

D’Costa’s Hermeneutics

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MY CONTRIBUTION to this symposium on Gavin D’Costa’s recent *Vatican II: Catholic Doctrines on Jews & Muslims* (hereafter, *VII*)¹ will focus on the hermeneutics of the Second Vatican Council that he develops in the first chapter (*VII*, 10–58) in his critical discussion of general types of interpreters of the Second Vatican Council.² It is fitting to focus on this aspect of his book, since he is concerned throughout the remaining chapters to discuss the development of the Church’s teaching at Vatican II on its stance toward Judaism and Islam. The first type of interpreter—of which Giuseppe Alberigo and John O’Malley, S.J., are representative—emphasizes a historical approach to the documents of Vatican II, underscoring discontinuity in doctrinal teachings, historicizing their truth-status, and hence opening them to reversal. The second type of interpreter (e.g., Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre) emphasizes a theological approach to the documents, underscoring doctrinal continuity, and hence rejects any form of discontinuity either as purely pastoral in character and reversible or, if doctrinal, as heretical and grounds for rejecting the Council. The third type of interpreter (e.g., Pope John XXIII, Yves Congar, O.P., and Pope Benedict XVI) synthesizes historical and theological interpretations of the Council’s texts. This last is D’Costa’s hermeneutics, in which there is a legitimate place for doctrinal development within continuity, development that expands our understandings of doctrinal truths, as well as a place for legitimate diversity/discontinuity in theological expressions within a

¹ Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

² I have written on the hermeneutics of Vatican II in my book *Pope Francis: The Legacy of Vatican II* (Hobe Sound, FL: Lectio, 2015), 1–36.

fundamental unity of truth, diversity that addresses the novelty of new questions that arise in specific situations. D'Costa's distinction between the second and third types of interpreters provides a critical and, hence, more exact way to approach the question of continuity/discontinuity, doctrinal development, novelty, and reform than does the approach of Massimo Faggioli, who seems to group advocates of continuity in D'Costa's second type.³ Furthermore, Faggioli seems sympathetic to the interpreters of the first type of hermeneutics without attending to any of its problems. Be that as it may, integral to D'Costa's hermeneutics is the import of different "theological notes," meaning authoritative levels of magisterial teaching. These varying "notes" not only affect the status of the teaching but also limit the scope for legitimate development and, consequently, discontinuity. There is a fourth type of interpreter that regards the texts of the Council as having arrived too late and, hence, as largely irrelevant to the issues raised by liberationist, feminist, and post-modernist theological interpretations. D'Costa does not engage the fourth type, and hence neither shall I.⁴

Before going on to discuss his hermeneutics of Vatican II, it is important to describe briefly the theological notes—"what doctrines are binding, on what grounds, and in what measure"⁵—by explaining briefly both these notes and the corresponding authority of doctrinal statements. Given the limitations of this article, I can best begin here by citing Karl Rahner's statement regarding the Council's assumptions about levels of authoritative teaching. These assumptions, I contend, are necessary for a clear and fruitful discussion of doctrinal development. The Council assumes:

[1] the distinctions to be made between the wielders of the teaching authority in the Church (individual bishops, the collective episcopate, the pope, a general council); [2] the distinctions to be made between the doctrine taught (revealed truths, truths not revealed but necessarily linked with reve-

³ Massimo Faggioli, *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2012), 133–38.

⁴ Nicholas Lash raises the question of whether the Council came too late. He answers, "No, it came just in time. But it came too late for renewal to be achieved without considerable confusion, misunderstanding and distress"; see "Vatican II: Of Happy Memory—and Hope?" in *Theology for Pilgrims* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2008), 227–39, at 233.

⁵ Avery Cardinal Dulles, *Magisterium: Teacher and Guardian of the Faith* (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2007), 84.

lation as its presupposition or its consequence, etc.); [3] the distinctions to be made between the types of authority claimed by the teacher and his intention of binding his hearers; [4] the distinctions to be made between the “theological qualifications” of the truths proposed (dogma, common teaching, irreformable truths, reformable truths which still demand a conditional assent, etc.); [5] the distinctions to be made in the assent of the hearer (from the absolute assent of faith to a genuine but not necessarily irreformable inner assent and on to mere “obedient silence”).⁶

For my purpose here, I will pare down and summarize the different levels of magisterial authority to be attributed to dogmas and doctrines as follows (*VII*, 14–15, adapted):

1. *De fide*: dogmas of the faith. These are divinely revealed truths *contained in the Word of God, written or handed down*, either (a) formally defined by a pope or Council or (b) taught by the ordinary and universal Magisterium. They constitute basic beliefs that must be held by Catholics, and they are called the primary objects of infallibility.
2. *Fides ecclesiastica*: doctrines that are infallibly taught as inseparably connected with revelation, called secondary objects of infallibility. These truths are necessarily connected with revelation by virtue of either an *historical relationship* or a *logical connection* expressing a stage in the development of the understanding of revelation. These truths are (a) formally defined by a pope or council or (b) taught infallibly by the ordinary and universal Magisterium of the Church as a *sententia definitiva tenenda*. This is why these are called the “faith of the Church.”
3. *Sententia fidei proxima*: doctrine authoritatively but non-infallibly taught by the Magisterium. This is for a doctrine that is not formally promulgated but is regarded as teaching a truth of revelation. It is proximate to the faith.

⁶ Karl Rahner, “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Chapter III, Articles 18–27,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler, trans. Lalit Adolphus et al., 5 vols. (London / New York: Burns & Oates / Herder & Herder, 1967–1969), 1:208–16, at 209, quoted in D’Costa, *VII*, 13–14.

4. *Sententia ad fidem pertinens / theologicæ certa*: theological conclusions logically deduced from a proposition of faith and taught by the Magisterium that have a high degree of certainty.

5. *Sententia probabilis*: probable opinion, although in theological discussion there are many other levels operating: well founded, pious, and tolerated opinions (with the least authority).⁷

In the remainder of this article, then, I will begin by filling out the picture of D'Costa's criticisms of interpretational type 1 (historical), say something briefly about type 2 (theological), and then turn to his defense of type 3 (synthesis) as the most adequate hermeneutics for Vatican II.

Type 1

Representative interpreters of type 1 are Giuseppe Alberigo (1926–2007) and John O'Malley. Alberigo was the director of the Institute for Study of Religion in Bologna, Italy, and the guiding scholar behind the five-volume *History of Vatican II*. This so-called “Bologna School” emphasizes a historical study of the texts of Vatican II that attends to the historical causes and effects of the Council in order to get at its theological and pastoral intentions. This historical study “surpassed all previous historiographical studies and remains an invaluable resource and a landmark of collective scholarship. It opens up many new research trajectories. It represents a distinctive methodology” (*VII*, 20–21). Of hermeneutical importance, according to D'Costa's understanding of type 1, are the themes of “event” and “spirit.” The former refers to “extra-Conciliar textual factors that are more important for understanding the Council text, sometimes more reflective of the concerns [*aggiornamento* and pastoral considerations] of the text, than the final text itself.” Such factors include “unpublished sources (letters, diaries, archival files, memoirs, interviews, private papers, and tape recordings) and many published sources.” The “spirit”—meaning thereby the deep

⁷ Similarly, see Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Dogma*, no. 8 (“Theological Grades of Certainty”), trans. Patrick Lynch, ed. James Canon Bastible (Rockford, IL: Tan Books, 1974), 9–10; and Dulles, *Magisterium*, 83–84. Helpful here is the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's document “Doctrinal Commentary on the Concluding Formula of the *Professio fidei*” (available at <http://www.ewtn.com/library/CURIA/CDFADTU.HTM>). See also Harold E. Ernst, “The Theological Notes and the Interpretation of Doctrine,” *Theological Studies* 63 (2002): 813–25.

motivating forces of the council, its ground motive, that steered and shaped the council—"was associated with the reforming energy and dynamism present at the Council; what was later called the 'event,' a historicization of the 'spirit,' which is always greater than the text that only partially represents it" (VII, 19). D'Costa's concluding point states his main objection to Alberigo's project: "it threatens to undermine the authority of the Council documents themselves" (VII, 22). This conclusion follows from Alberigo's claim that "'we came to see that the events of the Council could not be reduced to the body, wide though it was, of its decisions: the collegiality of the Council had much greater depth and coherence than the expression of it in *Lumen Gentium*,'"⁸ or as he says elsewhere, that "the most striking innovation of Vatican II lies not in any of its formulations but rather in the very fact that it was convoked and held. From this point of view the Council was a point of no return; the conciliar age has begun again and has found a very important place in the consciousness of the Church."⁹ This claim deserves more attention than D'Costa gives it in order to bring into clearer focus the hermeneutical themes of "event" and "spirit" and why they run the risk of undermining the normativity of the Council's final texts.

The central thesis of the Bologna School is that the Council's texts—all sixteen documents produced and promulgated—are *not* its primary elements. Alberigo says that a reductive vision of the Council fastens on "the letter alone and [is] unable to penetrate to the deeper motivation and universal, historical significance of the Council."¹⁰ Primacy should be ascribed to the event itself, that is, the event of an emerging "*conciliar* consciousness."¹¹ According to Alberigo, "the Council as such, as an event of communion, of encounter and exchange, is the fundamental message that constitutes the context and kernel of its reception."¹² This is the "event" character of the

⁸ Giuseppe Alberigo, "Vatican II and its History," *Concilium* 2005/4 (*Vatican II: A Forgotten Future*, ed. Alberto Melloni and Christoph Theobald): 9–21, at 16.

⁹ Giuseppe Alberigo, "Transition to a New Age," *History of Vatican II*, vol. 5 (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 573–653, at 643.

¹⁰ Giuseppe Alberigo, "The Christian Situation after Vatican II," in *The Reception of Vatican II*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo et al., trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1987), 1–26, at 19.

¹¹ I take this phrase, "conciliar consciousness," from the title of ch. 2 ("Toward a Conciliar Consciousness") of Giuseppe Alberigo, *A Brief History of Vatican II*, trans. Matthew Sherry (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 21–42.

¹² Alberigo, "The Christian Situation after Vatican II," 6.

