from which the age is suffering whether consciously or not, and it is a symptom of the lack of strength to assimilate and effectively to make it their own from which such 'traditionalists' are suffering. ¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 66.

¹⁵⁶ Karl Rahner, "Theology in the New Testament," p. 29.

¹⁵⁷ Karl Rahner, On Heresy, p. 61.

Rahner goes on to point out some examples of terminology which might undergo change without sacrificing the underlying meaning of what is defined and is binding for Catholic belief.

Words such as 'person' and 'nature' in Christology, 'original sin' in the theology of sin, 'transsubstantiation' in the doctrine of the Eucharist, 'infusion', 'habitus', 'increase of merit' etc. in the doctrine of justification certainly do point to a reality of faith and of binding conviction. But they also always imply the influence of certain linguistic conventions and language in the forming of definitions within a given confession which are not necessary and could in principle be altered without any surrender of what is really expressed in such definitions. 158

Rahner also states that there are examples which show that the Church has on occasion not only changed the terminology which it has used in its definitions but has actually changed the concepts which it used to express its dogmas. 159 An example of this is Augustine's formulation of the doctrine of justification.

Augustine was able, and had, to maintain-and the Church of his time did so as well in its doctrine-that every unjustified sinner sinned in every one of his acts. In the language of the post-Tridentine Church it is impossible to formulate things in this way, although it can be shown that the differing formulations do not, with regard to what they refer to, contradict one another. 160

¹⁵⁸ Karl Rahner, "On the Theology of the Ecumenical Discussion," Theological Investigations vol. 11. trans. David Bourke (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974), p. 41.

¹⁵⁹ Karl Rahner, Kerygma and Dogma, p. 93.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

The problem of pinning down exactly what the various theological terminologies "mean" has implications for ecumenical discussion. It is necessary for participants in the discussion to enlarge their grasp of different terminologies so that their dialogue can advance constructively.¹⁶¹ It is possible for disputants to actually be talking about different things, or to feel that they are in disagreement when they are actually agreeing in principle to the most salient points of the doctrine in question. Rahner offers as an example someone who in a theological dispute denies the existence of original sin.

Certainly all that would initially be taking place in such a case is that a particular ecclesiastical definition, in some sense binding for Catholics, would be being rejected. For the question would in fact still remain completely open as to whether the rejection of the term 'original sin' really entailed a rejection of the reality signified by and under the term original sin in a Tridentine formulation of a proposition of faith.¹⁶²

Rahner recommends that we listen with generosity to theologians who seem to oppose Catholic truths. When another theologian supports a position which seems to explicitly contradict Catholic dogma we can certainly answer with a forceful denial. But even then we must question whether the position which we are opposing is truly a rejection of the

¹⁶¹Karl Rahner, The Christian of the Future, p. 39.

¹⁶²Karl Rahner, "On the Theology of the Ecumenical Discussion," p. 41.

Catholic dogma or simply a misunderstanding of the dogmatic proposition. ¹⁶³ Bultmann and other modern protestant theologians may be closer to Catholic theological positions than Catholics or they themselves suspect.

Who can say precisely that the basic positions held by Rudolph Bultmann are, in the last analysis, really un-Catholic, or whether it is merely that the propositions themselves have not been understood or developed with sufficient precision, and that this is why conclusions have been derived from them by Bultmann or his followers which seem to run counter to the ultimate basic principles of Catholicism. . . . ¹⁶⁴

Misunderstanding of dogmatic formulas are possible because history, with its concomitant changes in language, is a process within which the Church lives. Dogmatic formulas contain implicit elements of linguistics and have been developed in ways dictated not only by the reality of the formulas' object; but also according to linguistic rules which might have been different. These linguistic rules are formed by "sociological and historical factors in the development of human thinking." ¹⁶⁵

Since a person cannot hear a truth without bringing to the confrontation the historically based concepts which

¹⁶³ Karl Rahner, "Pluralism in Theology and the Unity of the Creed in the Church," p. 9.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 14.

are already present in his mind,¹⁶⁶ it must also be true that this same situation was in effect when the various dogmatic truths were initially formulated in the Church. One can conclude from this that dogmatic truths can only be truly understood if we look at them in the full significance and limitations of their historical context.¹⁶⁷ We can then attempt to determine how their historical contexts determined their form and language. This is a basis for presenting dogmatic development as both possible and necessary.

