

## **The Historicity of Dogma and Common Sense: Ambroise Gardeil, Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, Yves Congar, and the Modern Magisterium**

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BEYOND THE MEN in the title of this article, many distinguished Dominicans gave themselves over in the twentieth century to engaging questions raised by Catholic Modernists such as Alfred Loisy, George Tyrrell, and Édouard Le Roy about the historicity of dogma. There were also M. M. Tuyaërts, Francisco Marín-Sola, Marie-Dominique Chenu, Edward Schillebeeckx, and Claude Geffré. Tuyaërts and Marín-Sola concerned themselves with the question of how identity of meaning is maintained from Scripture to doctrine and on to more developed doctrine, and how it can be known to be maintained. Beyond the provocations of heresy and the invitations of cultural circumstance, what generates developments, and does so in such a way as to guarantee that they really are developments of and not departures from the deposit of faith? They worked out logical answers to this question, although Marín-Sola devoted considerable attention to the role of affective knowledge in provoking and weighing putative developments. Chenu, Schillebeeckx, and Geffré, on the other hand, were so impressed with the necessity to conform the Gospel to various hearers of quite differing cultural circumstance that in the end they seemed to deny that doctrine remained homogeneous in meaning from Scripture to the ancient councils to the medievals to Trent and beyond. They were concerned to guarantee the accessibility of the Gospel to people of various times and places, but did not altogether save

their position from the historical relativism of the Modernists themselves.<sup>1</sup> While Ambroise Gardeil, Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, and Yves Congar certainly concerned themselves with the prior issue of what the engines of development might be—logic, connatural knowledge, exegesis—they also concerned themselves with this second issue, the communicability of the Gospel to every land and nation, in every time and age. They maintained the universal and trans-temporal accessibility of doctrinal formulations, formulations that nonetheless stayed identical in meaning with the original Gospel, even across the quite various venues of evangelization and catechesis the Church has known. This question of the universal accessibility of dogma, furthermore, has also concerned the modern magisterium. It is precisely because of this question about the universal accessibility of dogma that the notion of “common sense” enters the discussion of doctrine both theologically and magisterially.

This essay, therefore, treats the role attributed to “common sense” in assuring the universal intelligibility of the Church’s dogmatic teaching. This is traced out first in Gardeil and second in Garrigou-Lagrange, who wrote earlier than Gardeil but whom I think to be best understood within Gardeil’s more comprehensive fundamental theological understanding of dogma. Third, there is Congar. Fourth, we turn to Étienne Gilson’s trenchant criticism of Garrigou-Lagrange’s understanding of common sense. Fifth, modern magisterial documents from *Humani Generis* (1950) on are canvassed for their teaching on the accessibility of dogma and their invocation of, or failure to invoke, “common sense” such as it functions in Gardeil, Garrigou-Lagrange, and Congar. Then, sixth, we return to Gilson before presenting a summary conclusion.

### **Responding to Modernism: Ambroise Gardeil (1859–1931)**

The Modernists asserted a break, a radical discontinuity, between revelation and the language it evokes in prophet and apostle. Strictly, revelation itself is an ineffable experience, and the language it evokes turns out never to be properly about God, who remains confined in unknowable transcen-

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<sup>1</sup> See Thomas Joseph White, O.P., “The Precarity of Wisdom: Modern Dominican Theology, Perspectivalism, and the Tasks of Reconstruction,” in *Ressourcement Thomism: Sacred Doctrine, the Sacraments, and the Moral Life* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 92–123, at 97–101. For Marie-Dominique Chenu, see *Un théologien en liberté: Jacques Duquesne interroge le Père Chenu* (Paris: Éditions du Centurion, 1979), 69–70. For Edward Schillebeeckx, see his *God and the Future of Man*, trans. N. Smith (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968), 39–40. And for Claude Geffré, see his *The Risk of Interpretation*, trans. D. Smith (New York: Paulist, 1987), 14–15.

dence beyond the strictures of Kant's second critique. The language we find in Scripture and religious traditions may recall or evoke the experience (Tyrrell) or tell us how to act in relation to divine reality (Le Roy), but it carries no news about God.<sup>2</sup> Further, there are subsequent conceptual discontinuities. There is a discontinuity between the original language of prophet and apostle and later New Testament constructions of narrative and myth (Loisy).<sup>3</sup> There is a discontinuity between the language of Scripture and the language and meaning of ecclesial dogma. If dogma is understood to say anything positively informative about divine things, it turns out to be so bound to its time and place and culture as to be cognitively worthless for subsequent times and other cultural places (Tyrrell; Le Roy).<sup>4</sup> Strictly speaking, it too is cognitively empty relative to what it purports to speak about, namely, God and divine things. Last, there is a discontinuity between dogma and theology, for theology does attempt to say positive things about divinity.<sup>5</sup>

Gardeil undertook by contrast to demonstrate continuities at all these points, to throw a reliable bridge from one side of the abyss to the other, to show the homogeneity—his word—of the language of the New Testament and the dogmatic language of the Church, and a like continuity of meaning between the Church's discourse and theological discourse. This he does in *Le donné révélé et la théologie*.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> For the revelation as ineffable experience, see George Tyrrell, "Revelation," in *Through Scylla and Charybdis: or the Old Theology and the New* (London: Longmans and Green, 1907), 264–307. For dogma as purely directive of action, see Édouard Le Roy, "Qu'est-ce qu'un dogme?" in *Dogme et critique* (Paris: Librairie Bloud, 1907), 1–34, at 25–26. For the modernist view of revelation as religious experience, see Pope Pius X, *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, §§7–8, 14–15 (English at [w2.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-x\\_enc\\_19070908\\_pascendi-dominici-gregis.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_19070908_pascendi-dominici-gregis.html)). It is sometimes said that *Pascendi* is no accurate guide to what the many and, of course, divergent thinkers tagged as "Modernist" thought. This depends on whether the modernism of Loisy and Tyrrell consists of maintaining a historical and logical link between revelation conceived of as an ineffable experience and a transformist notion of dogmatic development across cultural difference, as the encyclical maintains.

<sup>3</sup> Alfred Loisy, *Autour d'un petit livre*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Picard et Fils, 1907), part 4.

<sup>4</sup> George Tyrrell, "Semper Eadem II," in *Through Scylla and Charybdis*, 133–54; Édouard Le Roy, "Qu'est-ce qu'un dogme?" 11–12; dogma exercises a kind of veto, but endorses nothing positive.

<sup>5</sup> George Tyrrell, "The Rights and Limits of Theology," in *Through Scylla and Charybdis*, 200–341; that is, there is a discontinuity between dogma and what Tyrrell calls "theologism," for which see also Tyrrell, "Theologism," in *Through Scylla and Charybdis*, 308–54.

<sup>6</sup> Ambroise Gardeil, O.P., *Le donné révélé et la théologie*, 2nd edition, with preface

In the first place and foundationally, however, he had to establish the nature of revelation as *discourse*, as opposed to some purely non-linguistic experience. This he does by defending the unrestricted breadth of human affirmations, affirmations that mediate the receptivity of thought to being, and of being itself to being known. And since the idea of being can be analogically extended to the divine,<sup>7</sup> then human affirmations of faith can really inform us about God, and God can use our language to tell us about himself. In this way, Gardeil vindicates the possibility of a revelation that truly reveals God and the things of God and the decisions of God.

Furthermore, the actuality of revelation is a matter of God's elevation of the prophet's or hagiographer's ability to affirm, since the affirmations now will touch on things beyond the horizon of our native cognitive capacity. Nonetheless, such affirmations are necessary for the public character of revelation, which is directed to human beings who exist in a natural and *social* unity. As a result, we may therefore trust the record of revelation deposited in Scripture.<sup>8</sup> I observe that, since the original Revealer and the principal Author of Scripture is the same God on Gardeil's account, we should expect no discontinuity between the first and subsequent layers of the New Testament, though he does not much concern himself with Loisy's New Testament criticism.