Council denoting a “rupture,” a “break,” a marked “discontinuity” with the pre-Vatican II Catholic tradition. If I understand Alberigo correctly, then, this conciliar experience has to be extended to the Church as a whole because the Council—conciliar consciousness—should be taken to be the model of the Christian life as such.¹³ That is the deeper dynamism and liberating power of the Council, its “spirit,” according to Alberigo. In the words of another theologian sympathetic to Alberigo’s view, Giuseppe Ruggieri: “The Council transmitted itself. In this sense, the new ‘doctrine of the church’ is not the fruit of *Lumen Gentium* and of the other ecclesiological fragments present in the various conciliar documents, but of the conciliar celebration as such. . . . The problem of the reception of Vatican II is primarily that of the collegiality of the whole church.”¹⁴ Yes, Alberigo adds, the Council’s documents on revelation, the mystery of the Church, the acceptance of Catholic ecumenism, and so forth, moved beyond approaches of the last few centuries and returned to the earliest and most authentic tradition.

¹³ In Alberigo’s understanding of the Council’s novelty one can hear echoes of the position to which the then Joseph Ratzinger raised objections more than thirty years earlier when he said that “councils are a necessity, but they always point to an extraordinary situation in the Church and are not to be regarded as a model for her life in general or even as the ideal content of her existence”; see Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, trans. Sister Mary Francis McCarthy, S.N.D. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 374. Does Alberigo propose to turn the Church’s whole life into a series of discussions about the content of Christianity and of ways of realizing it? Would that not make the content of Christianity open-ended such that the constant discussion of Christian themes comes to be considered the content of Christianity itself? Is this the view that precipitated the unraveling in the coherence of Church life, worship, and thinking, that is, in the words of Carl Braaten, “a free fall into doctrinal normlessness and liturgical adventurism”? See Braaten, *Mother Church: Ecclesiology and Ecumenism* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998), 92. Evidently, Alberigo hopes that the conciliar consciousness that emerged at the Council, quite deliberately but inchoately, should extend to the whole Church. Although I cannot argue the point here, I think Ratzinger was correct when he said at the time that in this approach lies the failure to recognize the true meaning of Christianity: “The real content of Christianity is not the discussion of its Christian content and of ways of realizing it: the content of Christianity is the community of Word, sacrament and love of neighbor to which justice and truth bear a fundamental relationship” (*Principles of Catholic Theology*, 374).

¹⁴ As cited by Sandro Magister, “Confirmed: The Council was a ‘Historic Transition’: The School of Bologna Annexes the Pope” (available at <http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/181668?eng=y>).

Still, the deeper dynamism (“spirit”) at work in Vatican II is the “event” of conciliar consciousness, says Alberigo. In the context of that conciliar consciousness, the Church has a responsibility of being faithful to the substance of faith and effectively communicating it to contemporaries. In other words, there must be “a greater assimilation of essential Christian teaching and a formulation of this teaching more in keeping with pastoral needs.”¹⁵ “But the most important novelty of Vatican II is not to be found in these various positions but rather in the very fact that it [the council] was convoked and held.”¹⁶ This “conciliar event” is a key moment in the Church’s own life, indeed it is of epochal importance. In contrast to the claim that Vatican II marked a systematic “rupture” event, D’Costa would agree with the late Francis Cardinal George, who wrote: “Of course the Council was an event; it was the major religious event of the twentieth century and was enlivened by many spirits. The challenge is to fit these into an organic development, a relationship with revelation, and with the tradition that connected us to it, and with the practice that bears witness to faith in what God has revealed.”¹⁷

This conclusion brings us back to Alberigo’s unclear claim that the true Council is found in its “spirit” rather than being *reducible* to the “letter” of its texts. In Alberigo’s own words, “to equate Vatican II with the corpus of its texts not only impoverishes the hermeneutics of those texts themselves but is also fatal to the image of the Council.”¹⁸ Although Alberigo is right that the deep motivating forces of the Council, its ground motives, and the “spirit” that steered and shaped the council, cannot be reduced to the letter of the texts, his statement is nonetheless unclear because it is *primarily* “the reading of the *letter* of the documents [that] will enable us to discover their true

¹⁵ Alberigo, *A Brief History of Vatican II*, 122.

¹⁶ Alberigo, “The Christian Situation after Vatican II,” 24.

¹⁷ Francis Cardinal George, OMI, “Integrating the Second Vatican Council,” in *A Godly Humanism* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 145–64, at 147.

¹⁸ *History of Vatican II, The Formation of the Council’s Identity, First Period and Inter-session, October 1962–September 1963*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (Maryknoll, NY/ Leuven: Orbis/Peeters, 1997), 583. Alberigo contests the implication drawn by some—e.g., Ratzinger and D’Costa—that his repeated claims that Vatican II cannot be equated with the body of texts “reduce or lessen the importance of the Council’s documents” (“Transition to a New Age,” 643).

spirit.”¹⁹ Alberigo would probably reply to this point that, as D’Costa says, “the texts reflect compromise; and the idea of the ‘spirit’ or ‘event’ helps to understand the texts.” D’Costa agrees, but he rejects as problematic Alberigo’s attendant claim²⁰ that “the collegiality of the Council does not find correlative ‘depth and coherence’ in the published text. . . . It threatens to undermine the authority of the Council documents themselves” (*VII*, 22). Still, according to Alberigo, the conciliar experience at Vatican II, however imperfectly and inchoately, was about the universal participation of the whole Church. In the postconciliar period, he claims, the aim has been to extend this conciliar experience to the whole Church, stimulating it to search out things “new and old,” engaging in the constant discussion of Christian themes. In this period after Vatican II, the “creative reception” of the Council, he writes further, “must distinguish between its transient and its substantive aspects.” He continues: “The Council is not looked upon there as a fixed historical datum and a set of norms that are to be taken over passively in the various parts of the Church.”²¹ Rather, this extension is essentially about the reception of the spirit of conciliar consciousness as something transcending the letter and particular contents of the documents.

Turning now to John O’Malley’s hermeneutics will fill out the picture of type 1. He emphasizes not only historical study of Vatican II’s causes and effects but also the literary genre of the final texts, and D’Costa supports these aspects of his hermeneutics as invaluable (*VII*, 24). In particular, O’Malley argues that the Council’s “literary genre was unprecedented.” That is, adds D’Costa, “its trope was *ars laudandi* or panegyric, painting ideal portraits to excite emulation or admiration. So far, this is helpful and illuminating” (*VII*, 27). Still, there are presuppositions of that hermeneutic that are deeply problematic, such as his emphasis on historical discontinuity, meaning thereby the sense of the “new,” throughout history. After all, to do justice to the Council’s radical notion of reform—which, according to O’Malley, was proposed quite deliberately, albeit inchoately—we need a philosophy of history that will support the claim that the conciliar “event” was about something radically new. In other words, we need a philosophy

¹⁹ Joseph Ratzinger and Vittorio Messori, *The Ratzinger Report: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church*, trans. Salvator Attanasio and Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985), 40.

²⁰ Alberigo, “Vatican II and its History,” 16.

²¹ Alberigo, “The Christian Situation after Vatican II,” 20.

of history, urges O'Malley, that is based on one fundamental presupposition: "history is a *human* phenomenon."

He draws several implications from this presupposition. (1) The past is radically contingent and particular: "Each word, document, event is historically and culturally conditioned, radically individualized, and understandable as history only insofar as it is unique and the result of man's more or less free action and decision." (2) The past is desacralized; there is no overarching divine plan: "Events are seen as the result of human and contingent causes, not as the result of divine interventions. If you will, the past is 'deprovidentialized,' as every effort is made to explain it as the result of human and earthly factors." (3) Persons, events, and documents are deprived of "all absolute character. We relativize them." (4) "What this means is that we are freed from the past. We are free to appropriate what we find helpful and to reject what we find harmful. We realize, perhaps to our dismay, that we cannot simply repeat the answers of the past, for the whole situation is different. The question is different. We are different."²²

In O'Malley's view, we must embrace all these implications if we are to do justice to the radical notion of reform to which Vatican II, however imperfectly and inchoately, was pointing, as he sees it. "We must create the future. . . . Imagination and creativity must enter every reform. . . . The outcome of creativity . . . is something *new*."²³ Vatican II was trying to create something *new*—says O'Malley.

Whatever truth there is to O'Malley's claims, says D'Costa, his historical hermeneutic misses out on telling us "why continuity is so important when it comes to magisterially proclaimed authoritative doctrine" (*VII*, 24), such as we find in levels 1–3 of the above theological notes. Elsewhere D'Costa says, "O'Malley never distinguishes between levels of authority in discussing the Council's revolutionary [O'Malley's word] teachings" (*VII*, 25). In this connection, D'Costa adds, "Further, as a historian O'Malley criticizes essentialist understandings of doctrine, in contrast to historicist models. . . . He never distinguishes between levels of authority in discussing the Council's revolutionary teachings. But he continuously uses tropes of 'discontinuity' and 'revolution' to describe the new teachings" (*VII*, 24–25).

²² John W. O'Malley, S.J., "Reform, Historical Consciousness, and Vatican II's *Aggiornamento*," in *Tradition and Transition: Historical Perspectives on Vatican II* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazer, 1989), 74–76.

²³ O'Malley, "Reform, Historical Consciousness, and Vatican II's *Aggiornamento*," 76.

For example, O'Malley's historicist interpretation of the Council shows itself particularly in his understanding of *ressourcement*, which he incorrectly contrasts with the Newmanian notion of development: "[Newmanian] development, writes O'Malley, was understood to be 'cumulative process in which the tradition became ever richer—or, from another angle, ever heavier, with ever more to bear and explain'" (VII, 27). O'Malley even acknowledges that this notion of development informs *Dei Verbum*, §8, which teaches that "the Tradition that comes to us from the apostles makes progress in the Church, with the help of the Holy Spirit. There is a growth in insight into the realities and words that are being passed on." Regardless, O'Malley claims that a "more radical view" (D'Costa's words) is "implied in *ressourcement*" (VII, 27). O'Malley writes: "If development takes the present as its starting point and looks to the future for even greater fulfilment, *ressourcement* is skeptical of the present because of what it has discovered in the past. It entails a return to the sources with a view not to confirming the present but to make changes in it to conform it to a more authentic or appropriate past, to what advocates of *ressourcement* considered a more profound tradition" (VII, 27–28).