If the 'making the faith one's own' is historical-and how could it be otherwise-and is not merely theological reflection on a consciousness of faith, then there must be a history of dogmas since this is nothing other than the history of the particular form of the absolute consent of faith in any particular time, made on the grounds of the one permanent divine revelation as it has been given once and for all in Jesus Christ and as it must remain in every situation of history-an actual event in the consent of faith and not merely of simple theology.¹⁶⁸

However, Rahner wants it clearly understood that such development in dogma does not mean that the Church is in any way changing its truths.

This does not mean that the ancient formulas which answer the question are eliminated or discarded as antiquated or even false, God forbid! The Church and its faith are always the same throughout their history,

¹⁶⁶Karl Rahner, "Theology in the New Testament," p. 28.

¹⁶⁷Karl Rahner, "Possible Courses for the Theology of the Future," Theological Investigations vol. 13, trans. David Bourke (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), pp. 47-8.

¹⁶⁸Karl Rahner, "Theology in the New Testament," p. 30.

otherwise we should have an atomized history of religion composed of event after event, but no one history of the one Church and the abiding self-same faith. . . . But since this one identical Church had and still has a history, the ancient formula is not merely the end. It is also the starting-point of a spiritual movement of departure and return which is our only guarantee or better, hope-of having understood the ancient formula. For no understanding is possible anywhere if what is understood remains fixed and frozen and is not launched into the movement of that nameless mystery which is the vehicle of all understanding. ¹⁶⁹

The historically conditioned understanding of dogma is the ferment within dogma, allowing for its possible development. ¹⁷⁰ Yet the development of dogma has its own logical energy and its own logical structure which unfolds in actual historical development of dogmas. ¹⁷¹ Because of this, dogma is not entirely at the mercy of historical forces. It maintains its integrity throughout the various phases of its development as it unfolds according to a structure which is inherent within the revelation itself.

The decisive feature of such a change is not 'progress' in the sense of acquiring a sort of plus-quantity of knowledge (as though the Church had somehow to become 'cleverer'), but (in principle, at least) the change, the new look, of the same reality and truth, appropriate to just this age of the Church: it is change in, not of identity. ¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹Karl Rahner, "On the Theology of the Incarnation," Theological Investigations vol. 4, trans. Kevin Smyth (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), pp. 105-6.

¹⁷⁰Karl Rahner, "Christology in the Setting of Modern Man's Understanding of Himself and of His World," p. 216.

¹⁷¹Karl Rahner, "The Historicity of Theology," p. 70.

¹⁷²Karl Rahner, "The Development of Dogma," p. 45.

Rahner feels that acknowledging the development of dogma in history is a challenge to the Church. It is a challenge which, if not accepted, could bring grave difficulties to the understanding of doctrine.

We possess this eternal quality of truth in history, and hence we can only appropriate it by entrusting ourselves to its further course. If we refuse to take this risk, the formulations of dogma wrongly claimed to be 'perennial' will become unintelligible, like opaque glass which God's light can no longer penetrate. ¹⁷³

But what is the nature of such development? The Catholic Church considers revelation closed with the death of the last apostle. Because of this, dogmatic development cannot consist of episodes of "new" revelation which are then incorporated into Church teaching. Dogmatic development within history must take a different form if it is to be both necessary and allowable. The enduring truths must be understood in a new way. ¹⁷⁴

The thought of earlier generations, even if it has had results in the form of conciliar definitions, is not a sort of couch for the thought of later generations. Definitions are much less an end than a beginning. A Hic Rhodus, An opening. No real achievement is ever lost to the Church. But theologians are never spared the task of prompt renewal. Anything which is merely conserved, or which is merely handed down without a fresh, personal exertion beginning at the very sources of Revelation, rots as the manna did. ¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³Karl Rahner, "The Historicity of Theology," p. 71.

¹⁷⁴Karl Rahner, "Theology and the Church's Teaching Authority After the Council," pp. 88-9.

¹⁷⁵Karl Rahner, "The Prospects for Dogmatic Theology," Theological Investigations vol. 1, trans. Cornelius Ernst (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961), p. 10.

The very nature of conciliar statements demonstrates the necessity of dogmatic development. If it were not necessary to clarify certain points of doctrine throughout history, there would have been no Church councils. Rahner points out that the necessity to clarify doctrine did not only come from the outside threat of heresy, but also from the very nature of dogmatic truth itself.

The degree of theoretical precision and existential vitality with which man understands what he hears depends on the degree to which he comprehends it within the total content of his spiritual being. If this were not the case, there would never have been Councils of the Church with their definitions, because a new age would always have been able to live on in the old clarity; or we should have to suppose that the only reason for these Councils was the fact that there had been evil heretics who maliciously obscured what in itself had been said with quite sufficient clarity and what in itself would have been quite sufficient for later ages in spite of their unlikeness. ¹⁷⁶

It is up to man in the present day to attempt to grasp God's revelation with his own contemporary existential vitality. Not to do so betrays the truth. We must attempt to both preserve and to change. If we do not preserve, we run the risk of falling into doctrinal error. If we fail to change, we fail to make God's truth our own. ¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ Karl Rahner, "Current Problems in Christology," Theological Investigations vol. 1, trans. Cornelius Ernst (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961), p. 153.