Then there is dogma. Gardeil first enlists Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange's defense of the "common sense" language and conceptuality of dogmatic affirmations, where common sense is styled a rudimentary philosophy of being, whose developed form stretches to metaphysical precision and necessity, but which makes dogma even so articulated accessible in some measure to all Christians.<sup>9</sup> Second, he defends the capacity of analogous terms to save us from the metaphysical equivocation alleged by Modernism, which functioning of analogy he explains as an analogy of proper proportionality in which we have imperfect but still proper knowledge of things divine.<sup>10</sup> Third, he maintains the logical development of dogma in the course of the Church's history, and therefore the homogeneity of dogma with the original deposit of revelation and any prior dogmatic decisions.<sup>11</sup>

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by Marie-Dominique Chenu, O.P. (Paris: Cerf, 1932 [1st ed. 1909, from a course at the Institut Catholique of 1908–1909]).

<sup>7</sup> Gardeil, *Le donné*, 1–40.

<sup>8</sup> Gardeil, *Le donné*, 41–76.

<sup>9</sup> Gardeil, *Le donné*, 77–114.

<sup>10</sup> Gardeil, *Le donné*, 118–50.

<sup>11</sup> Gardeil, *Le donné*, 151–84.

Following revelation and dogma, there is theology. The immediate point of departure for theology is the *present* teaching of the Church in its fullness as held by divine faith, whence the theologian works back (the “regressive method”) to its sources prior to categorizing this teaching as to its probative force in the various *loci* of theology.<sup>12</sup> Following upon this positive theological task, theology proceeds to its constructive work, the exploration of what can be revealed in the deduction of what is virtually contained in the teaching of the Church,<sup>13</sup> the ensemble of which conclusions, organized systematically,<sup>14</sup> finds a premier expression in the work of St. Thomas.<sup>15</sup>

Questions can be raised about Gardeil’s execution of his program. First, there are some onto-theological lapses in defending the metaphysical objectivity of the original statements of revelation and subsequent statements of the Church and theology, where he can be read as including God and creatures in a common, univocal category.<sup>16</sup> Some onto-theological

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<sup>12</sup> Gardeil, *Le donné*, 196–223.

<sup>13</sup> Gardeil, *Le donné*, 224–51.

<sup>14</sup> Gardeil, *Le donné*, 252–84.

<sup>15</sup> Gardeil, *Le donné*, 285–318. Dogmas, held to by faith in the God who reveals them, join the science founded on them, theology, to the science of God and the blessed, where their intrinsic evidence is manifest (Gardeil, *Le donné*, 203–04). The immediate given from which theology takes its point of departure is not established apologetically (which would make of theology a purely human science, with only human certitude, for the credibility that is the object of apologetics is arrived at by reason; 204–05), nor by critical assessment of foundational documents (197; which would give theology a conditional and only human certitude [208], as with contemporary Protestants and A. Loisy [209]). The point of departure for theology is established by theology itself, which like metaphysics takes charge of its own principles (191–92). Taking the present and actual teaching of the Church as his more immediate point of departure, the theologian works back by what critical science he possesses, but under the direction of faith, to the sources of this teaching in the word of God—hence the so-called “regressive” method. Thence he marks the differences of its expression (209), not taking faith as a merely extrinsic directive and safeguard for historical and critical studies (210), for that will produce only an inadequately minimalizing foundation (211), and one that reduces certitude to a human certitude for what remains (211). Rather, he will establish a truly positive *theology* (211), which proceeds in faith from the present teaching of the Church, with whatever means he has available for critical appreciation of this teaching, since it is easier to see the beginnings of things from the point of view of their end (213), thence coming to behold the unity of development in admittedly fragmentary documents (214). Then comes the classification of monuments, documents, and teachings into *loci* (216), which classification also takes place under the light of faith.

<sup>16</sup> For instance, Gardeil, *Le donné*, 122–23, 129.

trouble may be said to return where the analogy of proper proportionality is privileged as the way to control the metaphysical relativity of dogma.<sup>17</sup> Both these things are easy to fix. Second, there may be some narrowness in conceiving the engine of dogmatic development as a mostly logical machine. Congar fixes this. Last, with the “regressive method,” some think there is a risk of narrowing theology’s point of departure to the more recently produced and prominent magisterial teaching of the Church and so ignoring the wealth of Scripture and Tradition as a whole.<sup>18</sup> In fact, Gardeil’s proposal is rooted in the ancient insight that we read Scripture aright only within the framework of the Rule of Faith.

It remains that none of the responses to Modernism in Gardeil’s construction have lost their urgent claim upon our theological attention. But the keystone of the arch is doctrine—the doctrinal proposition, deployed in revelation, deposited in Scripture, distilled by the magisterium, defended by and intelligibly displayed in theology. Gardeil recognizes a twofold relativity of dogma: a first, metaphysical relativity, from the transcendence of God relative to our intellectual capacities; and a second, historical relativity, a function of the phantasm or image whence we derive our concepts.<sup>19</sup> Within this framework, the same topics capture our atten-

<sup>17</sup> The same problem emerges in Ambroise Gardeil, O.P., “La structure analogique de l’intellect,” *Revue thomiste* 27 (1927): 3–19. For discussion of this issue, see Thomas Joseph White, O.P., *Wisdom in the Face of Modernity: A Study in Thomistic Natural Theology*, 2nd edition (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2016), 21–27, 88–98, 217–25.

<sup>18</sup> On the regressive method, see Pope Pius XII, *Humani Generis* (1950), §21, which nonetheless encourages a return to the sources as such (English at [w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xii\\_enc\\_12081950\\_humani-generis.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_12081950_humani-generis.html)). For criticism of the regressive method in light of the Second Vatican Council’s *Optatam Totius*, the Decree on the Training of Priests (1965), §16, see Juan Alfaro, S.J., “Il Tema biblica nella teologia sistematica,” in *Cristologia e Antropologia* (Assisi: Cittadella, 1972), 11–45, at 19–21 ([1] it reduces Scripture to dogma in failing to distinguish the differing contexts of Scripture and dogmatic formulation; [2] it takes account only of logical development of doctrine; [3] it prevents Scripture itself, the word of God, from posing questions, shaping theology); opposed to the “regressive method” is the “genetic progressive” method, which starts from a delimitation of “biblical themes” (21–45). See also Jared Wicks, S.J., *Doing Theology* (New York: Paulist, 2009), 20–21 (on *Humani Generis*) and 27–29 (on *Optatam Totius*). Wicks sends us to René Latourelle, S.J., *Theology: Science of Salvation* (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1969), 69–75, on the regressive method in Gardeil, in contrast with a “genetic” approach.

<sup>19</sup> This is clearest elsewhere; see Ambroise Gardeil, O.P., “La réforme de la théologie catholique: La relativité des formules dogmatiques,” *Revue thomiste* 11 (1903): 633–49, at 646–47 (the article continues in *Revue thomiste* 12 [1904]: 48–76).

tion today: (1) the metaphysical and more-than-metaphysical objectivity and scope of dogma; (2) how it unfolds (“develops”); (3) its role as the point of departure for theology (“regressive method”); and what especially concerns us in this essay, (4) how its “historicity,” the second kind of relativity Gardeil acknowledges, is governed and controlled by “common sense” within his overall view of dogma.<sup>20</sup>

Gardeil alleges that the Church’s doctrine is couched in the terms of common sense. And these terms, universally accessible to every land and time, assure the accessibility of doctrine to the entire universal Church, wherever she is planted and in whatever culturally divergent circumstances. Is there some epistemological over-reach in asserting the universal intelligibility of the notions of “common sense” with which to express revelation? To answer this question, we need to look more carefully at what he means by “common sense.” Gardeil, however, says he means what Garrigou-Lagrange means by it.

### Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange (1877–1964)

The subtitle of Garrigou-Lagrange’s *Le sens commun* hints at the program to be executed: *La philosophie de l’être et les formules dogmatiques*.<sup>21</sup> “Common sense” is the ordinary man’s implicit possession of the philosophy of Aristotle and St. Thomas. This philosophy encompasses a philosophy of nature, a philosophy of man, and an ethics. But man and the cosmos are regions of being, the subject of metaphysics. So we have, in shorthand, “the philosophy of being.” The relation of common sense to this philosophy is as follows: the common-sense notions of thing or substance, of feature or accident, of cause and effect, of change and becoming, and of person and freedom and moral responsibility are made precise, are more adequately expressed, and are defended by the philosophy of being. As to dogma? According as dogma is expressed in the core concepts of common sense (person, nature, causal dependence, etc.), then it not only has the objectivity the philosophy of being vindicates on its behalf but is also universally intelligible and assimilable by men of every time and nation, or

<sup>20</sup> I have addressed the issues of the objectivity of human affirmations and the logical development of dogma elsewhere.