D'Costa finds O'Malley's interpretation of *ressourcement* problematic with respect to authoritative doctrines of levels 1–3. Even with respect to the reformable elements of level 3, authoritative but non-infallible teaching, says D'Costa, "O'Malley should be more explicit and nuanced" (VII, 28).²⁴ For example, Vatican II embraces ecumenism in *Unitatis Redintegratio*—thus revising reformable elements in Pope Pius XI's 1928 *Mortalium Animos*—but it still affirms the first principle of Catholic ecclesiology that the Catholic Church is the most fully and rightly ordered expression of the Church that Christ founded. Indeed, says then Joseph Ratzinger, the movement towards ecumenism ("the genuinely ecclesiological breakthrough of the Council") is an important illustration of the hermeneutic of continuity in reform: the Council found a way within "the logic of Catholicism for the ecclesial character of non-Catholic communities . . . without detriment to Catholic identity."²⁵ Constitutive of Catholic ecclesial identity is that the Church is not merely "one part of a divided whole." The Church rejects the so-called

²⁴ I find the same lack of clarity and nuance regarding level 3 teaching—authoritative but not infallible—to be also present in Thomas P. Rausch, "Does Doctrine Change?" *America*, November 30, 2015 (available at <http://americamagazine.org/print/220424>).

²⁵ Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 232.

“branch theory of Christianity,” also referred to as “ecclesiological relativism,” which is the view that the Church “subsists” intangibly under a variety of human constructions. Rather, as Ratzinger puts it, “the Catholic Church, even while allowing the usage [of the plural ‘Churches’], must nevertheless insist on giving herself the singular designation ‘the Church’ in a uniquely meaningful way.”²⁶ In short, “the identification of the Catholic Church with the Church of Jesus Christ is valid.”²⁷

Another example of *ressourcement*, given now by Pope Benedict XVI, happens with respect to the question of religious freedom affirmed in another document, the Council’s *Dignitatis Humanae*.²⁸ D’Costa summarizes the Pope’s argument:

He argues that if religious freedom is to underwrite relativism it would be unacceptable. However, if religious freedom is seen as a principle that derives from human coexistence and the fact that truth cannot be externally imposed, then the Council “recovered” the deepest patrimony of the Church” in *Dignitatis Humanae*. This . . . is clearly an underwriting of *ressourcement* [in Congar’s sense]. Otherwise . . . *Dignitatis Humanae* was being plain disingenuous when it insisted in the opening paragraph: “it leaves untouched traditional Catholic doctrine on the moral duty of men and women and societies toward the true religion and toward the one Church of Christ.” That statement was inserted to underline that doctrine was not being overturned or rejected. (*VII*, 47)

Here again, the strategy of *ressourcement* distinguishes between irreformable and reformable elements. Another example of this strategy is error still has no rights, but the people who hold erroneous beliefs have the right freely to hold them within the terms of a free and open society without the implication that their beliefs are true or even that it is reasonable to hold their beliefs. Accordingly, Vatican II distinguishes

²⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, “Catholicism after the Council,” *The Furrow* 18 (1967): 3–23, at 21.

²⁷ Joseph Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, Trans. by Henry Traub, S.J., Gerard C. Thormann, and Werner Barzel (New York: Paulist Press, 1966), 71.

²⁸ Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Roman Curia Offering Them His Christmas Greetings, Thursday, December 22, 2005: (available at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20051222_roman-curia_en.html).

between relating to people and evaluating their beliefs: “But it is necessary to distinguish between error, which always merits repudiation, and the person in error, who never loses the dignity of being a person even when he is flawed by false or inadequate religious notions.”²⁹ In the light of these examples, D’Costa is right that *ressourcement* does not imply “discontinuity in the sense of contradiction or rejection of previous doctrinal truths. . . . There is, however, serious development and an element of novelty” (VII, 48).

Now, with respect to teaching at levels 1–2, which is authoritative and infallible, adds D’Costa, “*ressourcement* as a concept was not applied to authoritative doctrines in the manner that O’Malley implies” (VII, 28). It was not applied in this way because the *ressourcement* movement of the *nouvelle théologie* affirmed “an important distinction between the deposit of faith given in the dogmatic teachings of the Church and the concrete expressions of these during different periods of time. The concrete expressions, not the dogmatic teachings, are subject to reform” (VII, 30).³⁰ One of the major proponents of *ressourcement*, Yves Congar, put the point this way: “Because no exterior form or formula produced at any given moment is an adequate expression of Catholic truth, it will always be possible, in the name of communion [of faith] itself, to seek to go beyond the expression held at a given moment. When it is a matter of properly dogmatic formulas, this evolution can only mean development by way of clarification.”³¹ This is because “what is true remains true, despite the flow of time.”³² In

²⁹ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, §28 (available at http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html).

³⁰ In his book *The Second Vatican Council, An Unwritten Story*, trans. Patrick T. Brannan, S.J., et al. (Fitzwilliam, NH: Loreto, 2012), Roberto de Mattei is mistaken for lumping together modernism and the *nouvelle théologie*. The *nouveaux théologiens* are not historicists about dogma (xviii). I defend the thesis that *nouveaux théologiens* are not proponents of a “new modernism” in my book *Berkouwer and Catholicism* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2013), 60–108.

³¹ Yves Congar, O.P., *True and False Reform in the Church*, trans. and with an Introduction by Paul Philibert (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), 232.

³² Congar, *True and False Reform*, 294. This, too, is the view of Walter Kasper: “As such [dogmatic statements of levels 1–2] decisions are true, they are also irreformable, for what is true today will also be true tomorrow and cannot be wrong tomorrow. Thus, the dogma testifies within history the truth, which transcends all historical conditioning, of the truth that appeared eschatologically definitely in Jesus Christ and of God’s unconditional love. Such a decision puts an end to all dialectics [taking back any determinate assertion that has just been made with its opposite]. Therefore, it is not legitimized through

other words, adds Congar, “returning to tradition means absolute respect for ecclesial expressions that are permanent and always viable, and a critical and intelligent respect for transitional forms, in a spirit of loyal respect and affection for all the forms.” He continues, “here again we are dealing with the idea of *ressourcement* that we met before when treating the two levels of fidelity . . . [a] twofold distinction between [truth’s] essence and the form in which it is realized and expressed. . . . That is why, at least in the case of Christianity, it is true to say that, although it is judged by the ‘truth’ of the fullness to which it aspires, yet that fullness is already there in its principle.”³³ On this point, namely, the distinction between the truth of dogma and its many expressions or formulations, D’Costa cautions against construing the truth of dogma as “a kind of neo-Platonism: a ‘pure’ idea of dogma that is then implemented in varying circumstances,” because such a view runs the “danger of identifying propositions with the fullness of truth and essentializing and eternalizing them” (VII, 31, 35). D’Costa also correctly warns against a “hermeneutic of relativism” wherein “nothing is determinate because history is indeterminate” (VII, 35). I will return to these claims in the concluding section of this article.

For now, I want simply to note D’Costa’s concluding claim about *ressourcement*: “For Congar and Pope John there is no fundamental discontinuity of dogma or doctrines in *ressourcement*. There should be reform of the Church at the level of its linguistic interpretation and implementation of its deposit. This is *ressourcement*, at least in the sources where these ideas were developed, rather than in O’Malley’s rendition of the sources” (VII, 31). Support for D’Costa’s claim is found in Congar, who explains the distinction between the truth of dogma and its expressions:

Thus the concrete forms in which Christianity realizes itself are themselves judged by this “truth,” which is found at the beginning and which, by means of the “truth,” is found fully at the end. This explains why the return to the sources (*ressourcement*) is the fundamental energy and the supreme guide of Chris-

subsequent reception in the Church. Still, such decisions are interpreted in a subsequent process of reception and are integrated into the whole of the faith and life of the Church”; see *The Catholic Church, Nature, Reality and Mission*, trans. Thomas Hoebel, ed. R. David Nelson (London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 264.

³³ Congar, *True and False Reform*, 295 and 365, respectively.

tian development as well as of the continuing amplification of already achieved forms that things require in order to realize their truth. This is the perspective in which it seems to me that Catholic fidelity can be thought on two levels and so in two ways. Fidelity to Christian reality can be a fidelity to the present state of things, to forms presently expressing this reality, that is a fidelity to what is at present achieved. It can also be a fidelity to its future development or a fidelity to its principle.³⁴

It is precisely this distinction between unchanging truth and its changeable formulations or expressions, which O'Malley calls "substantialism" or "essentialism" and that is fundamental to what I shall call the Lérinian legacy of Vatican II, that is rejected by O'Malley and others.³⁵ This distinction is concisely expressed in John XXIII's distinction between "substance and expression."³⁶ The Lérinian legacy is, arguably, based on the distinction between truth and its historically conditioned formulations, between form and content, between truth content and context—in sum, between propositions and sentences—which was implied by John XXIII in his opening address at Vatican II, *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*: "For the deposit of faith, the truths contained in our sacred teaching, are one thing; the mode in which they are expressed, but with the same meaning and the same judgment [*eodem sensu eademque sententia*], is another thing."³⁷ Focusing on the distinction between propositions

³⁴ Ibid., 366–67.

³⁵ For one, Christoph Theobald, S.J., "The Principle of Pastoralism at Vatican II," in *The Legacy of Vatican II*, ed. Massimo Faggioli and Andrea Vicini, S.J. (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2015), 26–37, at 34–35.

³⁶ Ormond Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II, Some Hermeneutical Principles* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2004), 72–73.