¹⁷⁷ Karl Rahner, "The Development of Dogma," p. 45.

Some may regard the idea of doctrinal development with fear that some of God's truth may be lost if any change in doctrine is allowed. Rahner would disagree with this position.

. . . a 'development of dogma' . . . need not entail any impoverishment of the life of faith in the Church, or any ossification of her awareness of her own faith. This life of faith is simply concentrated all the more clearly upon the ultimately decisive points contained in the Christian faith, and in the contemporary intellectual situation in the world there is every occasion for this concentration. And these most central and most radical points in the content of the Christian faith will be considered, interpreted, and applied to the present by theologies which are, and which will continue to be, very different in character. 178

The Christian should have no fear when facing the possibility of doctrinal development, but should rejoice. 179
Rahner sees in this process of development the possibility of an enriched understanding on the part of the Church.

. . . under certain circumstances certain conceptual models, or perhaps even errors which have crept into our understanding at an earlier stage are gradually eliminated in this process. The ultimate goal of the process itself is not that in this way we shall gradually argue away the very substance of the dogma itself, so as to leave no room for it in our world, but rather that from its own true and innermost centre an ever better understanding may be achieved of what it truly signifies. 180

¹⁷⁸Karl Rahner, "Pluralism in Theology and the Unity of the Creed in the Church," p. 20.

¹⁷⁹Karl Rahner, The Christian of the Future, p. 36.

¹⁸⁰Karl Rahner, "The Position of Christology in the Church Between Exegesis and Dogmatics," p. 209.

The fact that revelation springs from an immutable God is not seen as a barrier to change. Rather it provides the very possibility of change, since God in his relations with the world is the dynamism of change.

. . . the most general relation between God and a mutable world consists in the fact that God as most immanent- and yet precisely for that reason absolutely superior to the world-confers on finite beings themselves a true active self-transcendence in their change and becoming, and is himself ultimately the future, the final cause, which represents the true and really effective cause operative in all change. 181

It is God's gift of self-transcendence that allows man to open up to divine revelation, thus providing an inner principle of doctrinal development.

The closing of revelation is not the arbitrary ending of God's speaking, which could have gone on and only as a matter of fact fell silent after some chosen utterance. . . . It is man's being opened up for and into the real and not merely conceptual self-communication of God. And therein it has within itself, precisely because of this closure, which is dis-closure, its dynamism of the development of dogma. 182

Having established that dogma does and in fact, must, develop we will now examine some specific mechanisms which Rahner feels contribute to dogmatic development.

Rahner uses various explanations to show how doctrine can develop while essentially remaining the same. These mechanisms for development of dogma are found throughout his

¹⁸¹Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger, Revelation and Tradition, (New York: Herder & Herder, 1966), p. 12.

¹⁸²Karl Rahner, "Considerations on the Development of Dogma," p. 9.

writings and no where does he attempt to tie all of them together into a comprehensive system. This author has attempted to collect the various mechanisms which Rahner offers and to present them in an orderly manner. This has resulted in the creation of four broad categories of mechanism for dogmatic development. These categories will be presented below.

The first mechanism which Rahner proposes for understanding the relationship between developing dogma and the permanence of Christian truth involves the thought that such a truth can only be understood in relation to the whole fabric of truths which make up the Christian faith.

The faith which we believe and live is not a collection of propositions arbitrarily brought together, a collection which is held together only by an abstract, formal authority of the revealing God; rather, these truths together really form an inner unity, they belong together, each refers to the other, and the faith in any one of them is always merely faith in one aspect of the one truth, and is always possible only in the one totality which is comprehended in its historical development through the ages by the one living consciousness of faith of the individual and of the whole Church. ¹⁸³

By examining how a truth derives its life, meaning and content from the whole of Christian faith through succeeding ages, it is easier for us to comprehend its significance in relation to this whole. ¹⁸⁴ It is this framework

¹⁸³ Karl Rahner, "Scripture and Tradition," p. 111.

¹⁸⁴ Karl Rahner, "The Immaculate Conception," p. 202.

which enables us to understand an apparent change in a particular truth.¹⁸⁵ Because of the relation of each truth to the whole body of truths a change or development in a single truth, which may not seem to be consistent with previous teaching when viewed by itself, might be seen as a natural development when such a change is viewed against the background of the entire body of Catholic doctrine.