<sup>21</sup> Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *Le sens commun: la philosophie de l’être et les formules dogmatiques*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Nouvelle Librairie Nationale, 1932 [originally 1909]). See the brief comment by Aidan Nichols, O.P., *Reason with Piety: Garrigou-Lagrange in the Service of Catholic Thought* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2008), 39: “Garrigou is careful to state that a dogma is not identical with its own formulation. In this way, he recognizes, up to a point, the issue of the historicity of language.”

at least is tantamount to being understood and appropriated, for *common* sense is common in virtue of the nature of man and the constancy of the object—being—of his intellect.

Garrigou-Lagrange's goal in *Le sens commun* is to establish the "conceptualist realist" theory of common sense. This distinguishes his understanding from the contemporary and very popular Bergsonian understanding of common sense espoused by Édouard Le Roy, the distinguished exponent of Henri Bergson's metaphysics and epistemology. He, too, thinks dogma is expressed in common-sense terms. But for Bergson, common sense does not tell us how things are, but only how we are to deal with them: it is an organ of *practical* wisdom, but does not tell us anything of the nature of the real. The nature of the real is the nature of Bergsonian *durée*, the pure mobility of both nature and consciousness whose expression in discrete and spatializing concepts necessarily deforms it.<sup>22</sup> It is known only by pre-conceptual intuition. Expressed in language, however—that is, in common sense terms—the real is automatically deformed when such expression is taken to *represent* the real.<sup>23</sup> Such language tells us how to navigate in the world to meet our needs, and of that world, it tells us only that it is patient of being so traversed.

When Le Roy applies this understanding of common-sense terms to dogmatic formulas, agreeing with theologians like Ernest-Bernard Allo, O.P., Jules Lebreton, and Antonin-Dalmace Sertillanges, O.P., that dogmas are cast in common and non-technical terms, then it results that dogma tells us nothing about how things are, but only how to act relative to things divine.

Such a view of dogma makes it easier to handle the alleged historical discontinuities Loisy and Tyrrell asserted. But it also seems to present us with one of those moments where the scientist or savant tells us, "you used to think in your naïve and simple-minded way that all Xs are Ys, but *now* we know that no X was ever a Y," and so on and so forth. It could not be that the real nature of dogma was discovered in early-twentieth-century France and that what we used to think about it—that it informed us about divine things and told the truth about them in just the terms of its expression—is false. Hence Garrigou-Lagrange's project of dismembering Le Roy's Bergsonism, metaphysical root and theological branch, lest it bear what promised to be a poisoned fruit.

<sup>22</sup> Henri Bergson, *Matière et mémoire* (Paris: Alcan, 1933), 207, 218, 223.

<sup>23</sup> Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, 218–24; Édouard Le Roy, "Science et philosophie: I: Les donnés du sens commun," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 7 (1899): 375–425, at 379.

Common sense is to be vindicated, but precisely in such a way that its concepts tell us about the real. The “conceptualist realist theory of common sense,” Garrigou-Lagrange claims, is a “classical” theory, the theory of Aristotle and St. Thomas, of Gottfried Leibniz and Thomas Reid. Its vindication consists just in showing that it is a rudimentary philosophy of being, establishing the relation of its notions and certitudes to being, the formal object of the intellect, and to the principles of being. That is to say, its vindication consists in showing the relation of common sense to the metaphysics of Aristotle and St. Thomas<sup>24</sup>

More narrowly, the vindication consists in showing, first, that the key common-sense concepts such as person, substance, nature and so on are a nominal and confused grasp of what the philosophy of being grasps perfectly and distinctly in real definitions.<sup>25</sup> Second, it consists in showing that the illations that establish such common-sense certitudes as those of the existence of God and the immortality of the soul can be turned into satisfactory and valid demonstrations of the truths in question.

The ensemble of common-sense knowledge is therefore small, but strategic relative to all other human knowledge: it contains an implicit grasp of the principles of identity and non-contradiction, of sufficient reason and causality, both efficient and final; it contains nominal definitions of substance, accident, cause, person, man, life, and miracle; it contains also affirmations of the existence of God, of immortality, of final reward.<sup>26</sup> So justified, common sense will be shown in fact to be in uncritical but real possession, though “in a confused way,” of “the certain solution of the great philosophical problems.”<sup>27</sup> So also the *mot* of Bergson, which Garrigou-Lagrange never tired of repeating, according to which the metaphysics of Plato and Aristotle “is the natural metaphysics of human intelligence.”<sup>28</sup>

Just because of the continuity between common sense and the philosophy of being, dogma expressed in the language of the philosophy of being is relatively if not completely accessible to all people everywhere.

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<sup>24</sup> Garrigou-Lagrange, *Sens commun*, 84.

<sup>25</sup> Garrigou-Lagrange, *Sens commun*, 55, 96, 282; see also Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, “De methodo Sancti Thomae speciatim de structura articulorum Summae Theologiae,” *Angelicum* 5 (1928): 499–524, and “De investigatione definitionum secundum Aristotelem et S. Thomam. Ex posteriorum Analyt. L. II, C. 12–14; L. 13–19 Commentarii S. Thomae,” *Acta Pont. Academiae Romanae S. Thomae Aq. et Religionis Catholicae* 2 (1935): 193–201.

<sup>26</sup> See Garrigou-Lagrange, *Sens commun*, 131, for a good summary.

<sup>27</sup> Garrigou-Lagrange, *Sens commun*, 89.

<sup>28</sup> For instance, Garrigou-Lagrange, *Sens commun*, 94; see Henri Bergson, *L'Évolution créatrice* (Paris: Alcan, 1934), 352.

So for instance, common sense distinguishes person and nature in a rough and ready way—it is inscribed in the difference between speaking of “my arm,” “my body,” “my intellect,” “my will,” “my decision,” on the one hand, and saying “I run,” “I think,” “I decide,” on the other. “We thus oppose to an ‘I,’ to one and the same *I*, all that we attribute to it: our spiritual and bodily nature, our existence, our faculties, our acts.”<sup>29</sup> Common sense is thus close to the language of Chalcedon with its talk of the one person and two natures of Christ, and is but a few steps away from an initial, but real, understanding of the teaching. On the other hand, Garrigou-Lagrange points out, Chalcedon is unthinkable—that is, it disintegrates into gibberish—if one supposes a person is an accidental collection of sense data and ideas with Hume, or is an *élan vital et libre* with Bergson.

### In the Eye of the Storm: Yves Congar (1904–1995)

An introduction to revelation and theology comparable in scope to Gardeil’s *Le donné* can be found fifty years later in Yves Congar’s *La foi et la théologie* (1962).<sup>30</sup> Congar wrote this great and vastly under-appreciated introduction to theology after the Holy See’s intervention in the controversies surrounding *la nouvelle théologie* and before the confusion of Catholic theology after the Second Vatican Council. At least outwardly, the late 1950s were calm, but only in the way the eye of a cyclone is calm.

Congar readily acknowledges his debt to Gardeil’s *Le donné* in treating his material.<sup>31</sup> But there are some differences, too. In the first place, the understanding of revelation is thoroughly rooted in a theology of the word of God.<sup>32</sup> Second, revelation is understood as an economy of word and deed.<sup>33</sup> Third, the analogy invoked to understand our language about God is the analogy of attribution (*unum ad alterum*).<sup>34</sup> Fourth, the explanation of why and how doctrine develops is more than seeing how logic applies

<sup>29</sup> Garrigou-Lagrange, *Sens commun*, 324.

<sup>30</sup> Yves Congar, O.P., *La foi et la théologie* (Tournai: Desclée de Brouwer, 1962). The work was conceived and written in 1958–1959. I will cite it usually according to the running section numbers in the margins.