³⁷ "Est enim aliud ipsum depositum Fidei, seu veritates, quae veneranda doctrina nostra continentur, aliud modus, quo eadem enuntiantur, eodem tamen sensu eademque sententia" (John XXIII, "Allocutio habita d. 11 oct. 1962, in initio Concilii," 792). The Latin clause *eodem sensu eademque sententia* has been either omitted in translations, such as the English and Spanish, or translated in the Dutch and German versions of the opening speech. It is also missing in *Gaudium et Spes*, §62. When that subordinate clause has been translated into English, it has almost always been inadequately translated as "provided their sense and meaning are retained," "with their meaning preserved intact," or "retaining the same meaning and message" (which last two translations are used by D'Costa in *VII*, 30, 45), or as Walter Abbott's translation renders it: "For the deposit of faith or revealed truths is one thing; the manner in which they are formulated without violence to their meaning and significance is another." In my view,

and sentences, which implies that the truths of faith are distinct from their linguistic expression, we may say that different sentences used to make assertions may express the same proposition, but when someone uses the proposition to assert something he takes to be true, he is judging that proposition to be true. The subordinate clause in this passage is part of a larger passage from the First Vatican Council's *Dei Filius*,³⁸ which passage is itself taken from the *Commonitórium primum*, 23.3, of Vincent of Lérins: "Therefore, let there be growth and abundant progress in understanding, knowledge, and wisdom, in each and all, in individuals and in the whole Church, at all times and in the progress of ages, but only with the proper limits, i.e., within the same dogma, the same meaning, the same judgment."³⁹ Vincent's crucial point here is about invariance of meaning and, hence, about unchanging truth; it is about, as John XXIII put it, the Church's being able "to transmit the doctrine, pure and integral, without any attenuation or distortion, which throughout twenty centuries, notwithstanding difficulties and contrasts, has become the common patrimony of men."⁴⁰

because of the connection between meaning and truth such that what is meant is judged to be true to reality, the most fitting translation is "keeping the same meaning and the same judgment"—I follow Joseph Komonchak's translation of the official Latin text (available at <https://jakomonchak.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/john-xxiii-opening-speech.pdf>), which also happens to be the translation in Heinrich Denzinger, *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals, Latin-English* (hereafter, DS), ed. Peter Hünermann, 43rd ed., English edition ed. Robert Fastiggi and Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), no. 3020.

³⁸ *Dei Filius*, ch. 4 ("Faith and Reason"): "For the doctrine of faith that God has revealed has not been proposed like a philosophical system to be perfected by human ingenuity; rather, it has been committed to the spouse of Christ as a divine trust to be faithfully kept and infallibly declared. Hence also that meaning of the sacred dogmas is perpetually to be retained which our Holy Mother Church has once declared, and there must never be a deviation from that meaning on the specious ground and title of a more profound understanding [can. 3]" (DS, no. 3020).

³⁹ Cited in Thomas G. Guarino, *Vincent of Lérins and the Development of Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 6, referencing *The Commonitorium of Vincent of Lerins*, ed. Reginald Stewart Moxon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915). On the importance of Vincent for doctrinal development, see Yves Congar, O.P., *The Meaning of Tradition*, trans. A. N. Woodrow (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 119–20, as well as Guarino's magisterial study just cited.

⁴⁰ The Latin text unequivocally expresses John's concern with transmitting doctrine "integram, non imminutam, non detortam."

Of course John was not simply urging the Council to repeat what everyone already knew. This is another important aspect of the Council. “What is needed is that this doctrine is more fully and more profoundly known and that minds be more fully imbued and formed by it.” Indeed, “What is needed is that this certain and unchangeable doctrine, to which loyal submission is due, be investigated and presented in the way demanded by our times.” Still, as D’Costa explains, “Revelation would always be greater than its expressions. But its expressions had to be understood in harmony with each other and over time” (*VII*, 28). Therefore, to carry out this task faithfully and responsibly, John called the Council to distinguish between unchanging truth and its formulation, yet those new formulations or expressions must keep the same meaning and the same judgment (*eodem sensu eademque sententia*). Here, too, we find with this distinction between unchangeable “affirmations” and changeable “representations” of truth that John made at the opening of the Council, meaning not only the influence of the *nouvelle théologie*—suggesting that he wanted the approach begun by the *nouvelle théologie* to be given continued study, as G.C. Berkouwer rightly noted⁴¹—but also the manner in which the *nouveaux théologiens*, such as Congar and others, “escaped the accusation of ruinous anti-intellectualism and dogmatic relativism justly brought against the Modernist.”⁴²

O’Malley’s historicism and consequent anti-essentialism or hermeneutic of relativism about dogma prevents him from affirming that the meaning and truth of dogma, its continuity and material identity, endure throughout history and, hence, are unchanged by history. Still, O’Malley raises important objections that must be addressed. In sum, D’Costa explains these objections: “O’Malley argues that an essentialist/classicist view that holds dogma to be immutable and irreversible avoids the fact that dogma is always expressed in historical and cultural contexts. The essentialist position cannot (a) account for the need for new expressions; (b) defend the notion that dogma is immutable and irreformable, for historical expressions are always mutable and contingent and not divine truth per se, which is God

⁴¹ G. C. Berkouwer, *Vatikaans Concilie en Nieuwe Theologie* (Kampen, NL: J. H. Kok, 1964), 68; English trans. (hereafter, ET) in *The Second Vatican Council and the New Catholicism*, trans. Lewis Smedes (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 62. The Dutch historian of the Reformation and Reformed theologian Heiko Oberman (1930–2001) describes Berkouwer’s book on Vatican II as “breath-takingly important” in *Evangelische Theologie* 28 (1968).

⁴² Yves Congar, O.P., *History of Theology*, trans. and ed. Hunter Guthrie, S.J. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), 10.

in Christ; and (c) explain these 'essences' apart from the particular historical expression of it. If the medium is the message, then the message is changing, as is the medium" (*VII*, 31). What, then, is the import of this distinction for understanding the continuity and material identity of dogma over time? I shall return to give D'Costa's answer to this question when examining type 3 interpreters. For now, I turn briefly to type 2.

Type 2

Type 2, according to D'Costa, "emphasizes the importance of tradition and continuity and the enduring doctrinal truths taught by the magisterium." In my judgment, this is a version of essentialism that identifies dogmatic propositions with the fullness of truth. It comes in two basic shapes: either the "Council did not teach any new doctrines" or it did "teach new doctrines and rejected old doctrines" (*VII*, 16). Roberto de Mattei is an example of the former. He holds that the Council was pastoral rather than doctrinal in nature. De Mattei then draws this conclusion: "The Second Vatican Council certainly has its specific teaching, which is not without authority, but, as Gherardini writes, 'none of its doctrines, unless ascribable to previous conciliar definitions, are infallible or unchangeable, nor are they even binding: he who denies them cannot, for this reason, be called a formal heretic. He, then, who imposes them as infallible and unchangeable would be going contrary to the council itself.'"⁴³ In short, on this view, the Council is accepted but many of its pastoral proposals regarding the liturgy, religious freedom, ecumenism, and other religions are all "reversible for they are not of doctrinal nature." D'Costa adds, "if one interpreted the Council in the light of unchanging tradition then one would see that the doctrinal changes claimed are purely private theological interpretation" (*ibid.*).

As an example of the second shape of type 2, where it is held by some proponents that new doctrines were taught at the Council and old ones were rejected, we find Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre and his Society of St. Pius X.⁴⁴ On this view, the claim is that the Council

⁴³ De Mattei, *An Unwritten Story*, xi.

⁴⁴ For example, Archbishop Lefebvre, founder of the Society of Saint Pius X, emphasizes rupture with respect to the liturgical reform of Vatican II: "It is clear, it is evident that the entire drama between Ecône and Rome is due to the problem of the Mass. . . . We are convinced that the new rite of Mass expresses a new Faith, a Faith which is not ours, a Faith which is not the Catholic Faith . . . that this new rite is misleading and, if I may say, supposes another conception of the Catholic Religion. . . . This is why we are attached to this

itself has no validity and, hence, no authority for changing the deposit of faith—"no authority to contradict, reverse, and change previous magisterially taught doctrines. . . . Discontinuity in doctrinal truth is not possible" (*VII*, 16). On the one hand, D'Costa agrees with the main thesis of this version of type 2 that discontinuity in doctrinal truth, authoritative doctrinal teachings, is not possible. On the other hand, he adds critically, "type 2 can be characterized as the other side of the same coin as type 1." In other words, in the words of Richard John Neuhaus, which D'Costa approvingly cites, "Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre and his Society of St. Pius X are right: The Council was a radical break from tradition and proposed what is, in effect, a different Catholicism. The irony is in the agreement between Lefebvre and the liberal party of discontinuity. [John] O'Malley and those of like mind [Giuseppe Alberigo] might be described as the Lefebvrists of the Left" (*VII*, 38n60). So, then, there is the matter of the formulations or expressions of unchanging truth, the history of those expressions, as well as the development of doctrine over time—all of which seems to be ignored by Lefebvre and his followers.⁴⁵

D'Costa opts for what I have called the Lénenian option—John XXIII's option—which distinguishes between the truth of dogma and doctrine and the possibility of their many legitimate expressions. Therefore, on this view, the concrete expressions of these dogmas or doctrines may change so long as those new expressions keep the same meaning and the same judgment [*eodem sensu eademque sententia*], such that, as D'Costa puts it, "new expressions and doctrinal development, which are not necessarily the same thing, do not logically entail discontinuity of doctrine" (*VII*, 31). But this conclusion is precisely what is contested by type 2 interpreters.

An early critic of the distinction between the truth of dogma and its formulations is Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., in his 1946 article "Where is the New Theology [*nouvelle théologie*] Leading Us?"⁴⁶ The crux of Garrigou-Lagrange's criticism is found in what he regards as the view of truth of the *nouvells théologiens*. How do

Tradition which is expressed in such an admirable manner, and in a definitive manner, as Pope Saint Pius V said so well, in the Sacrifice of the Mass (June 29, 1976)," in *The Problem of the Liturgical Reform, A Theological and Liturgical Study* (Kansas City, MO: Angelus Press, 2001).

⁴⁵ George, "Integrating the Second Vatican Council," 157.