The true meaning of an individual proposition of revealed truth does indeed contain an 'item' of new knowledge, which is added on to the other truths, enlarges and completes them; yet a proposition of this kind is in itself only really intelligible in the totality of the one saving Truth.¹⁸⁶

In addition to this, the development of a particular dogma may shed new light on the entire field of doctrines as the relation between this new development and Catholic teaching is worked out and viewed for consistency. Old insights can be challenged as the development of a particular dogma introduces new questions and new perspectives on Catholic teaching as a whole.¹⁸⁷

One truth known points to another, trains comprehension of yet another, gives an understanding of the meaning and spirit of the whole and so makes it possible to

¹⁸⁵Karl Rahner, "The Historicity of Theology," Theological Investigations vol. 9, trans. Graham Harrison (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), p. 68.

¹⁸⁶Karl Rahner, "The Interpretation of the Dogma of the Assumption," Theological Investigations vol. 1, trans. Cornelius Ernst (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961), p. 216.

¹⁸⁷Karl Rahner, "The Historicity of Theology," p. 67.

grasp another part. Every question that is raised by one truth known leads immediately beyond the particular reality to the whole. ¹⁸⁸

Another mechanism of doctrinal development is that the Church knows what it wants to say in some unformulated and universal way and that this primal knowledge is simply rephrased in different ways and at different times as parts of the faith come into greater consciousness within the Church. ¹⁸⁹ Rahner appeals to a global understanding of Christian faith which the Church carries through history and which only gradually moves into reflexive consciousness.

The Church as a whole considers a thought which grows out of the whole content of its faith: it ripens, it merges ever more fully with the whole, while the Church lives it and perfects it. And so the Church of a certain day, if we say so, finds itself simply there, believing in this specific manner. ¹⁹⁰

These truths become reflexively conscious through the application of thought, in faith, to them within the stresses and challenges of our historical situation.

The history of theology is by no means just the history of the progress of doctrine, but also a history of forgetting. . . . What was once given in history and is ever made present anew does not primarily form a set of premises from which we can draw new conclusions which have never been thought of before. It is the object

¹⁸⁸ Karl Rahner, On Heresy, p. 35.

¹⁸⁹ Karl Rahner, "Heresies in the Church Today?," Theological Investigations vol. 12, trans. David Bourke (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974), pp. 140-41.

¹⁹⁰ Karl Rahner, "Considerations on the Development of Dogma," p. 32.

which, while it is always retained, must ever be acquired anew, by us, that is, we who are just such as no one else can ever be in all history. 191

According to this theory, the Church today would have more faith "data" available to her in a reflexive way than did, perhaps, the early Church. Rahner denies that our faith is therefore somehow better than theirs.

. . . in actual fact (if not in essential principle) greater reflexive articulation of a spiritual possession is nearly always purchased at the cost of a partial loss in unhampered communication ('naive' in the good sense) with the reality given in faith (and which is still possessed in its entirety). 192

The reason that the Church must come to greater reflexive consciousness of her faith is that revelation can be expressed only imperfectly in a human Church, even one which has been promised the help of the Spirit. This, according to Rahner, is the effect of original sin, which still leaves its "shadows and scars" on the members of Christ's Church. 193 This should not be construed to mean that the Church's definitions of doctrine are somehow false. Rahner proposes that each doctrinal statement is valid on its own even though it may be formulated imperfectly within a sinful Church. He takes great care to protect the legitimacy of existing dogma

¹⁹¹Karl Rahner, "Current Problems in Christology," pp. 151-2.

¹⁹²Karl Rahner, "The Development of Dogma," p. 67.

¹⁹³Karl Rahner, Kerygma and Dogma, p. 87.

by asserting that all doctrinal statements are true because, despite their limitations, they correspond in some way to reality. Therefore they are always binding.¹⁹⁴

Rahner's third mechanism views the development of dogma as an explication or unfolding of what is already contained in existing dogmas. First, it is necessary to realize that truths which are derived from other articles of faith do exist as dogma and are not merely theology.

There are truths of faith which are recognized as such by the Church because and as they are referred back to other truths of revelation in which they are 'implicitly' contained. Any development of dogma which is more than just history of theology would otherwise be impossible.¹⁹⁵

This does not mean that doctrine itself is mutable or that the substance of faith is changing. Doctrine cannot be abolished, but it can move forward toward the ultimate fullness of its own meaning.¹⁹⁶

Rahner would deny that a dogma derived implicitly from a revelation is somehow less of a revelation in itself. He feels that God is not communicating in a somehow inferior way but is simply communicating differently. This potential for implicit communication is derived from the fact that the object communicated far surpasses any utterance of its reality.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴Karl Rahner, "The Development of Dogma," p. 43.

