

***Dei Filius* IV: On the Development of Dogma**

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Introduction

Historically, it is indisputable that the intention of the latter part of chapter 4 of *Dei Filius* was to restate the substantial immutability of the deposit of faith, not for the sake of rejecting doctrinal development, but for the sake of establishing parameters for a certain *profectus fidei*—progress or development in the faith—which no Catholic theologian doubted, not even nineteenth-century neo-Scholastics. Then-contemporary (e.g., John Henry Newman and the Tübingen school) and subsequent (e.g., Yves Congar and Henri de Lubac) theologians' theories that were more thoroughly worked out presupposed this immutability.

The argument here is simple: *Dei Filius*'s teaching on the immutability of dogma not only did serve as the necessary foundation for any sound (i.e., Catholic) theory of doctrinal development, but continues to do so. While the teaching of *Dei Filius* itself is limited and incomplete, it is essential. Furthermore, its key feature of *dogmatic* immutability is not compromised by even the most dramatic of doctrinal developments.

To establish the ongoing relevance of *Dei Filius* for contemporary discussions on doctrinal development, I will first draw out certain key similarities between the nineteenth-century, modernist, and contemporary contexts. This will be followed by a presentation of the relevant portions of *Dei Filius*. Finally, in the longest section, I will discuss what is at stake in the teaching of *Dei Filius* and offer some different examples of how doctrines develop in ways that uphold the fundamental-theological principle laid out

in *Dei Filius*: namely, that all doctrinal development is homogenous with, or in continuity with, the deposit of faith.

Anton Günther and Theology Today

We can identify two major factors that led to the Vatican Council having to address dogmatic development. The first, and perhaps most important, factor is the implication that Anton Günther's (1783–1863) understanding of faith and reason had on dogma and its immutability. The second factor is simply the fact that, in the midst of these pervasive philosophical and theological disputes over faith and reason, Pius IX not only managed to define the Immaculate Conception *as dogma*, but did so by *papal* definition: the 1854 definition was the freshest example of what would later be defined in 1870.¹ A brief examination of the thought of Günther will help us better understand why the paragraph on development (i.e., the immutability and progress of dogma) pertains to the faith–reason relationship and, hence, appears in the fourth chapter.²

Günther's major concern is a noble one: namely, to respond to the Kantian critique of supernatural religion. To do so, he sees it as necessary not only to defend rationally but also to explain rationally—according to the philosophical systems of Schelling and Hegel—Christian dogma. Günther is no brash and pure rationalist. He believes in the history of supernatural revelation. He acknowledges that reason alone could never discover supernaturally revealed truths; but, as a so-called semi-rationalist, he believes that, once made known to it, reason can then penetrate and, indeed, prove these revealed truths.³

¹ Mark G. McGrath, *The Vatican Council's Teaching on the Evolution of Dogma* (Rome: Pontificium Athenaeum Internationale Angelicum, 1960), 71.

² For a summary of Günther's approach to faith and reason, see Gerald A. McCool, *Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism: The Search for a Unitary Method* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1977), 88–112, esp. pp. 89–92, 106–109.

³ McCool, *Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism*, 103. The following summary of Günther's thought depends on a variety of sources, not only McCool. In Hermann-Josef Pottmeyer's judgment, much of nineteenth-century theological criticism levelled against Günther misrepresented his thought (*Der Glaube vor dem Anspruch der Wissenschaft: die Konstitution über den katholischen Glauben Dei Filius des Ersten Vatikanischen Konzils und die unveröffentlichten theologischen Voten der vorbereitenden Kommission*, *Freiburger Theologische Studien* 87 [Freiburg in Breisgau: Herder, 1968], 435–36). We are not in a position to evaluate this judgment; what concerns us here is the Council's teaching. However unfair it is to misrepresent a thinker, the meaning of conciliar teaching is determined not by the theological accuracy concerning the historical error,

But if revealed mysteries are discoverable by human reason, then those same mysteries have to be interpreted in such a way that is, indeed, within the reach of reason using its proper resources.⁴ Not Scholasticism but German idealism—especially its category of self-consciousness—was Günther’s vehicle for giving an account of the faith. Such a re-interpretation of Christian dogma according idealism’s categories naturally alters the original understanding of that dogma. But for Günther, this reinterpretation is necessary if revelation is to be accessible to reason.