⁴⁶ English translation of this article, "La nouvelle théologie où va-t-elle?" which was first published in French in the 1946 volume of the Roman journal *Angelicum*, is found in *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 18.1 (2011): 63–78.

they understand the relationship between language and reality in respect of truth? He asks, “how can one maintain that all of these propositions [of dogma] are invariably *true* if the idea of truth itself must change, and if one must substitute for the traditional definition of truth (the conformity of judgment to extra-mental reality and to its immutable laws) what has been proposed in recent years by the philosophy of action: the conformity of judgment to the exigencies of action, or to human life, which is always evolving?”⁴⁷

Although I think that Garrigou-Lagrange is mistaken in his charges against the *nouvelle théologie*, he does raise a fundamental question regarding the nature of truth: does the truth of dogma depend on its conformity to the reality of things as objective states of affairs or on its conformity to the current measure of human knowledge—on *adaequatio rei et intellectus* or on *adaequatio realis mentis et vitae*? The former is a realist view of truth in which a proposition is true if and only what that proposition asserts is the case about objective reality; otherwise, the proposition is false. If the latter is accepted, then we have a historicist view of truth because, on this account, the meaning of dogmatic formulations is continually being reinterpreted; concepts informing such formulations do not possess fixed, unalterable meanings or determinate content. Dogmatic formulations derive their meaning from context and usage. This is the “hermeneutic of relativism” that D’Costa warns against, wherein “nothing is determinate because history is indeterminate” (VII, 35) and, hence, the affirmations of faith do not have a determinable content of truth in respect of their correspondence to reality.

How, then, can one be a realist regarding the relationship between dogmatic propositions and reality in respect of truth and yet simultaneously hold that such statements may require further thought and elucidation—being open, as such, to reconceptualization and reformulation—and, hence, that no statement comprehensively exhausts truth? Congar provides an answer to this question by adopting the distinction between contrast (*Gegensatz*) and contradiction (*Widerspruch*).⁴⁸ Says Congar, “The *Gegensätze* are contrasted positions which

⁴⁷ Garrigou-Lagrange, “Where is the New Theology [*nouvelle théologie*] Leading Us?” 64, and again, 66, 73, 77. By “immutable laws” Garrigou-Lagrange is, I believe, referring to the fundamental laws of logic governing reality and thought: the law of identity (P is P); the law of non-contradiction (P is not non-P); and the law of excluded middle (either P or not-P).

⁴⁸ Congar, *True and False Reform in the Church*, 205–08. This distinction originates with Johann Adam Möhler, and “Cardinal [Charles] Journet has felicitously

express different aspects of reality. When they are held in the living unity of the Church which embraces them, each one is corrected by at least a potential openness to the complementary aspect. They interpenetrate in such a way that they have a mutual relationship. These are diversities in unity.”⁴⁹ Now, we may get at those contrasts by understanding that (as Berkouwer puts it) “the church’s formulation of the truth could have, for various reasons, actually occasioned misunderstandings of the truth itself.”⁵⁰ Berkouwer then gives an example of some of the consequences of a polemically defined truth:

An unmistakable limitation and even, in a sense, an overshadowing of the fullness of truth is created by the defensive and polemical character of dogmatic pronouncements. Thus, Trent judged the reformation *sola fide* as a vain confidence, but failed to “delineate what could rightfully have been intended by the phrase *sola fide*.” The historical and polemical conditionedness of Church pronouncements must be respected. It seems both necessary and almost self-evident that previous pronouncements of dogma must be interpreted in this light. *The interpretation need not bear the character of a revision which gives a new and different meaning to the dogma in order to make it acceptable to a new era.* But dogma must be understood in the light of revelation and of the intention of the church as that intention came to expression in a given period of history.⁵¹

So, Congar and Berkouwer are suggesting that the formulation or expression itself of the truth could be characterized by one-sidedness. Following Congar, we may distinguish two types of one-sidedness: “First, there is the possibility that this formulation, made in reaction to an error characterized by unilateralism, should itself become unilateral in its expression. Next, there is the possibility that the condemnation might include in its condemnation of the erroneous

rendered [these ideas] by the words *contrast* and *contradiction*” (as cited in *ibid.*, 205).

⁴⁹ Yves Congar, O.P., *Diversity in Communion*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1984), 151.

⁵⁰ Berkouwer, *Vatikaans Concilie en Nieuwe Theologie*, 20 (ET, 23–24).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 77 (ET, 69, emphasis added). The quote within the quote is from Hans Küng, “Why are Dogmatic Pronouncements So Difficult to Make Today?” in *The Council in Action: Reflections on the Second Vatican Council*, trans. Cecily Hastings (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1962), 196–208, at 207.

reactive element the seeds of truth as well, whose original ambivalence unfortunately became deviant.”⁵² This possibility especially occurs where the Church polemically defines truth. Put differently, as Berkouwer rightly notes, “the church has been constant in truth at its deepest intent, even though it [the church] has not been elevated above historical relativity in its analysis of the rejected errors.” He elaborates in a passage worth quoting in full:

Put another way, the question is: Does a judgment by the Church of a given position carry with it the assumption that its *analysis* of the position under judgment is necessarily accurate? . . . Must these “facts”—the analysis of a condemned idea—be considered part of infallibly proclaimed truth? Or is it possible that the analysis may later be seen as mistaken even though the intention of preserving a truth may have been valid? Can we distinguish between the Church’s positive intention to confess a truth and its analysis of an “error” so that the constructive intention could be admitted without implying that the analysis of the “error” was correct.⁵³

For example, in *Mortalium Animos* (1928), Pius XI rejects ecumenism because he holds that it implies ecclesiological relativism, which fosters a false irenicism and a religious indifferentism. In polemically defining the truth that the Church of Christ fully subsists alone in the Catholic Church, he denies any ecclesial status whatsoever to the historic churches of the Reformation. I think we can say that Pius XI was right in rejecting these views as false but incorrect in his analysis that the rejected errors were inherent to ecumenism, with the latter jeopardizing the dogma that the Catholic Church is in some fundamental sense the one visible Church of God. So, accepting ecclesiological relativism would be an example of discontinuity in the sense of contradiction or rejection of previous doctrinal truths, and not a matter of doctrinal development. It would not just be a contrast, a complementary aspect of the Catholic ecclesiology. The Church, however, now accepts that there exists elements of truth and sanctification outside the visible boundaries of the Church and that these elements do not exist in an “ecclesial vacuum.”⁵⁴ Thus, Catholic

⁵² Congar, *True and False Reform in the Church*, 208.

⁵³ Berkouwer, *Vatikaans Concilie en Nieuwe Theologie*, 501–51 (ET, 48–49).

⁵⁴ Pope John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint* (1995), §13.

ecclesiology now faces the following dilemma: either it affirms that the Church of Christ fully and totally exists in the Catholic Church, implying the implausible denial that the Orthodox churches and the historic churches of the Reformation are churches in any real sense whatsoever, or it accepts that they are churches in some analogical sense and, thus, accepts ecclesiological relativism.⁵⁵ I must leave this dilemma to the side, given the limitations of this article.

Berkouwer is right that we must recognize the historical and polemical conditionedness of Church teachings without embracing revisionist interpretations of them that give “a new and different meaning to the dogma in order to make it acceptable to a new era.” Again, Vatican II embraces ecumenism—thus revising reformable elements in *Mortalium Animos*—but it still affirms the first principle of Catholic ecclesiology that the Catholic Church is the most fully and rightly ordered expression of the Church that Christ founded. Neither are these claims contradictory nor do they involve rejection of previous doctrinal truths, and hence, there is no discontinuity. Another example of this is given by D’Costa, and it bears directly on the theme of his book. He explains: “The necessity of the Church for salvation is a *de fide* teaching and contextualized at the Council by the recognition that there are many outside the Church who have not heard the gospel through no fault of their own. This contextualization, called ‘invincible ignorance’ in the tradition, helped Catholic theology move into a new and interesting space” (*VII*, 4). He continues:

Take for example the doctrine “no salvation outside the Church” (X). If it is assumed that everyone who is not a Christian has freely chosen to reject what they recognize as the truth as the truth of the gospel, then we can say that they have sadly, but freely, chosen damnation upon themselves. Assent to X is unproblematic. If however, we find a lost Amazonian tribe who never knew and thus never rejected the gospel, we may wish to add to X another doctrine, Y. Y states: invincible ignorance of the truth of the gospel requires that God, who is just and merciful, offer some other means of grace to the invincibly ignorant. This means X is true, but now Y provides a proper

⁵⁵ I am grateful to Fr. Thomas Guarino of Seton Hall University for helping me to formulate this dilemma. I consider a solution to this dilemma—again, with his help—in my recent book *Pope Francis: The Legacy of Vatican II*, 145–81.

context for a proper appreciation of the truth of X. If later, for the sake of argument, we find lots of people in London, not in the Amazon, in 2013 that are invincibly ignorant of the gospel, despite living within a Christian culture, we may have to add Z. Z states: those who are invincibly ignorant may live in a Christian culture. It states this because Y always assumed otherwise. If the Church teaches doctrine J: God is known by Muslims, we would have to work out how these doctrines and their qualifications interacted so as to further parse the meaning of X. Do all instances of knowing God (as in J) count as knowing the gospel? The point is that the truth of X holds, even if Y, Z, and other qualifications are required now to give it a more precise meaning. (XII, 35)⁵⁶

One need not entirely agree with D'Costa's interpretation of Islamic theology and all the conclusions he derives from his qualifications in order to appreciate his hermeneutical strategy of *ressourcement* or the hermeneutic of continuity in renewal and reform and its attending presuppositions—namely, five teachings: (1) the necessity of the Church as a means of salvation and the corresponding notion of invincible ignorance; (2) the universal necessity of the Church's missionary mandate; (3) the category of *ordinantur* to describe the other religions' relation to the Church; (4) that these other religions can be *praeparatio evangelica* to the Catholic faith; and (5) sin and Satan (VII, 4–5). I turn now to D'Costa's defense of this hermeneutic in type 3 interpreters.