¹⁹⁵Karl Rahner, "Theology in the New Testament," p. 25.

¹⁹⁶Karl Rahner, The Christian of the Future, p. 24.

¹⁹⁷Karl Rahner, "Considerations on the Development of Dogma," p. 25.

The content of a doctrinal statement points to the mystery of God. It is this mystery that provides a unity for the statement which is not simply achieved by the word alone.¹⁹⁸ Because dogmatic statements are statements about a reality which defies expression by its very nature, a dynamism is created between what is said and what was intended.

. . . it is just because dogmas are human statements about the word of God that their character and inner tension become more apparent. If dogmas, as human insights, also possess 'intellectual' character, they still cannot be totally and evidently known, because in their content they refer to something which is of an origin that is historical and above all, supernatural and mysterious.¹⁹⁹

All statements about God are by nature analogous, approaching the reality which they wish to express but never quite expressing the thing itself in its totality. This is true of both the dogmatic and of the theological statement.²⁰⁰ This dynamism of expression between a reality that is beyond linguistic expression and attempts to express this reality, is evident even in the apostles' experience of Jesus and their attempts to convey that experience to others.

Christ, as the living link between God and the world . . . is the objective content of an experience which is more elemental and concentrated, simpler and yet

¹⁹⁸Karl Rahner, "Pluralism in Theology and the Unity of the Creed in the Church," p. 21.

¹⁹⁹Karl Rahner, Kerygma and Dogma, p. 41.

²⁰⁰Ibid., p. 98.

richer than the individual propositions coined in an attempt to express this experience—an attempt which can in principle never be finally successful.²⁰¹

This richness or plenitude, which is a characteristic of the personal experience of Christ and of the experience of all revelation, is the basis for thinking that revelation is an inexhaustible source of knowledge.

That revelation has been closed is a positive and not a negative statement, a pure Amen, a conclusion which includes everything and excludes nothing of the divine plenitude, conclusion as a fulfilled presence of an all-embracing plenitude.²⁰²

Because of this each doctrinal assertion can only lead to more assertions about the infinite reality which it attempts to express.

. . . since each truth is in this way a moment of this movement towards the unifying self-communication of God, which is absolutely unified and utterly intensive, the assertion can only function when it is open to more than it contains, to the whole, in fact. But it is only open . . . if it unfolds itself in a greater fullness of assertions, through which it is referred ever more fully to revelation as a whole.²⁰³

Such movement within the whole of revelation may open revelation itself up for fresh insights and new outlooks.

. . . because our statements about the infinite divine realities are finite and hence in this sense inadequate—that is, while actually corresponding to reality, yet not

²⁰¹Karl Rahner, "The Development of Dogma," p. 65.

²⁰²Ibid., p. 49.

²⁰³Karl Rahner, "Considerations on the Development of Dogma," p. 25.

simply congruent with it--so every formula in which the faith is expressed can in principle be surpassed while still retaining its truth. . . . it can be replaced by another which states the same thing, and what is more states it not only without excluding more extensive, more delicately nuanced prospects, but positively opening them up: prospects on to facts, realities, truths, which had not been seen explicitly in the earlier formulation and which make it possible to see the same reality from a new point of view, in a fresh perspective. ²⁰⁴

The knowledge which an explication brings does not need to be provable in a strictly logical manner. It must be viewed in the light of Christian faith. When doctrinal developments are viewed within this light of faith a sure knowledge of the correctness of the development can be obtained, "through the luminous power of the Spirit in contact with the res itself." ²⁰⁵

There are two dynamisms at work within explication of dogma: expansion and simplification. Rahner feels that simplification may be the most important.

It is not at all as if dogmatic development must always move in the direction of multiplying individual assertions. Just as important, indeed, strictly speaking still more important, is the development in the line of simplification, towards an ever clearer view of what is really intended, towards the single mystery, an intensification of the experience in faith of what is infinitely simple and in a very essential sense obvious. ²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ Karl Rahner, "The Development of Dogma," p. 44.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 52-3.

²⁰⁶ Karl Rahner, "Considerations on the Development of Dogma," p. 26.