<sup>31</sup> Congar’s own immersion into the historicity of all things human, faith and dogma and theology included, might also be attributed to Marie-Dominique Chenu, O.P., another of Gardeil’s heirs; Congar followed one of Chenu’s courses in 1927–1928 (see William Henn, O.F.M. Cap., *The Hierarchy of Truths according to Yves Congar, O.P.* [Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1987], 19–20).

<sup>32</sup> Congar, *La foi*, pt. 1, nos. 1–12.

<sup>33</sup> Congar, *La foi*, pt. 1, nos. 6–10, esp. 10.

<sup>34</sup> Congar, *La foi*, pt. 1, no. 30.

to the *donné* of revelation, and Congar includes a lengthy consideration of historical factors.<sup>35</sup>

On the other hand, the “regressive method” is maintained, and there is good discussion of the *loci theologici*.<sup>36</sup> The place of St. Thomas and the pluralism of theologies are addressed, as in Gardeil.<sup>37</sup> Most important of all, the objectivity and capacity of discourse, of the proposition, to express the word of God, and thus subsequently the word of the Church and the word of theology, is maintained. So his Thesis IV reads: “The word that God addresses to men under many forms presupposes, as a transcendental condition, the value of the analogical language that we use of God, and thus a capacity of our intellect to grasp that word. (*Proximum fidei*).”<sup>38</sup> The difference from Gardeil and from the post-conciliar scene is that there is no sense of responding to an immediate crisis of theological method.

Congar faces the historicity of dogma most directly with Thesis VIII: “That sense of the sacred dogmas which holy mother Church has once and for all declared is perpetually to be retained (D1800, 1818).” Garrigou-Lagrange and Gardeil are acknowledged in the note to this thesis, but there is no report or development of Garrigou-Lagranges’s “conceptualist realist” theory of common sense in the text or the notes.<sup>39</sup> We will have to think about that momentarily.

Congar begins by emphasizing the importance of the formula, the form of words to which orthodoxy has historically been bound (e.g., *transsubstantiatio* and *homoousios*), and raises two objections against such fixity of expression. First, this would bind dogma to a particular culture or philosophy. Second, words cannot always be well translated, and their sense changes in the course of time.

To meet both objections, “it is necessary that the terms taken up not be used by the Church except as instruments or servants, and that they be used in order to translate the intention of an idea of which the precise

<sup>35</sup> Congar, *La foi*, pt. 1, nos. 98–117.

<sup>36</sup> Congar, *La foi*, pt. 2, nos. 18–24, 25, 40.

<sup>37</sup> Congar, *La foi*, pt. 2, nos. 87–98.

<sup>38</sup> Congar, *La foi*, p. 32. For discussion of Congar on dogma, see Henn, *Hierarchy*, 137–49.

<sup>39</sup> Fifty years later, Fernando Ocariz and Arturo Blanco do the same thing, sending us to Gardeil and Garrigou-Lagrange for a defense of the validity of dogmatic formulas “consistent with cognitive realism, the reality of analogy, and the infallibility of the Church” (*Fundamental Theology* [Woodbridge, IL: Midwest Theological Forum, 2009; originally 1998], 71), but with no elaboration of the “conceptual realist” theory of common sense in the text.

content has gone before them in the consciousness of the Church.<sup>40</sup> The Church is indebted to a surrounding culture or philosophy only for the form of its expression, and this is what the history of doctrine shows us. Congar illustrates with the *homoousios*, a word employed by Denis of Alexandria, abjured by the Council of Antioch (269), and canonized by Nicea. Nor was Athanasius “tied to the word as such but only to the sense of the gospel affirmation.”<sup>41</sup> So also *transsubstantiatio* does duty for *conversio* or *transformatio* and is no riff on the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle.

Congar returns again and again to the point that the definition serves to maintain the right religious relation between the believer and saving reality.<sup>42</sup> But the core of his answer to the objections is Gardail’s: the expressions seemingly borrowed from this or that particular and distinctive cultural or philosophical milieu do not have more than a “common sense” meaning.<sup>43</sup> “If the Church borrows expressions apparently philosophical, it is only for their content of truth as such, not for the technical value that they can have in a system.”<sup>44</sup> Thus, the Church is indebted to what is beyond her for an external form, expressing some truth “in a universally accessible language,”<sup>45</sup> but at the same time “she frees the notion from its systematic connections and appropriates it to signify her own thought.”<sup>46</sup> Her *own* thought, expressing a revelation that comes from beyond her, is nonetheless expressible in *universally* accessible terms. This is a delicate proposal and cannot be recommended, I think, except given a robust confidence in the unity of the created order with the economy of salvation: in principle, the dogmatic language of the Church both is common to mankind and is her own invention.<sup>47</sup>

To the renewed objection that the doctrines of the Church were worked out in a Mediterranean world, Congar concedes that, indeed, God truly has entered history, and therefore a particular history; on the other hand,

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<sup>40</sup> Congar, *La foi*, pt. 1, no. 57. This is not to say this “precise content” has gone on before the formulation of the doctrine without *other* words.

<sup>41</sup> Congar, *La foi*, pt. 1, no. 57.

<sup>42</sup> Congar, *La foi*, pt. 1, no. 57.

<sup>43</sup> Congar, *La foi*, pt. 1, nos. 58, 59, 60, 63.

<sup>44</sup> Congar, *La foi*, pt. 1, no. 59.

<sup>45</sup> Congar, *La foi*, pt. 1, no. 59.

<sup>46</sup> Congar, *La foi*, pt. 1, no. 60.

<sup>47</sup> See also Congar, *La foi*, pt. 2, no. 60. Congar’s recognition of this twofold relativity was one of the reasons his *Chrétiens désunis* (Paris: Cerf, 1937) was placed on the Index in 1939 (see Joseph Komonchak, “*Humani Generis* and *Nouvelle Théologie*,” in *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology*, ed. Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012], 138–56, at 141).

“where it is a question of dogmatic formulas, they have not assumed in a Greco-Latin form anything but common notions, able to be translated into the everyday language of all men.”<sup>48</sup>

Summing up, we can say first that there is a twofold relativity of dogma just as in Gardeil. The transcendence of the object requires the stratagem of analogy; the historical conditioning of our knowledge makes for the peculiarly human relativity of doctrine.<sup>49</sup>

Second, we have the assertion that the terms used in dogmatic formulas, the concepts employed, are not so much always simply adopted as such, but

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<sup>48</sup> Congar, *La foi*, pt. 1, no. 63. Congar’s last section on Thesis VIII, no. 66, on the relativity of dogmatic formulas, juxtaposes the definition of an article of faith as *perceptio divinae Veritatis tendens in ipsam*, which is ascribed to Isidore of Seville by Aquinas in *Summa theologiae* [ST] II-II, q. 1, a. 6, sc, though it is probably from William of Auxerre, with St. Thomas’s own statement of the terminal object of faith, according to which the act of faith *non terminatur ad enuntiabile sed ad rem* (ST II-II, q. 1, a. 2, ad 2). It is difficult to read Congar here. He says that dogma “is joined to the very object of his [the Catholic’s] faith,” but at the same time, faith “goes beyond the canonical formulation.” “Beyond that [beyond the formulation] it wants to reach the divine Reality.” The first citation from St. Thomas surely asserts that faith “goes beyond” and “tends” to divine Truth itself, and subsequently, Congar understands this as indicating an eschatological, anagogical dimension to faith (pt. 1, no. 69). But does he mean that the “enun- tiable,” the proposition, likewise points beyond itself in some way in addition simply to delivering to us the reality it speaks of, just as any true proposition does and as St. Thomas makes clear, comparing the propositions of faith to those of science? It seems that he does in speaking of faith “going beyond the canonical formulation” and speaking of a “perception,” a perception in which this Reality can be savored.” In this respect, Congar seems to impute something to the prop- ositions of faith that belongs to them uniquely because they are articles of faith, a cognoscitive quality beyond that of an ordinary, true proposition. That he means to do so is also indicted by his citation at this point of Marie-Dominique Chenu, O.P., “L’unité de la foi: Realisme et Formalisme” (*La Vie Spirituelle* Supplément 51 [1937]: 1–8), which, without express citation of St. Thomas, makes much of faith as a perception, a loving tending to the reality of God, but one inseparably conjoined with the assertion of the propositions of doctrine. The text of ST II-II, q. 1, a. 1, ad 2 lies just underneath the text of *Une école de théologie: le Saulchoir* (Paris: Cerf, 1985 [1937]), 135, too, where the realism of the act of faith, reaching beyond the proposition, “terminating” in divine reality, is ascribed, not to the simple and natural force of the proposition itself, but to the light of faith. This light, or “word,” puts the believer in a “commerce direct” with God. To my lights, the supernatural intentionality of faith, something consciously present (as Gardeil and Garrigou-Lagrange argued) is mistakenly being held to do what St. Thomas ascribes to the native force of propositional assent, which for faith *as for science*, “terminates in reality.”