Type 3

Berkouwer is right: "It would be reckless to pull far-reaching conclusions out of Pope John's statement [regarding the distinction between

⁵⁶ Invincible ignorance is not the cause of saving grace; only Jesus Christ is the full and sufficient cause of our salvation. *Lumen Gentium*, §16, speaks twice of those who, through no fault of their own ("the invincibly ignorant") do not know the Gospel of Christ, describing certain criteria to determine whether such persons are not culpably ignorant, criteria such as "sincerely seeking God" and being "moved by grace," which presupposes that they have positively responded to God's offer of grace. It is important to understand that "a condition that must be fulfilled to avoid culpability, is in no sense a cause of salvation"; see Francis Sullivan, *Salvation Outside of the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 77. For an extensive discussion of these matters, see Eduardo Echeverría, "Vatican II and the Religions: A Review Essay," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 13.3 (2015): 837–73.

truth and formulations of truth] and to brand it with the mark of a strong progressive theological outlook.”⁵⁷ On this outlook, which advocates for a perpetual hermeneutic, both truth and its formulations are subject to reform—namely, the deposit of faith given in the Church’s dogmatic teaching—that John XXIII held, in light of his Lérinian perspective, to be at once meaning-invariant and, hence, unchanging truth on the one hand, and the expressions and formulations of these teaching in the course of time, on the other. Unfortunately, this is precisely what one finds suggested in recent interpretations—such as those of Richard Gaillardetz⁵⁸ and Christoph Theobald⁵⁹—of Pope John XXIII’s distinction between truth and its formulations. The Lérinian point about meaning-invariance and unchanging truth—keeping the same meaning and the same judgment (*eodem sensu eademque sententia*)—is ignored, and hence, such interpretations misrepresent John XXIII’s basic point.⁶⁰ Gaillardetz, for one, then historicizes the

⁵⁷ Berkouwer, *Vatikaans Concilie en Nieuwe Theologie*, 19–20 (ET, 23).

⁵⁸ Richard R. Gaillardetz, *An Unfinished Council, Vatican II, Pope Francis, and the Renewal of Catholicism* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015), 36–38, 52–53, 133–35. David Tracy takes a position on the question of material continuity and discontinuity in respect of doctrine that is close to the one for which I am arguing in this article; see Tracy, “A Hermeneutics of Orthodoxy,” in *Christian Orthodoxy*, ed. Felix Wilfred and Daniel F. Pilario in *Concilium* 2014/2: 71–81. His view is more faithful to John XXIII’s Lérinian conception than is Gaillardetz. Tracy says, “Fidelity to orthodox judgment intrinsic to the particular meaning expressed in propositions is what counts, not the language itself” (74). He writes again, “The judgments endure but always need new cultural and therefore linguistic formulations” (75), and again, “A purely classicist understanding of language believes that a static unchanging, unchangeable, normative language is alone capable of expressing (*semper idem*) the community’s *ortho-dox* beliefs” (ibid.). These distinctions totally elude Gaillardetz.

⁵⁹ Theobald, “The Principle of Pastoralty at Vatican II,” 34–35. Theobald claims that the expression “substance of the deposit of faith” should be “taken as *a whole* and without making reference to an internal plurality [i.e., unchangeable truth and its formulations] that is already part of such an expression.” This suggestion is implausible, given that John XXIII’s distinction is evidence of a clear point of contact with the *nouvelle théologie*, a movement of renewal that exercised a significant influence upon the Council. In this respect, Berkouwer, the Reformed master of dogmatic and ecumenical theology, is a more reliable interpreter of Vatican II than Theobald or Gaillardetz.

⁶⁰ Kasper holds that “the infallibility and irreformability of . . . [dogmatic] decision always takes place in a specific historical situation, they use historical human language and ways of expression and are insofar historically conditioned.” But unlike proponents of type 1, his position is similar to D’Costa’s and, hence, to type 3. He adds, “It pertains also to the historicity that dogmas

meaning and truth of dogma by expanding the meaning of “pastoral.” He cites fellow theologian John O’Brien to explain this historicist view that underpins the claim that doctrine has a pastoral orientation: “[The] pastoral had regained [with Pope John XXIII] its proper standing as something far more than mere application of doctrine but as the very context from which doctrines emerge, the very condition of the possibility of doctrine, the touchstone for the validity of doctrine and the always prior and posterior praxis which doctrine, at most, attempts to sum up, safeguard, and transmit.”⁶¹ This statement is saying much more than “the specific formulation of doctrine represents an acknowledgment that doctrine is always historically conditioned.” It is also saying much more than “the interpretation of church doctrine requires knowledge of the specific historical contexts in which it was first formulated and in which it is being appropriated.”⁶² Berkouwer is right that it is surely simplistic to ignore the historical context in understanding “the various terms, concepts, images, and propositions that the Church has used to confess its faith.” He is also surely right that the meaning of dogmas is not always immediately transparent. For example, there exist unclear terms “in the Christological and Trinitarian controversies, such words as consubstantial, hypostasis, person, nature, and many others. The terms often evoked misunderstandings, and different interpretations of them created conflict of opinion.”⁶³ Berkouwer’s insistence here is, then, that to grasp the meaning of a dogma, we must understand its historical context.

If this is all that Gaillardetz means, then of course he is right.⁶⁴ But we are not simply interested in the conditions under which these statements were originally asserted, but rather particularly with “what is asserted in them, the theological truth-content.”⁶⁵ So, Grisez is also right that “if the propositions signified by certain expressions

can subsequently be deepened and complemented [not contradicted], obviously always in the same sense and the same meaning [*eodem sensu eademque sententia*]. In other words, there is growth and progress in understanding the faith. However, within all this historical conditionality they express something that is valid and binding for all times” (*The Catholic Church*, 264).

⁶¹ John O’Brien, “Ecclesiology as Narrative,” *Ecclesiology* 4.2 (2008): 150, cited in Gaillardetz, *An Unfinished Council*, 38.

⁶² Gaillardetz, *An Unfinished Council*, 52.

⁶³ Berkouwer, *Vatikaans Concilie en Nieuwe Theologie*, 85 [ET, 74].

⁶⁴ I draw here on some material from Echeverria, *Berkouwer and Catholicism*, 65–81.

⁶⁵ Paul Helm, *Faith, Form, and Fashion: Classical Reformed Theology and its Postmodern Critics* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 176.

were true,” say, the Chalcedonian formula of faith regarding the relationship between the two natures in the unity of the divine person, “subsequent variations in the meaning of the expressions do not affect the truth of the propositions, but only the ability of the expressions to communicate truth without interpretation.” In short, adds Grisez, “If this proposition is true, it will be true always and everywhere.”⁶⁶ Therefore, the question at hand is, arguably, a matter of judging whether or not what is meant is true to reality.

Thus, these two points in the above passage cited by Gaillardetz are correct, but particularly relevant in respect of the conditions under which we come to know that something is true. But those conditions are distinct from the conditions under which something is true. In sum, conditions of truth must be distinguished from conditions of justification. But the above passage seems to blur the distinction between the conditions under which I come to know that a doctrine is true and the conditions that make it true. A doctrinal proposition is true if and only if what that proposition asserts is in fact the case about objective reality; otherwise, the proposition is false. It is not the context that determines the truth of the proposition that is judged to be the case about objective reality. Rather, reality itself determines the truth or falsity of a proposition. In sum, the historical context does not determine the validity—the truth status—of the doctrine.

Furthermore, doctrinal essentialism is correct. Characteristic of essentialism is the claim that there is a “dogmatic conceptual hard-core”⁶⁷ of Catholic dogmas, such as the Trinity and the Incarnation, whose meaning does not change precisely because it is true to reality. The content of the concepts informing the propositions that God is triune and that the Second Person of the Trinity is God incarnate is meaning-invariant, fixed, and determinate. Essentialism as such is, however, not incompatible with the claim, as Thomas Guarino notes, “that every statement requires further thought and elucidation, that every assertion is open to reconceptualization and reformulation, and that no statement comprehensively exhausts truth, much less divine truth.”⁶⁸ But the linguistic formulations or expressions can vary as

⁶⁶ Germain Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus, Christian Moral Principles*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983), 172.

⁶⁷ I borrow this phrase from the British Evangelical philosophical theologian Oliver Crisp, who defends a version of essentialism in his article “*Ad Hector*,” *Journal of Analytic Theology* 1.1 (2013): 133–39, at 138.

⁶⁸ Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 139n59; see also 100n20. I have learned much from Fr. Guarino’s magisterial

long as they mediate the same judgment of truth of the same dogma or doctrine. Pace Gaillardetz, therefore, there is no reason to think that the acceptance of truth as propositional leads to the claim that doctrinally correct formulations or expressions of revealed truth completely express such truth.⁶⁹ There is, then, also reason to reject the claim that the essentialist position “cannot account for the need for new expressions,” as O'Malley charged, and as D'Costa rightly states, “[this] is a false criticism” (VII, 31). Says D'Costa, “X is irreformable and unchangeable, but its truth is expressed in Y, when Y not only carefully preserves the meaning of X (through careful historical exegesis), but now places X within a wider context, making Y a more suitable expression” (VII, 34). An essentialist hermeneutic can then attend to “discontinuous expressions of the same dogma or doctrine” (VII, 47), while at the same time defending the enduring validity of the conceptual and linguistic formulations used to express a divine truth.

D'Costa draws on *Mysterium Ecclesiae* (1973) to explain his point: “It sometimes happens that some dogmatic truth is first expressed incompletely (but not falsely), and at a later date, when considered in a broader context of faith or human knowledge, it receives a fuller and more perfect expression” (VII, 33).⁷⁰ D'Costa elaborates: “If there is a mystery Ø, and a true expression of it is Z, this does not mean that F and G might not also be true expressions and that G might be more preferable at a particular time. The basic issue is whether Z, when proclaimed and understood in its context, denoted mystery Ø. If it did, *it still does* [italics added], even if the language of Z is problematic for cultural and social reasons” (VII, 31). For example, says D'Costa, “neither Greek nor Jew accepted the incarnation, understood as ‘truly God, truly man’ (Chalcedon, 451), yet the concept of ‘*homoousion*’ (Nicaea first, 325, and then Chalcedon) had to be pressed into service to formulate this dogmatic truth. . . . If it was then true in its context,

study. Crisp also argues that essentialism is compatible with the view “that our *understanding* of the concept might develop, becoming conceptually richer, being developed along the lines of a particular model of the Trinity, and so on” (“Ad Hector,” 138).