The more often the ultimate themes of revelation are disentangled from the various assertions of doctrine the more clearly the validity of the individual assertions can be grasped, and the more dogmatic development occurs.²⁰⁷ An explication of a doctrinal principle can in turn be both less and more than the original revelation. It is more because a reflexive formulation of the original, simple possession of the reality can illuminate and enrich it. Less, because it can only be a remote and reflexive expression of what was before a spiritual possession.²⁰⁸

Rahner makes some distinctions between the types of explication which are possible and gives his opinion as to which are valid. One type is,

When the explication is that of a single proposition contained in original Revelation, and when this explication only states more expressly ('in other words', in a different conceptual language etc.) 'the same thing' as the original proposition (of course with the guarantee of the magisterium, that the new proposition correctly renders the sense of the old), there can be no doubt that the new proposition too states what God has revealed, that it is believed with divine faith as materially God himself, that it is 'dogma' and not just theology.²⁰⁹

A second type of explication is the explication of content which is "virtually implicit" in one proposition

²⁰⁷Ibid.

²⁰⁸Karl Rahner, "The Development of Dogma," p. 67.

²⁰⁹Ibid., pp. 57-8.

using the help of another proposition to aid in explication.²¹⁰

There is some disagreement among theologians about the validity of this second type of explication.

One group, the majority today, hold that these inferred propositions are purely human ones, the correctness of which can of course be guaranteed by the Church. The others believe that this kind of explication of what is contained merely 'virtually' in the immediate propositions of Revelation can and must still really be called 'Revelation', and as such can be proclaimed by the Church as the object of divine faith in the strict sense. The second view would seem more correct.²¹¹

Rahner views the fact that there are some existant propositions of faith which fall into this second category of explication as proof that this form of explication is valid. The magisterium under the guidance of the Spirit cannot rule falsely about a matter of binding faith.²¹² Rahner sums up his theory of types of explication by saying that,

. . . the connection between the original propositions and those reached in consequence of dogmatic development can consist in the connection between something formally or virtually implicit in a proposition and the explication of this by logical procedures with the support and in the light of the divine Spirit, leaving it open as to whether or not this connection must be logically compelling in every case 'quoad nos'.²¹³

When a Christian pays heed to God speaking through the dynamism of an explicated revelation he can believe it

²¹⁰Ibid., p. 58.

²¹¹Ibid., p. 59.

²¹²ibid., p. 60.

²¹³Ibid., p. 63.

as if this were the original utterance itself.²¹⁴ Rahner appeals to Christians to have faith in God as he uses the dynamic mechanisms which are present even in purely human speech to reveal himself to man.

. . . the God who speaks surveys in himself from the very beginning all the virtualities of his speech, and by his own Spirit in the Church inspires, guides and watches over their very actualization; and . . . from the point of view of men and their properly human words and propositions, even in human speech more is actually communicated formally than can formally be stated.²¹⁵

Related to explication as a mechanism of dogmatic development is Rahner's idea of a development actually being contained within a doctrine by being co-defined, co-expressed or compresent. Rahner prefers these terms to the phrase "implicitly defined."²¹⁶ A dogma can have development of this type and can still remain within the sphere of what is revealed.

The immediately intelligible and express statements of Revelation in its manifold variety (proposition series A) are heard and questioned with a view to discovering what is compresent to mind and communicated by them, that is, their background and the principle which comprehends the whole of this variety and gives it unity. The basic idea compresent to mind and con-signified (mit-gesagte) is extracted by making use of the individual propositions to give a view of the res on which they are based: in this way the basic idea is formulated in propositions (proposition B). It is only from

²¹⁴Ibid., p. 72-3.

²¹⁵Ibid., p. 74.

²¹⁶Karl Rahner, "Theological Reflexion on Monogenism." Theological Investigations vol. 1, trans. Cornelius Ernst (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961), p. 242.

this intermediate proposition B that the desired terminal proposition is deduced, i.e. recognized as con-signified. ²¹⁷

In his various writings Rahner sets forth certain conditions for establishing whether or not a truth is compresent. This is necessary because we cannot be sure that we truly know the mind of someone else when that person is no longer available to confirm or deny the accuracy of our inferences.

It may be said, conversely, that something is co-defined (mitdefiniert); which although it is not directly intended by the definer, as properly speaking to be defined, fulfills the two following conditions. Firstly, it must have been certainly compresent to the definer's mind (mitgedacht); and secondly, which is more important, it must stand in so immediate, so immediately evident and indissoluble a connexion with the proper and direct matter of the definition, that it is impossible in fact or in thought that it too should not bear the whole weight of the affirmation given to the proper content of the definition. If this is not the case, i.e. if the connexion between what was compresent to mind and what was properly intended by the definition is not seen quite directly and quite explicitly as such, although it is quite objectively given and even demonstrable, then what was compresent to mind cannot be spoken of as defined. ²¹⁸

The last of Rahner's mechanisms of development which we will discuss is the idea that the object of a dogmatic statement is the principle by which that same statement is understood. God not only speaks to man, but within the mechanisms of the Spirit, as the Spirit works in mankind, God also becomes the hearer of his own utterance.