<sup>49</sup> Congar, *La foi*, pt. 1, nos. 53, 55–65.

are worked out in the working out of the dogma (person, nature). This is new or at least a new emphasis, I think. This thesis about how the fathers and councils worked out the terms in which to express dogma distances Congar somewhat from the idea that some stockpile of common-sense notions was ready to hand for the formulation of doctrine.<sup>50</sup> Nonetheless, Congar maintains the “accessibility” hypothesis, and this is a noteworthy appropriation of what Gardeil and Garrigou-Lagrange held before him.

Third, then, “common sense” is indeed invoked to defend the accessibility of dogma, but there is no philosophical apology for “common sense” in Congar. He does not report the detail of Garrigou-Lagrange’s “conceptualist realist” account of common-sense notions as a philosophy of being in embryonic form. Congar takes the same bottom line as Gardeil and Garrigou-Lagrange, asserting the availability of dogma to ordinary people, even when it borrows technical terms that it does not mean technically. Still, it may be that he distances himself from the elaborate and detailed claims Garrigou-Lagrange makes for common sense. And this distancing may perhaps be provoked by the criticism of the neo-Scholastic version of common sense made by Gilson, criticism it is hard to believe Congar was not aware of.

### **“Common Sense” Historically Located: Anti-Historical and Naturalizing?**

The “common sense” to which Gardeil, following Garrigou-Lagrange and followed by Congar, appealed to explain the accessibility of dogma both across the ages and to all manners of men and to all cultures provoked an extended critical essay by Gilson. He maintained that the various scholasticized theories of “common sense,” those of Matteo Liberatore, Tommaso Zigliara, and Garrigou-Lagrange, were incoherent amalgams of Thomas Reid, David Hume’s eighteenth-century critic, and Thomas Aquinas.<sup>51</sup> The scholasticized “common sense” of Reid Gilson recognizes in Garrigou-Lagrange contains, as we have seen, not only the first and self-evident principles of reason, what St. Thomas sometimes calls the *communes conceptiones*, but also what Reid (and Cicero, for that matter) identified

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<sup>50</sup> But see Garrigou-Lagrange, *Sens commun*, 270, where revelation has an impact on the common-sense notions, and Gardeil, *Le donné*, 213 (quoting B. Schwalm), although earlier, 88–89, theologians come “sans effort” to the orthodox meaning of *homoousios*.

<sup>51</sup> Étienne Gilson, “Realism and Common Sense,” in *Thomist Realism and the Critique of Knowledge*, trans. Mark A. Wauck (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986 [originally 1939]), 27–53, at 40; on Garrigou-Lagrange, see 41–42.

as the shared opinions of men on the nature of man and on fundamental moral principles. "Common sense," as Garrigou understands it, meaning its contents and not some faculty of reason distinct from the speculative and practical intellect, includes the first principles of the intellect, practical and theoretical, but also such things as the conviction of human freedom of choice, of the immortality of the soul, and of the reward for our good and evil deeds on the other side of death, things understood as the shared opinions of men on the nature of man and morals. For Gilson, therefore, Garrigou-Lagrangé's "common sense" is a sort of historical monstrosity, a mélange of Reid and Aristotle.

It is also epistemically strange. "First principles" include the principles of non-contradiction, causality, and finality, together with such things as the distinction between substance and accident—all of which are *per se nota*—and whose evidence is of the first order of magnitude.<sup>52</sup> *Sens commun* leads back the principles of non-contradiction, substance, causality, sufficient reason, and finality to being by establishing that the denial of any one of them leads to the denial of the principle of identity.<sup>53</sup> The "conceptualist realist" theory of common sense also establishes the real definitions of things like body, plant, animal, and man.<sup>54</sup> And there is a vindication of the common-sense knowledge of God, immortality, and the miraculous.<sup>55</sup> But how, Gilson asks, can such things as the existence of God, freedom of will, and the immortality of the soul be rightly placed in the same epistemic company as first principles?<sup>56</sup>

The upshot of Gilson's criticism, we might say, is that Garrigou-Lagrangé's *Sens commun* is nothing more than an elaborate, historically suspect and epistemically misleading stratagem to ignore the historicity of dogma, an excuse to elide the historical studies that, for instance, will tell us what "person" meant in the fifth, seventh, and thirteenth centuries. In this light, Garrigou-Lagrangé's theory of common sense does not wholly escape the charge that it is an attempt to ignore the historical character of dogma.

Furthermore, what of the content of common sense, insofar as it goes beyond the first principles of reason? May we not characterize it as a sort

<sup>52</sup> See Gilson, "Realism and Common Sense," 36–37, for such *communes conceptions*, the ones known by all (not the ones common only to the learned), things whose denial contains an evident contradiction; Gilson sends us to *De potentia*, q. 5, a. 3, ad 7.

<sup>53</sup> Garrigou-Lagrangé, *Sens commun*, 105–17.

<sup>54</sup> Garrigou-Lagrangé, *Sens commun*, 98–102.

<sup>55</sup> Garrigou-Lagrangé, *Sens commun*, 117–29.

<sup>56</sup> Gilson, "Realism and Common Sense," 42–43.

of residue of post-Christian, or at least post-Christendom, Europe? It is what deism and rationalism allowed Europeans to keep from the Gospel in a post-Christian intellectual milieu, things like the immortality of the soul and the Golden Rule. In this respect, Garrigou-Lagrange's attempt to elide history is itself therefore a quite determinate historical artifact. What he parades as a perennial endowment arguably turns out to be a modern European artifact. Thus, it is not just the notion of "common sense" itself and as opposed to philosophy or some forms of it that has a history—of this Garrigou is quite aware in his own fashion—but the content is historically determined, too.<sup>57</sup> To the extent this is true, should there not be more account of it?

Garrigou-Lagrange's position can also be criticized as requiring us to pour the wine of revelation into already used and purely natural wine-skins. Either the wine-skins will burst, if the wine really is new, which is to say that revelation has to find its own proper terms in which to express itself and we will be beyond "common sense," or on the other hand, if the notions of common sense do not need to be re-formed and re-tooled, then revelation has nothing new to say to us—we thought the wine was new but it was not, since the wine-skins did not burst. This was of old Lucien Laberthonnière's criticism of Gardeil.<sup>58</sup> We have seen that Congar is sensitive to it.

### **Common Sense, Common Notions in the Magisterial Understanding of Dogma**

We could be dogmatically indifferent to the alleged role of common-sense notions in the formulation of doctrine and what they are supposed to accomplish, and leave the question to a more speculative day, except that the Roman magisterium itself has not been indifferent to the proposal of Garrigou-Lagrange, Gardeil, and Congar. The magisterium makes rules about how to talk about Christ, the Trinity, the Church, the sacraments, original sin, and grace. It also makes rules about how to talk about these rules. There are several texts of moment to review here. We review the texts, and then return to the just sketched criticisms.

1. In 1950, in §16 of *Humani Generis*, Pope Pius XII reproves contempt

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<sup>57</sup> This does not gainsay the fact that Garrigou-Lagrange's instinct for "common sense" was an effective rhetorical move in opposition to the Bergsonian criticism of "common sense." The *historical* location of *Sens commun* is in this way relevant for an appreciation of its merits.