⁶⁹ Gaillardetz, *An Unfinished Council*, 5.

⁷⁰ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Mysterium Ecclesiae: Declaration in Defense of the Catholic Doctrine on the Church Against Certain Errors of the Present Day*, §5 (available at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19730705_mysterium-ecclesiae_en.html).

historically we can reframe the context and issues so as to understand *homoousion* as the ancients did, even though this word is not used in any normal discourse now. It is irreformable in that sense alone: it communicates a truth that was authoritatively taught as *de fide*” (VII, 33). Significantly, D’Costa rightly underscores that this dogma is taught as *de fide* because it is itself determinately true in that it bears a relationship to reality. Given that dogma’s relationship to reality, we might say of such dogmatic assertions that they are permanently true because objectively true, really true, and, as I understand D’Costa, not just true in their original context.

There is another point to consider here regarding the enduring validity of dogmatic formulations: the truth of dogma is unchangeable and irreformable. Here, too, O’Malley objects, stating that essentialism cannot “defend the notion that dogma is immutable and irreformable, for historical expressions are always mutable and contingent and not divine truth per se” (VII, 31). We need to be careful here in making the point about dogma’s truth status. It is one thing to say that our doctrinal formulations *exhaustively* grasp the content of revealed truth, and it is another to say—which I would argue we must say—that dogmatic formulations, in D’Costa’s words, “must bear some determinative relationship to truth itself . . . unless one has a view that language has no proper referencing function to reality” (VII, 35).⁷¹ In short, the relationship between dogmatic formulations and reality determines the truth status of the dogma. Consider, for example, the creeds of Nicaea and Chalcedon. Is what they assert and, hence, make judgments about (for example, the Trinity and the person and natures of Christ) true to reality? In other words, do they have truth-conveying status, meaning that what is asserted in them is ontologically true? And what about linguistically articulated

⁷¹ Thus, there is no need to withdraw the claim that one can express truth determinately because our dogmatic formulations cannot exhaustively grasp the content of revealed truth. We can know something truly without knowing it exhaustively. Some do not see the difference here. For example, Rausch’s claim is unclear when saying that it is “the *direction* of the judgment contained in the dogmatic statement [that] cannot be reversed” (“Does Doctrine Change?” emphasis added). He implies that the judgment only “points,” as it were, in a certain direction, rather than saying that it is the meaning and determinate truth of the judgment—taught authoritatively and infallibly—contained in the dogmatic statement that is irreversible. I suspect that he does not see how there is dogmatic development and at the same time expressing truth determinately in judgments, and hence he uses the term “direction” (or, as some say, “point”) to signify that truth is only available in an indeterminate way.

doctrine, judgments expressive of propositional truth, supporting the conclusive and abiding assertions of revelation and doctrine, and logically sustaining the affirmations of Christian beliefs, their universality, continuity, and material identity? As Avery Dulles once put it, “if we are to worship, speak, and behave as though the Son of God were himself God . . . is it not because the Son really and ontologically is God, whether anyone believes it or not? By inserting the homoousion in the creed, the Council of Nicaea was indeed laying down a linguistic stipulation; but more importantly, it was declaring an objective truth.”⁷²

I think enough has been said of D'Costa's response to O'Malley's objections to show that a hermeneutics of continuity within renewal and reform can (a) account for the need for new expressions, (b) explain why propositions of dogmas/doctrines are unchangeable, irreformable, or definitive, and (c) distinguish between the message and the medium.

Brief Evaluation

The question regarding the relationship between unchangeable truth and the human expression of that truth in the variety of historically conditioned forms of thoughts that include different philosophical concepts that have played a role in explicating the content of revelation and linguistically articulated dogma and doctrine is the nub of the dilemma between essentialism and historicism. Berkouwer, for one,⁷³ is persuaded that “Modernism has definitely seen a very real problem—despite its untenable solutions—that has not been seen by anti-modernistic reaction in upholding the ‘*semper eadem*,’ namely the absolutizing of continuity in a way that had no appreciation for the historical nature of human expression. In more recent times, this compelling problem naturally resurfaced and the distinction between form and content returned.”⁷⁴ Thus, the distinction between abiding truth and its historically conditioned formulation resurfaced with the *nouveaux théologiens*, and with that came the problem regarding the relation between history and truth.

⁷² Avery Cardinal Dulles, “Postmodernist Ecumenism,” Review of *The Church in a Postliberal Age*, by George A. Lindbeck, *First Things*, October 2003.

⁷³ For another, Aidan Nichols, O.P., writes, “Though modernism had been a false answer it had set a real question”; see “Thomism and the *Nouvelle théologie*,” *The Thomist* 64 (2000): 1–19, at 5.

⁷⁴ G. C. Berkouwer, *Nabretrachting op het Concilie* (Kampen, NL: J. H. Kok, 1968), 72.

Of course Berkouwer is right that the distinction itself cannot “be used as a magician’s wand to clear up every burning question.”⁷⁵ The problem was that the presupposition of the hermeneutic of continuity no longer seemed self-evident, given that truth’s expressions are historically conditioned and that these expressions are never comprehensive, adequate, and complete—even if all are true. Berkouwer elaborates: “That harmony had always been presumed, virtually self-evidently, to be an implication of the mystery of the truth ‘*eodem sensu eademque sententia*.’ Now, however, attention is captivated primarily by the historical-factual process that does not transcend the times but is entangled with them in all sorts of ways. It cannot be denied that one encounters the undeniable fact of the situated setting of the various pronouncements made by the church in any given era.”⁷⁶ The question is, then, how exactly a single and unitary revelation homogeneously is expressed, keeping the same meaning and the same judgment, given the undeniable fact “of time-conditioning, one can even say: of *historicity*.”⁷⁷ Says Berkouwer pointedly, “all the problems of more recent interpretation of dogma are connected very closely to this search for continuity.... Thus, the question of the nature of continuity has to be faced.”⁷⁸

Throughout the past eighty-five years, magisterial attention has, in varying degrees, been given to this question of continuity and its nature: Pius XII’s *Humani Generis* (1950),⁷⁹ Pope Paul VI’s *Mysterium Fidei* (1965),⁸⁰ John Paul II’s *Fides et Ratio* (1998),⁸¹ and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’s *Mysterium Ecclesiae* (1973).⁸² Of relevance to this question is also the work of the International Theological Commission, which is the advisory body of theologians to the

⁷⁵ Berkouwer, *Vatikaans Concilie en Nieuwe Theologie*, 99 (ET, 84).

⁷⁶ Berkouwer, *Nabretrachting op het Concilie*, 52.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 52–53.

⁷⁸ G. C. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, *Eenheid en Katholiciteit* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1970), 236–37; English translation in *The Church*, trans. James E. Davidson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 190–91 (Davidson’s translation is a one-volume presentation of the two-volume *De Kerk*).

⁷⁹ Pius XII, *Humani Generis*, §§15–16 (available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_12081950_humani-generis.html).

⁸⁰ Paul VI, *Mysterium Fidei*, §§23–25 (available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_03091965_mysterium.html).

⁸¹ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, §95 (available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html).

⁸² *Mysterium Ecclesiae*, §5.

CDF. It devoted an entire document to this question, “The Interpretation of Dogma” (1989), giving systematic attention to, among other matters, a metaphysical hermeneutic that underpins the question regarding the relationship between language, truth, and reality, with a particular focus on the relationship between truth and history.⁸³

After all these years, we may rightly hold that a consensus exists on this question. First, there is the basic affirmation regarding the continuity and material identity of Christian doctrine over time in respect of its meaning and truth (*eodem sensu eademque sententia*). Second, doctrinal relativism and its corollary of a perpetual hermeneutic is rejected because of its emphasis on doctrinal discontinuity, not merely discontinuity in expression or formulation, but a discontinuity that denies the enduring validity of truth, recognizing nothing but interpretations of interpretations, with our judgments never reaching the reality that makes them true. Furthermore, a perpetual hermeneutic holds that the truth of dogma can be formulated only either (a) in an indeterminate way or (b) in various ways that are not only different, but fundamentally contradictory. This hermeneutic opposes the teachings of Vatican I and Vatican II, and particular their Lérinian legacy—namely, that the interpretation of dogmas throughout the ages must keep the same meaning and the same judgment (*eodem sensu eademque sententia*). Third, albeit tentatively and cautiously, some brief attention is given by Pius and Paul to the question of the inadequacy and incompleteness of conceptual and linguistic formulations and expressions of unchanging truths and of whether our understanding can deepen the meaning and truth of dogma and doctrine. The CDF goes further by devoting an entire section of its document to that question: new formulations of the permanently valid content of dogmas or doctrines are not contradictory and do not involve rejection of previous doctrinal truths, and hence, there is no doctrinal discontinuity. It explicitly recognizes the distinction between truth and its formulations, between unchanging truth and the historical conditioning that affects the formulation of it. The International Theological Commission later picks up on this distinction in the “Interpretation of Dogma,” as does John Paul II in *Fides et Ratio*, arguing that the fundamental question here regarding the unity and authentic diversity of dogmatic formulations of the truth and reality of revelation—about the relationship between universal

⁸³ International Theological Commission, “The Interpretation of Dogma” (1989), A.I.3 (available at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_1989_interpretazione-dogmi_en.html).

truth, always valid, on the one hand, and the historicity of dogmas and doctrine, on the other—requires a metaphysical hermeneutics giving an account of the relationship between language, truth, and reality. Against this background, I shall draw some conclusions about D’Costa’s hermeneutic.