²¹⁷Karl Rahner, "The Development of Dogma," p. 73.

²¹⁸Karl Rahner, "Theological Reflexion on Monogenism," p. 242.

A divine utterance which is divine by reason of its own nature has no meaning unless it is directed toward a divine hearing. Part therefore of the divine revelation is the Holy Spirit, as the strictly supernatural self-communication of God. He does not enter in merely as the guarantee of its correctness or as the originator of a process of efficient causality on the part of God which takes place per se in the region of the finite. He is there as the thing uttered itself and only with this can the human utterance be the self-utterance of God. Here we have at once the infinite openness of self-development, whose only limits are in the visio beatifica itself. ²¹⁹

The spirit performs this action through the "believing consciousness of the Church." Through its harboring of the Spirit, the Church becomes the bearer of doctrinal development. ²²⁰ The Spirit as part of the Trinity, is the reality which is believed in, therefore the object of faith is not passive but is involved as a dynamic principle by which it itself is grasped. ²²¹

. . . the formal a priori of faith, in contrast to the natural transcendence of the spirit and its a priori relationship, is not a formal abstract a priori, founded on the potentiality of the developing spirit and its openness; it is not merely an a priori of possibility. It is in fact the real intensive fullness of what is meant in each individual object of faith, and that not merely in notion or idea, but in the reality itself, which is none other than the triune God in his real self-communication. ²²²

²¹⁹Karl Rahner, "Considerations on the Development of Dogma," p. 12.

²²⁰Ibid., p. 14.

²²¹Karl Rahner, "The Development of Dogma," p. 51.

²²²Karl Rahner, "Considerations on the Development of Dogma," pp. 25-6.

In our discussion of the mechanisms of the development of dogma Rahner has attributed the dynamics of doctrinal development to many elements. However, he emphasizes that revelation develops as a complex whole.

Dogma, or a dogma, is a unified entity which is constructed of various elements. . . . If dogma or a dogma develops all the elements which go to build up such a dogma necessarily develop also. This is only possible however if a dynamic tendency to develop is innate in each of these constitutive elements themselves. We recognize of course also at the same time that the dynamic tendencies of each of these elements can only be effective in the totality and must remain dependent on the unfolding of the whole. . . . Any theory of the development of dogma which disregards or denies this simple fact and would for instance try to attribute the development of dogma as such merely to the magisterium or to the inspiration of the Spirit or to the logical explication of the virtualities implied in the human assertion, is to be discarded at once as false. ²²³

We will conclude by examining criteria for doctrinal development which may be found in Rahner's writings. There appears to be a development in thought between ideas which Rahner has proposed in two different articles. First I will present the theory of the possibility of developmental criteria which is given in Rahner's article "The Development of Dogma" in Volume I of Theological Investigations.

Let us suppose that in the development of the doctrine of the Assumption, for example, forms and properties of the development of dogma become apparent which cannot be demonstrated with the same clarity in other phases or sectors of this development; these properties may even be clearly of a kind which do not harmonize with the accounts of development given in the ordinary theological treatment (not of course in the authoritative pronounce-

²²³ Ibid., pp. 10-11.

ments of the Church). Yet this would not indicate any false development here . . . at most it would be a sign that the scheme proposed in the average treatment requires to be improved, qualified or enlarged. ²²⁴

If this is true, then theological laws which are deduced from studies of dogmatic development may not apply to all cases.

. . . laws certainly exist which may be observed in a section of this total process, and which can then be applied to other (later) phases and partial developments. The perfected law of dogmatic development however may only be laid down when the whole unique process has reached its term. And because it is a genuinely historical process, under the impulse of the Spirit of God, who never makes himself accessible without remainder to laws which can be grasped by human minds, it is never just the working out of a formula and an all-embracing law. It is manifestly erroneous a priori to attempt to construct an adequate formula of this kind and by this means to master the single sense of this process and combat possible 'deviations' as false developments. ²²⁵

Rahner does give some guidelines on how to grapple with the problem of recognizing false dogmatic development. Certain laws can be applied a priori "in an obvious way- and certainly with prudence" but they can be applied only by the Church and not by the individual. Secondly, development will become slower as truth becomes clearer and more full. With greater clarity comes more "strictness" which in turn more completely precludes the possibility of errors occurring in doctrinal formulations. And lastly, and most significantly, Rahner proposes that "the danger of the human factor simply

²²⁴Karl Rahner, "The Development of Dogma," p. 42.