<sup>58</sup> See my "What Is a Dogma?": *The Meaning and Truth of Dogma in Edouard Le Roy and His Scholastic Opponents* (Rome: PUG, 1985), 359–60.

of dogma and the traditional terms in which it expressed.<sup>59</sup> These can be perfected, but not abandoned. He notes that the Church cannot be bound to any philosophical system, and then continues:

The things that have been composed through common consent by Catholic teachers over the course of the centuries to bring about some understanding of dogma . . . rely on principles and notions deduced from a true knowledge of created things. In deducing this knowledge, revealed truth, like a star, enlightened the human mind through the Church. Whence it is not surprising that some of these notions have not only been employed but even sanctioned by the Ecumenical Councils, so that it is wrong to depart from them.

The principles and notions in which dogma is expressed are deduced from a true knowledge of created things, but this natural deduction is itself guided by revealed truth. This gives a light to the mind for understanding created things that would not otherwise be possessed. This sounds very much like what Gilson counts as “Christian philosophy.”<sup>60</sup>

To Garrigou-Lagrange, it sounded like an endorsement of his first great work, *Le sens commun*, and his understanding of the role common-sense terms exercise in the expression of dogma, and he said so.<sup>61</sup>

2. Just fifteen years later, Pope Paul VI offered a yet more explicit endorsement of this understanding in his encyclical on the Eucharist, *Mysterium Fidei* (1965).<sup>62</sup> He recalls the teaching of St. Augustine that, unlike philosophers, when we speak of the matters of faith, we are bound to “a fixed rule.”<sup>63</sup> The dogmatic formulas for the Incarnation, the Trinity, and the Eucharist “express concepts that are not tied to a certain specific form of human culture, or to a certain level of scientific progress, or to one or another theological school.” Rather:

They set forth what the human mind grasps of reality through

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<sup>59</sup> Pope Pius XII, *Humani Generis* (the English translation here is my own, but the official English translation can be found on the Vatican’s website at the URL given in note 10 above).

<sup>60</sup> Étienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, trans. A. H. C. Downes (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1940), 37.

<sup>61</sup> Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., “L’Encyclique *Humani generis* et la doctrine de Saint Thomas,” *Revista di Filosofia Neo-Scholastica* 43 (1951): 41–48.

<sup>62</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Mysterium Fidei* (1965) (English at [w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_enc\\_03091965\\_mysterium.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_03091965_mysterium.html)).

<sup>63</sup> Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 10.23 (a text invoked also by Congar, *La foi*, pt. 1, no. 55).

necessary and universal experience and what it expresses in apt and exact words, whether it be in ordinary or more refined language. For this reason, these formulas are adapted to all men of all times and all places. (§24)

He grants that such formulas can be made “clearer and more obvious,” but they must “retain the meaning in which they have been used” (§25).

The concepts or terms in question are not called “common,” but they are understood to be common, not tied to a specific culture or scientific cultivation or school. Just as for Garrigou-Lagrange, they are rooted in necessary and universal experience.<sup>64</sup> They assure the universal accessibility of dogmatic truth.

3. The International Theological Commission largely repeats Paul VI in its *Unity of the Faith and Theological Pluralism* of 1972:

Dogmatic definitions ordinarily use a common language; while they may make use of apparently philosophical terminology, they do not thereby bind the Church to a particular philosophy but have in mind only the underlying realities of universal human experience, which the terms in question have enabled them to distinguish (§11).<sup>65</sup>

And §12 maintains that revealed truth “remains always the same, not only in its substance but also in its fundamental statements.”

4. Next, there is *Mysterium Ecclesiae*, a production of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1973.<sup>66</sup> In the fifth section, the Congregation undertakes a word explanatory of the nature of the Church’s infallibility.

The Congregation first notes the transcendence of divine mysteries to human intellect, and marks a second source of “difficulties” in the transmission of revelation, namely, “the historical condition” that affects its expression. The rest of the paragraph is mostly concerned with this second matter. The document distinguishes and then treats successively first the

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<sup>64</sup> Garrigou-Lagrange, *Sens commun*, 130–32.

<sup>65</sup> International Theological Commission, *Unity of the Faith and Theological Pluralism*, in *International Theological Commission: Texts and Documents, 1969–1985* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 91.

<sup>66</sup> An English translation of *Mysterium Ecclesiae* can be found at [www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19730705\\_mysterium-ecclesiae\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19730705_mysterium-ecclesiae_en.html).

language of dogmatic formulas and then their meaning.

As to the language: first, the “expressive power” of language is subject to historical contingencies; second, not every first expression of some dogmatic truth is complete, which does not mean it is false; third, there is usually some error which serves as a foil to the expression of the dogma; last, the congregation makes an admission that qualifies the universality of the terms employed.

Even though the truths which the Church intends to teach through her dogmatic formulas are distinct from the changeable conceptions of a given epoch and can be expressed without them, nevertheless it can sometimes happen that these truths may be enunciated by the Sacred Magisterium in terms that bear traces of such conceptions.

These “traces” do not mean that the formulas are not from the beginning and “forever suitable for communicating this truth to those who interpret them correctly.” The Congregation cites here Pius IX’s *Eximiam Tuam* (1857), in which there is an appeal to St. Augustine’s dictum about keeping the rule of the Church’s language, and Paul VI’s *Mysterium Fidei*, but grants also that this “suitability” of the formulas is over time subject to degrees, and may require explanatory comment. So much for what the Congregation refers to as the “language” of dogmatic truths.

The document then turns to the “meaning” of dogma.

As for the *meaning* of dogmatic formulas, this remains ever true and constant in the Church, even when it is expressed with greater clarity or more developed. The faithful therefore must shun the opinion, first, that dogmatic formulas (or some category of them) cannot signify truth in a determinate way, but can only offer changeable approximations to it, which to a certain extent distort or alter it; secondly, that these formulas signify the truth only in an indeterminate way, this truth being like a goal that is constantly being sought by means of such approximations.

Such a view does not escape “dogmatic relativism,” against which the Congregation marshals the First Vatican Council, Paul VI, and John XXIII. From this last reference, the Congregation draws an important argument. At the opening of the Second Vatican Council, John had said:

This certain and unchangeable doctrine, to which faithful obedience is due, has to be explored and presented in a way that is

demanded by our times. One thing is the deposit of faith, which consists of the truths contained in sacred doctrine, another thing is the manner of presentation, always however with the same meaning and signification.<sup>67</sup>

Whence the Congregation argues:

Since the Successor of Peter is here speaking about certain and unchangeable Christian doctrine, about the deposit of faith which is the same as the truths contained in that doctrine and about the truths which have to be preserved with the same meaning, it is clear that he admits that we can know the true and unchanging meaning of dogmas.

*Mysterium Ecclesiae* acknowledges that dogmatic formulas—and here it is a question of the *language*—are distinct from “the changeable conceptions of a given epoch.” This implies a universally accessible expressive form of language, which, however, the Congregation forbears to characterize or explain further. Of all the recent magisterial pronouncements, this text is the most reticent relative to the thesis about common sense, common notions, and common terms.

5. With less authority than the Congregation, the International Theological Commission addressed the question of dogma and its permanent value in 1990 in *The Interpretation of Dogma*.

The commission refers to *Mysterium Fidei* on maintaining language of the Church, although it does not report the reasons *Mysterium Fidei* adduces (section B.II.1). It refers to *Mysterium Ecclesiae*, recognizing that dogmas are historical creations (B.II.2). The Commission imitates Congar in citing the two texts from *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 1, together (B.III.4; see above, note 48). It is the section entitled “The Permanent Value of Dogmatic Formulations” (C.III.3), however, that is most germane to our question.

Here, it is said that there can be no “neat distinction” between “content and form of expression,” and it is maintained that “images and concepts are not interchangeable at will.”<sup>68</sup> Again, “the symbolic nature of language

<sup>67</sup> The text here reports the Congregation’s citation. Pope John’s Latin can be found at [w2.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/la/speeches/1962/documents/hf\\_j-xxiii\\_spe\\_19621011\\_opening-council.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/la/speeches/1962/documents/hf_j-xxiii_spe_19621011_opening-council.html).