Earlier I noted that, although D’Costa embraces the distinction between the truth of dogma and its many expressions or formulations, he cautions against construing the truth of dogma as “a kind of neo-Platonism: a ‘pure idea of dogma that is then implemented in varying circumstances,” for such a view runs the “danger of identifying propositions with the fullness of truth and essentializing and eternalizing them” (VII, 31, 35). D’Costa is right that some versions of essentialism do run the danger of identifying propositions with the fullness of truth. I considered that version in type 2 interpreters of Vatican II. But essentialism as such is not incompatible with the claim, as Guarino notes, “that every statement requires further thought and elucidation, that every assertion is open to reconceptualization and reformulation, and that no statement comprehensively exhausts truth, much less divine truth.”⁸⁴ Divine truth may be expressed incompletely and inadequately, but neither falsely nor indeterminately. The fact that we do not know everything that there is to know about a particular divine truth does not necessarily mean that what we do know is not determinately true in these doctrinal formulations, but only approximations of that truth (VII, 35). Furthermore, Rahner is correct: “They are an ‘*adequatio intellectus et rei*,’ insofar as they state absolutely nothing which is false. Anyone who wants to call them ‘half false’ because they do not state everything about the whole of the truth of the matter in question would eventually abolish the distinction between truth and falsehood.”⁸⁵ So, the new linguistic formulations or expressions can vary as long as they mediate the same judgment. What is more, adds Rahner, “a more complete and more perfect statement does not falsify the one it supersedes.”⁸⁶ The content of the concepts informing the propositions that God is triune and that

⁸⁴ Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology*, 139n59; see also, 100n20.

⁸⁵ Karl Rahner, “The Development of Dogma,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 1, trans. Cornelius Ernst, O.P. (Baltimore, MD: Helicon Press, 1961), 39–77, at 44. Pace Küng, “Why are Dogmatic Pronouncements So Difficult to Make Today?” 207: “Every proposition can, as far as the verbal formulation goes, be true and false, according to how it is aimed, situated, intended.”

⁸⁶ Karl Rahner, “*Mysterium Ecclesiae*,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 17, trans. Margaret Kohl (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 139–55, at 151.

the Second Person of the Trinity is God incarnate are meaning-invariant, fixed, and determinate, and that meaning does not change precisely because it is true to reality, to an objective state of affairs. Bernard Lonergan is right that the “meaning of its nature is related to what is meant, and what is meant may or may not correspond to what is in fact so [is the case].” “If it corresponds,” Lonergan adds here, “the meaning is true. If it does not correspond, the meaning is false.”⁸⁷

What of D'Costa's worry about “eternalizing” propositions? His worry is unclear. What is wrong with timeless or eternal truth anyway? As Paul Helm explains, “if God is timelessly eternal then at least some propositions about him will be timelessly true in this very robust sense. Presumably the timelessness of God is itself an example of a timeless truth in this sense, if it is a truth. And whatever else is essential to God will, in turn, be robustly timeless in this sense—God is just, God is love, God is one nature in three persons, and so on.”⁸⁸ Consider also assertions about the Trinity and the Incarnation. Can these doctrines be understood non-metaphysically, even non-essentially? Oliver Crisp rightly states, “If we must confess that God is both one and three, that he is Triune, and that the Second Person of the Trinity is God Incarnate, and so forth, then we are predicating certain things about the divine nature. We are saying that God is Triune; that in some important and fundamental sense it is true that he is both one and yet three; that the Second Person of the Trinity is Incarnate in Christ; and so on. We cannot avoid making such claims as Christian theologians.” Furthermore, he continues, “these claims are metaphysical in the sense that they predicate something about God, about the nature of God, and are claims we think veridical.”⁸⁹ If D'Costa objects to “timeless propositions” that purport to express eternal truths about God, such as the ones Crisp gives as examples, he does not say. Furthermore, some theologians object to the notion of “timeless truth” because they claim it turns theology into a system of “universal truths,” meaning propositions that are enduringly valid, and hence, “if they are true, then they are true at all times.”⁹⁰ D'Costa clearly affirms that the truths of the Christian faith are now forever

⁸⁷ Bernard Lonergan, S.J., “The Dehellenization of Dogma,” in *A Second Collection*, ed. William F.J. Ryan, S.J., and Bernard J. Tyrrell, S.J. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974), 11–32, at 14.

⁸⁸ Helm, 170. I have learned much from Helm's book.

⁸⁹ Crisp, “*Ad Hector*,” 138.

⁹⁰ Helm, *Faith, Form, and Fashion*, 172–173.

true, permanently true, and hence, he wonders why there is an objection (see *VII*, 35n51).

D'Costa embraces the distinction between the truth of dogma and its expression. He claims that dogma's truth "is *not* exclusively dependent on any particular framework, unless the framework eschews ontology." I wish that D'Costa were clearer here, too. Is he saying that an account of the truth of dogma requires an ontological framework in which such truths correspond to what is basically an objective reality? And if so, is this ontology about "a relationship between language and reality in respect of truth"?⁹¹ He suggests that it is when arguing that "any dogmatic expression must bear some determinative relationship to truth" and that this is because "language" (one presumes he means assertions) has a "proper referencing function to reality" (*VII*, 35). Still, D'Costa's hermeneutic is, as it stands, metaphysically underdetermined: "A metaphysical hermeneutic raises the question of the very truth of reality itself. This begins with the fact that the truth manifests itself in and by means of human intelligence in such a fashion that in the light of the intelligence the very truth of reality itself shines forth."⁹² Although his hermeneutic is open to the appeal of metaphysics, given his suggestive claim about the relationship between language, truth, and reality, he never explicitly gives a metaphysical account of that relationship in respect of dogma's truth. In that account, he would need to "show how it is possible to move from the historical and contingent circumstances" in which the truth of a dogma is asserted "to the truth which [it] expresses, a truth transcending those circumstances."⁹³ It is not clear why he does not give such an account, given that his hermeneutic is open to metaphysics, but what is clear is that he thinks he can defend the truth of dogmatic formulations without that account. This is evident when he claims, "It is perfectly possible to defend it [dogma's truth] within a more historicist view" (*VII*, 31). In other words, D'Costa defends "a historicist form of [essentialism]" (*VII*, 48).

On this view, he explains in response to critics of an essentialist hermeneutic (such as O'Malley and the Belgian philosophical theologian Lieven Boeve), "I am not suggesting that we can somehow jump out of our cultural linguistic world and see 'truth' beyond these performances and utterances. Rather, the claim is that a cognitive

⁹¹ Ibid., 157.

⁹² International Theological Commission, "The Interpretation of Dogma," A.I.3.

⁹³ John Paul II, *Fide et Ratio*, §95.

grasp of truth is possible through formulations that may change and that a comparison may be possible between these different formulations whereby continuity or discontinuity can be determined" (VII, 48–49). Again, D'Costa leaves me wondering what he means by a "cognitive grasp of truth." Even if we cannot jump out of our linguistic cultural world, if we focus on the truth of what is asserted, then, surely what is cognitively grasped is not merely true in its context; otherwise, that would be historicism—which he decidedly rejects. As I argued earlier, the conditions under which I come to grasp the truth of that assertion must be distinguished from the conditions that make that assertion true. John Paul II gets it right: "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."⁹⁴ Thus, the metaphysical question concerning truth and reality is at its nub "the question of the relationship between truth and history."⁹⁵ That is to say, "from the theological viewpoint, the question spills over into that of the relationship between universal truth, always valid, on the one hand, and the historicity of dogmas, on the other."⁹⁶

Furthermore, a cognitive grasp of truth involves propositions, or assertions, because dogma is truth-asserting. In other words, asserting that P is the case under particular conditions does not make that dogmatic assertion true. "It is the truth content of that assertion that may become the content of countless other assertions."⁹⁷ The truth content of such assertions is what may be cognitively grasped through varying formulations, focusing on the truth of what is asserted and expressed in order to give a proper account of the traditional characteristic of doctrinal form, as Guarino puts it, "at least in its essential judgments, [which] include its unity and organic continuity, its material identity and constancy."⁹⁸ In sum, D'Costa rejects a hermeneutic of relativism, and hence, not only may truth be determinately known and expressed through formulations that may change, but also he defends the enduring validity of the conceptual language used to communicate the truth of a dogma.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ International Theological Commission, "The Interpretation of Dogma," A.I.3.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Helm, *Faith, Form, and Fashion*, 176.

⁹⁸ Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology*, ix.

One final point I want to make concerns D'Costa's understanding of revelation. He is clear that "God's self-revelation [is] determinative for faith" (*VII*, 35). Propositions, or assertions, are surely central and essential to the Christian faith, particularly concerning the nature of revelation. I miss the idea of revealed truth, of propositional revelation—in short, of the mediating role of propositions in God's self-revelation to man—in D'Costa's view. Arguably, the International Theological Commission is right: "Catholic theology begins from the certitude of faith that the *Paradosis* of the Church and the dogmas she transmits are authentic statements of the truth revealed by God in the Old and New Testaments. She also affirms that the revealed truth, transmitted by the *Paradosis* of the Church, is universally valid and unchangeable in substance."⁹⁹ An adequate account of revelation in *Dei Verbum*, the Vatican II Constitution on Divine Revelation, must understand the *inherent* connection of words (the verbal element of revelation) and acts in the Christologically concentrated structure of revelation.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, the idea that God's self-revelation is a *word*-revelation, forming an essential element of God's self-revelation, entails the idea of propositional revelation, of revealed *truth*—namely, that assertions expressing propositions are part of the way God reveals himself. *Dei Verbum* also affirms the centrality of "assertions," or propositions, in God's verbal revelation: "Therefore, since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings for the sake of salvation" (§11). Aidan Nichols is right: "Whatever else doctrines are, they are propositions, and no account of revelation which would exclude propositions wholly from its purview could do justice to the role of doctrines in Catholic Christianity."¹⁰¹ In conclusion, D'Costa needs to explicitly integrate into his hermeneutics a theology of propositional revelation. N V

⁹⁹ International Theological Commission, "The Interpretation of Dogma," A.II.1.

¹⁰⁰ On this, see Aidan Nichols, O.P., "De Lubac & Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange [on Divine Revelation]," in *Engaging the Theologians* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2013), 113–28, at 124.

¹⁰¹ Aidan Nichols, O.P., *From Newman to Congar: The Idea of Doctrinal Development from the Victorians to the Second Vatican Council* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 175.