²²⁵Ibid., pp. 41-2.

remains a danger and no precautionary measures exist which can exclude it unambiguously at the very start." Because of this Rahner goes back to Christ's promise that he would never allow his Church to fall into errors of belief. It is only this promise of the presence of the Spirit within the Church which prevents the potential danger of human error in the formulation of doctrine from becoming a reality. ²²⁶

Rahner again emphasizes that it is in the authority, based on the promise of Christ to his Church, of the magisterium which finally gives the validity to dogmatic statements.

. . . it is superfluous and injurious to the honesty which is one of the virtues of theology, to attempt at all costs to produce a logically stringent argument of a reflexive kind from the sources of faith for every doctrine of faith to which there is firm testimony in the magisterium of the Church. The theologian should try to find such an argument. . . . But even where he is unable to find an argument which is honestly justified by the facts, he should avoid giving the appearance of supposing that his own mind and his own theological reflexions are simply the point at which the Holy Spirit of the Church has achieved its fullest manifestation. ²²⁷

Dogmatic development is a "spiritual process" which continues to work even when theologians have not yet developed a satisfactory understanding of the objective and subjective presuppositions upon which this developmental pro-

²²⁶ Ibid., pp. 42-3.

²²⁷ Ibid., pp. 54-5.

cess is resting.²²⁸ The reason is that the motivating force within doctrinal development, and which guarantees its validity, is not simply identified with formal logic.²²⁹ Rather, this motivating force operates within the "plentitude of revealed reality."²³⁰ In his work On Heresy, Rahner writes that

. . . the development of the Church's awareness of her faith has gradually made the criterion of faith in its strictly formal, juridical rigour itself an object of faith. With the definition of the infallibility of the supreme teaching authority of the pope, this development has reached a certain finality. Consequently, it is no longer as possible as it was in earlier days for there to be doubt or uncertainty whether some explicit doctrine is or is not in accordance with the Church's belief.²³¹

Rahner presents a shift of emphasis in this viewpoint in the article, "Considerations on the Development of Dogma" in Theological Investigations IV. Rahner here makes the assertion that perhaps some principles can validly be applied to doctrinal development. He is still cautious in applying principles of development to already existing dogmas but at least opens the possibility for such an application.

In the last resort, the development of dogma is not a single process which can be adequately comprehended by formal laws. . . . The unfolding of divine revelation

²²⁸Ibid., p. 56.

²²⁹Ibid.

²³⁰Ibid.

²³¹Karl Rahner, On Heresy, p. 49.

is a process. As a process through which the divine revelation passes it is unique. Therefore it has no a priori categories, distinct from itself and superior to itself and likewise adequately determining it. Unlike the processes of natural science, it cannot be comprised under such formal laws as would enable us to predict properly any later phase. . . . We cannot therefore demand that the development of one dogma will conform adequately to the laws of another and so for instance challenge the legitimacy of a given development by appealing to the contrast in another. . . . But in saying this we do not of course deny that there are certain formal principles with regard to this development, which follow from the nature of a historical and final revelation, just as much as does the principle enunciated above. Such principles may give rise to justifiable objections to possible wrong developments in theology. ²³²

²³² Karl Rahner, "Considerations on the Development of Dogma," pp. 7-8.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

We end this paper presenting two cautious theories of criteria for dogmatic development. At the very least Rahner seems hesitant to use his broad categories of developmental mechanisms as criteria for judging dogma. In doing so Rahner remains true to the Catholic idea of authority of the magisterium in all decisions regarding doctrine.

However, the real value of Rahner's work regarding dogma has very little to do with establishing criteria for judging doctrine. Rahner has presented us with a coherent system of thought which, beginning with his ontology and anthropology, allows us to make a systematic progression from man's ability to hear revelation and God's ability to reveal himself to doctrine, its relation to revelation and inherent aspects which allow and generate dogmatic development. His four categories of mechanisms for dogmatic development may serve as organizing principles for the study of specific dogmas and their histories. This in itself is quite an accomplishment. And although ideas on these subjects are scattered throughout Rahner's works, they remain available to theologians who wish to avail themselves of the ability to study progressive, systematic thought orien-

ted to the future while based on time-honored Thomistic principles of philosophy and theology.

It is hoped that this paper, by gathering these ideas and presenting them in a somewhat systematic manner, has facilitated the reader's appreciation of the scope of Rahner's thought and perhaps stimulated further inquiry into its application in the fields of dogma and dogmatic development.

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The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

March 31, 1980
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