<sup>68</sup> International Theological Commission, *The Interpretation of Dogma*, in *International Theological Commission*, vol. 2, *Texts and Documents, 1986–2007* (San Fran-

is not simply an item of apparel, but in some way truth itself incarnate,” and the foundation of this truth is the Incarnation itself.<sup>69</sup>

The insistence on the inseparability of content and form, image and concept, grounds the document’s recognition of the ineluctable historicity of dogma, even as did Congar where he noted the Greco-Latin provenance of the Church’s formulations. The Commission says:

The basic expressions of faith may not be revised, even when it is claimed that the reality they express will not be lost to sight. The effort must always be made to assimilate them more and more, and to push on with explaining them, thanks to a whole range of different forms of evangelization. In particular, the inculturation of Christianity in other cultures may give occasion for this task, or indeed make it obligatory. Revealed truth for all that remains unchanged “not alone in what constitutes substantial content but also [in its] decisive expressions in language” (§12).<sup>70</sup>

What is unique to the Commission’s statement is the extent to which it emphasizes that the language of the Church is her own invention, though one not apart from fruitful dialogue with philosophy.

The study of the history of dogma shows clearly that in these dogmas the Church has not simply taken up already existing conceptual schemes. She has rather subjected existing concepts, imprinted by the upper levels of the language of the milieu, to a process of purification and transformation, or reworking. In that way, she has created the language that fits her message. Take for example the distinction between “substance” (or nature) and “hypostasis,” and the working out of the concept of person which was unknown, as such, to Greek philosophy. In fact, it came about as a result of reflection on the reality of the mystery of Salvation and on biblical language.<sup>71</sup>

This spells out much more completely what Pius XII seems to mean by

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cisco: Ignatius Press, 2009), 23–53, at 50. This text is also online at the Vatican web site.

<sup>69</sup> International Theological Commission, *Interpretation of Dogma*, 50.

<sup>70</sup> International Theological Commission, *Interpretation of Dogma*, 51. The citation is to a former ITC document, “Unity of Faith and Theological Pluralism” (1972).

<sup>71</sup> International Theological Commission, *Interpretation of Dogma*, 50.

saying that revealed truth enlightens the mind. It is a point quite expressly anticipated by Congar as observed above: the language is in different respects both borrowed and a work of the Church's own fashioning. The Commission further explains:

The language of the Church's dogma was then forged partly in debate with certain philosophical systems, but is not bound in any way to any definitive philosophical system. In the process of seeking language for the faith, the Church has created a language of her own in which she has given expression to realities hitherto unperceived and unknown, but which belong now, precisely by means of such linguistic expression, to the *Paradosis* of the Church and through it to the historical heritage of humanity.<sup>72</sup>

The Commission seems to me to convey here very exactly Congar's sense of things. Dogma expresses the truth about divine things. Its expressions and conceptuality are worked out historically with what is at hand but are the Church's own creation, a creation enriching the common patrimony of humanity. Still, dogma remains accessible to all. The Commission refuses to let the truth about the historicity of dogma defeat the truth of its accessibility, and vice versa. The Commission does this without any express appeal to already available "common" or common-sense concepts, although there is a suggestion that there is a production of such a store common to all mankind.

The Commission also says that the dogmatic formula, "as a real-symbolic expression of the content of faith, contains and makes present what it indicates."<sup>73</sup> The meaning of this last saying is not altogether obvious: it seems to express what Chenu thought *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 1, a. 2, ad 2, means: that the light of faith implies there is some special touching by the mind of the revealed reality beyond the proposition.<sup>74</sup> But the Commission expresses it in Rahnerian terms (real symbol), and suggests that the content of faith itself comes to its own historical realization in the ecclesial formula.<sup>75</sup>

6. Last, there is John Paul II's Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, of 1998. We have

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<sup>72</sup> International Theological Commission, *Interpretation of Dogma*, 50.

<sup>73</sup> International Theological Commission, *Interpretation of Dogma*, 50.

<sup>74</sup> See above, note 48.

<sup>75</sup> For real symbols, see Karl Rahner, "The Theology of the Symbol," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 4, *More Recent Writings*, trans. Kevin Smyth (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966), 221–52.

here, as in *Mysterium Fidei*, a fuller and more easily recognizable reliance on at least part of what Garrigou-Lagrange called “common sense.” Paragraph 4 evokes the “universal” and “fundamental” elements of knowledge that enable man to understand himself and his flourishing, elements that spring from following the wonder whence philosophy begins and are common to all. Further:

Although times change and knowledge increases, it is possible to discern a core of philosophical insight within the history of thought as a whole. Consider, for example, the principles of non-contradiction, finality and causality, as well as the concept of the person as a free and intelligent subject, with the capacity to know God, truth and goodness. Consider as well certain fundamental moral norms which are shared by all. These are among the indications that, beyond different schools of thought, there exists a body of knowledge which may be judged a kind of spiritual heritage of humanity. It is as if we had come upon an *implicit philosophy*, as a result of which all feel that they possess these principles, albeit in a general and unreflective way. Precisely because it is shared in some measure by all, this knowledge should serve as a kind of reference-point for the different philosophical schools. Once reason successfully intuits and formulates the first universal principles of being and correctly draws from them conclusions which are coherent both logically and ethically, then it may be called right reason or, as the ancients called it, *orthós logos*, *recta ratio*.<sup>76</sup>

This evocation of a body of knowledge “beyond different schools of thought,” an inheritance of humanity itself and as a whole, an “implicit philosophy,” very nicely recalls what Garrigou-Lagrange meant by the conceptual-realist theory of common sense, and the Holy Father details some of the same components as Garrigou-Lagrange first inventoried them: the principles of non-contradiction, of finality, and causality, the notion of the person, and fundamental moral norms. Note that it includes not only first principles, but what can be drawn from them.

This thought of §4 is turned to the expression of the Church’s dogma in §§95–96. The word of God is addressed to all, but dogmatic statements sometimes reflect “the culture of the period in which they were defined.” “This prompts the question of how one can reconcile the absoluteness

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<sup>76</sup> The English translations in this section are all from the Vatican website.

and the universality of truth with the unavoidable historical and cultural conditioning of the formulas which express that truth" (§95). Only metaphysics—that is, the philosophy of being of which, for Garrigou-Lagrange, "common sense" is the outline for the vulgar—"can show how it is possible to move from the historical and contingent circumstances in which the texts developed to the truth which they express, a truth transcending those circumstances" (§95).<sup>77</sup>

The next paragraph focuses more narrowly on "the problem of the enduring validity of the conceptual language used in Conciliar definitions." The Pope cites §16 of *Humani Generis* and refers us to the Commission's *The Interpretation of Dogma*. There follows a very recognizable appeal to "basic concepts" universally accessible.

The history of thought shows that across the range of cultures and their development certain basic concepts retain their universal epistemological value and thus retain the truth of the propositions in which they are expressed [there is a citation to *Mysterium Ecclesiae*, §5]. Were this not the case, philosophy and the sciences could not communicate with each other, nor could they find a place in cultures different from those in which they were conceived and developed. The hermeneutical problem exists, to be sure; but it is not insoluble. Moreover, the objective value of many concepts does not exclude that their meaning is often imperfect. This is where philosophical speculation can be very helpful. We may hope, then, that philosophy will be especially concerned to deepen the understanding of the relationship between conceptual language and truth, and to propose ways which will lead to a right understanding of that relationship.

Because of these "basic concepts," the interpreting ego in some way transcends cultures. Notwithstanding the existence of basic concepts that function cross-culturally, however, the further perfection of their expressive power remains a possibility.

*Fides et Ratio* gives us an inventory of common cognitive possessions, from first principles and basic moral norms to conclusions drawn therefrom, together with certain "basic concepts"—one should think of person and nature, for instance; it gives us an inventory markedly similar to

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<sup>77</sup> He continues: "Human language may be conditioned by history and constricted in other ways, but the human being can still express truths which surpass the phenomenon of language. Truth can never be confined to time and culture; in history it is known, but it also reaches beyond history."

Garrigou-Lagrange's inventory of the contents of common sense. There is, however, no claim whatsoever about any "classical theory" of common sense. Rather, as the citations to Pius XII and the International Theological Commission give us warrant to say, the contents in question, in some way common to many cultures, are worked out by the Church herself, with the help of revelation, just as Congar supposed. Just so, they are a common heritage not just of the Church, but of mankind generally.

There is a sort of completion with *Fides et Ratio*, but it may be well to add up the results of our canvass of the documents, a sort of list of the guiding principles of dogmatic expression, re-expression, development, and interpretation. We can sum up nine headings for the six documents (in historical order again: *Humani Generis* [HG; 1950]; *Mysterium Fidei* [MF; 1965]; *Unity of Faith and Theological Pluralism* [TP; 1972]; *Mysterium Ecclesiae* [ME; 1973]; *Interpretation of Dogma* [ID; 1990]; *Fides et Ratio* [FR; 1998]).

1. Dogmatic terms (words, expressions) are not tied to a particular philosophy or culture or scientific achievement: *HG, MF, TP, ID, FR*.
2. They are not technical terms, but *common* or *basic* (*FR*) expressions, though sometimes "refined" (*MF*): *MF, TP, FR*.
3. They are rooted in and reflect necessary and universal human experience: *MF, TP, FR*.
4. They and the dogmatic statements composed of them are true (and not merely "approximations" [*ME*; though this is merely implied for some statements]): *HG, MF, TP, ME, ID, FR*.
5. These terms and expressions are universally accessible, or forever accessible, or at least not to be discarded and replaced: *HG, MF, TP, ME, ID, FR*.
6. Moreover, these terms have found approval by the magisterium: *HG, MF, ME, ID, FR*.
7. For all that, the expressive terms of dogmatic statements can be further perfected: *HG, MF, ME, ID, FR*.
8. Their historical relativity or conditioning is acknowledged: *ME, ID, FR*.
9. Last, they have not been simply received, but have been hammered out by the Church in her own work of giving expression to revealed truth: *HG, ID, FR*.

None of the documents takes up any account of "common sense" as such, although *Fides et Ratio* comes closest, where it recognizes a "core" of philosophical insight, a heritage common to mankind as a whole, a sort of "implicit philosophy," whose components are the first principles of reason, basic moral norms, and such things as the notion of the person. This will

be important in considering Gilson's objection, to which I turn.

### The Objections Again

How, Gilson asks, can such things as the existence of God, freedom of will, and the immortality of the soul be rightly placed by Garrigou-Lagrange in the same epistemic company as first principles?<sup>78</sup> The magisterial documents, on the other hand, generally make no claim even about self-evident principles in defending the terms of dogma, but defend only the accessibility of the terms in which doctrine is expressed. The exception is *Fides et Ratio*, but it does not adduce the apparatus of Garrigou-Lagrange by which he defended the objectivity of the principles; nor does it repeat any of his productions of the real definitions of basic terms. It seems content merely to register and accept the content of "common sense," and indeed, as something common to mankind. For St. Thomas, of course, first principles are the instruments by which the agent intellect works to articulate the intelligibility of the things of the world.<sup>79</sup> But leaving things just as the encyclical does, there is no unwarranted addition to this Thomist a priori element of knowledge, the light of the agent intellect, a simple location of the ground of manifestation and argument common to all cultures, all sciences, something that includes the principles and adds some further basic apprehensions to them in virtue of the universal experience of mankind. The ecclesial documents rather leave us more with the sense of things we find in Congar. The universal availability of the terms of doctrine to ordinary understanding and their non-technical nature—these are asserted. But there is no justifying theory for these assertions.

The documents from the Popes, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and the International Theological Commission are more forthright about the historical conditioning of doctrine than was Garrigou-Lagrange, and this historical conditioning proceeds betimes under the light of revelation. In this way, the appeal to universally accessible notions does not necessarily flatten out the novelty of revelation or make us ignore it. The Commission's *The Interpretation of Dogma* is noteworthy

<sup>78</sup> Gilson, "Realism and Common Sense," 42–43.

<sup>79</sup> See for instance *Quaest. de anima*, a. 5, resp.: "Some on the other hand say that the agent intellect is nothing else in us than the habit of indemonstrable first principles. But this cannot be, because we know even these indemonstrable principles by abstracting [them] from singulars, as the Philosopher says in *I Post. Analytics*. Whence it is necessary that the agent intellect exist prior to the habit of principles, as its cause. But principles are compared to agent intellect as certain of its instruments, because it is through them that it makes other things intelligible in act" (my translation).

here, providing a very Congar-like admission that the language of the Church's doctrine is in some measure her own invention, and yet, not an invention that prevents communication. This is, as has been said above, a delicate point. Holding to the universal accessibility and maintaining the common-sense intelligibility of the terms of doctrine even as in some fashion borrowed from non-Christian thought requires us to think of the unity of the economy of salvation, the unity of the orders of creation and re-creation in Christ, of nature and grace. The "basic concepts," the concepts in which dogma is formulated, are provided by reason and yet recount revelation. How can this be, except that the created order is first inscribed in the pattern contained in the very Word that becomes incarnate? There is a great difference between making sense of the things of the world, or of being, and making sense of the word of God. But all these words, natural and supernatural, are included in the Word made flesh.

### Concluding Synthetic Word

Taking our theologians and the magisterial documents together, we end up with a claim that the terms of doctrine are historically conditioned, are yet in some measure universally accessible, and are both provided by natural reason and worked out by faith seeking understanding.

For John Paul II in *Fides et Ratio*, that there be "certain basic concepts" with a "universal epistemological value" is a condition of the possibility of two facts: first, that philosophy and the sciences can understand one another, and second, that they can find a home in cultures other than that of their origin (§96). The human subject is constituted by the ability to discern identities in differences, including differences of time and culture. We assert as much whenever anyone adverts, like John XXIII, to the difference between a truth and its "manner of presentation," as he did at the opening of the council. *Fides et Ratio* simply picks out a necessary instrument of recognizing identities of meaning in different expressions across time or from culture to culture. We come closest to identifying the sorts of things to be included in these "basic concepts" when we speak of the principles of non-contradiction, causality, and finality and the distinction between substance and accident, "basic" because universal and presupposed to making sense of the things we experience. Because he speaks from within the unity of a single culture and a determinate age of that culture, Garrigou-Lagrange is more sanguine about counting more and more such basic things as belonging to every man. John Paul II, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and the International Theological Commission do not disagree so much as point to the mediating role of the hermeneutical act to make the necessary transitions.

If we develop this allusion to the hermeneutical act more fully, then we will perhaps distinguish between cultural environments and the culture-transcending horizon of being, which can come to expression only within a determinate culture, of course, and which for us has come to expression within the ancient culture of Plato and Aristotle.<sup>80</sup> The magisterial documents and Garrigou-Lagrange therefore do well to privilege the idea of the *person*, not simply because of its role in the doctrines of Christ and the Trinity, but because of the role of the person in formulating and apprehending doctrine in the first place. For, the Catholic notion of dogma necessarily presupposes that the human person is not culturally bound, but is the “agent of truth.”<sup>81</sup> He is no passive registrar of the world, but is defined by his finality to truth and his desire to install it in his action and speech. Most of all is his finality to truth satisfied, however, when he hears the word of God. This returns us to Bernard Lonergan’s appreciation of the constitution of dogma in his *De Deo trino*.

Dogma emerges from the revealed word of God, carried forward by the tradition of the Church; it does so, however, only to the extent that, prescindendo from all other riches contained in that word of God, one concentrates on it precisely *as true*.

... If one separates the word from the truth, if one rejects propositional truth in favour of some other kind of truth, then one is not attending to the word of God as true.<sup>82</sup>

Attention to truth, of course, matches the scope and depth of John Paul II’s evocation of metaphysics, the science of being. N.V

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<sup>80</sup> See Robert Sokolowski, *Husserlian Meditations: How Words Present Things* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974), sect. 70.

<sup>81</sup> See Robert Sokolowski, *Phenomenology of the Human Person* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), ch. 1.

<sup>82</sup> Bernard Lonergan, S.J., *The Way to Nicea*, trans. Conn O’Donovan (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 8; or see *The Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, vol. 11, *The Triune God: Doctrines*, trans. Michael Shields (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 41.