So, for example, because modern psychology cannot make sense of a distinction between “person” and “nature” that is not coterminous, we must conclude, against Ephesus, that Christ is in fact a unity of two persons. Nor, for that matter, is the human person a composite of body and soul as defined by the Council of Vienne (1311–1312). Because God is self-conscious spirit, there is a process of trebling in God that tends toward the tritheistic,⁵ whereby God becomes three by virtue of thesis (the self-conscious subject), anti-thesis (the self-conscious object), and synthesis (the consciousness of equality between the subject and object). Each person, though distinct from another, denies that he is another; such a denial of the infinite then leads God to think the finite, and hence create *necessarily*.⁶ And because these three distinct realities were united only by virtue of their origin and not their nature, he denies the Fourth Lateran Council’s and the Council of Florence’s teaching that the works of God *ad extra* have only one origin, and hence are the works of the entire Trinity.⁷

Günther’s ultimate error is reducing Christian doctrine to natural

but by the response to what was considered to be erroneous, whether rightly or wrongly attributed to Günther (or any one of his disciples). Be that as it may, Pottmeyer does admit that Günther’s identification of personhood with self-consciousness was a novelty that did not sit well with previously defined dogma (441).

⁴ For a helpful summary of Günther’s semi-rationalism as a prelude to false development, see Klaus Schatz, *Vaticanum I: 1869–1870*, vol. 2, *Von der Eröffnung bis zur Konstitution Dei Filius* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1993), 335–39.

⁵ P. Gondet notes that, because “person” for Günther is tantamount to self-consciousness, the Güntherian Trinity amounts to a tritheistic three consciences/consciousnesses, three substances, three centers of operation which, in turn, have knock-on effects for our understanding of the Incarnation, etc. (“Günther, Antoine,” in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, vol. 6 [Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1908], cols. 1992–93). See also “Tritheism,” in *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. E. A. Livingstone, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1654., and Pottmeyer, *Der Glaube*, 435–36.

⁶ Michael O’Carroll, “Günther, Anton,” in *Trinitas: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Holy Trinity* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1987), 120–21.

⁷ Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, trans. Patrick Lynch (Rockford, IL: Tan, 1974), 72.

reason so as to better understand and penetrate that doctrine. In so doing, he subordinates “theology to autonomous philosophy,”⁸ or, conversely, elevates reason to a norm that determines the meaning of revelation.⁹ The progressive dynamics of the human sciences can and should justify a similar progress or adjustment in Christian doctrine. Gerald McCool explains:

Christ’s positive historical revelation [for Günther] is not a collection of pre-given ideas. It is the concrete intelligible self-revelation of Christ’s inner experience. Christ’s experience is transmitted to the intelligences of Christian believers through the concrete language of their Christian tradition. Since this is so, there will be a development in theology, as cultural and scientific development increases Vernunft’s ability to intuit and thematize the intelligibility incarnate in the words of Christian tradition. . . . The urgent concern of the Church must always be that in each generation the Christian faith is thematized through a theology whose breadth of vision and systematic rigor can meet the demands of contemporary culture. . . . The unfolding of revelation’s doctrinal content through scientific Wissen is achieved by philosophical reflection, according to the rigorous demands of scientific method, upon the intelligibilities passively received through faith.¹⁰

This progress or unfolding of content in the tradition inevitably involves abandoning the original interpretation of a dogmatic formula for a newer one—one more in concert with contemporary philosophy or science.

Does the requisite reinterpretation of dogma negate the divine origin of dogma and the infallibility of the Church’s teaching? By no means! As semi-rationalist, Günther upholds the divine origin of revelation and he wants to affirm the Church’s infallible teaching. But this infallible teaching is still provisional; it is only the Church’s best available judgment in a given context, which does not preclude further precisings of doctrine that slowly and gradually render the entire body of doctrine discoverable by human

⁸ Thomas Guarino, “Vincent of Lérins and the Hermeneutical Question: Historical and Theological Reflections,” *Gregorianum* 75, no. 3 (1994): 491–524, at 500–502. He is summarizing the votum of Franzelin, re-published in the appendix of Pottmeyer, *Der Glaube*, 28*–89*.

⁹ Pottmeyer, *Der Glaube*, 435.

¹⁰ McCool, *Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism*, 108–9.

reason.¹¹ Dogmas are revisable or perfectible according to the progress of *Wissenschaft*. And this is necessary if one wants to bring revealed truth “into line,” as it were, with reason. Such a view of doctrine and its development can be considered, historically speaking, a prelude to the modernist crisis.¹²

While nineteenth-century (semi-)rationalism and turn-of-the-century modernism are two very different things, there are noteworthy similarities. Like Günther, George Tyrrell was concerned with “making peace between faith and reason.”¹³ The revelation that the Church transmits is, for both Günther and Tyrrell, not so much a revealed teaching, but Christ’s spiritual or religious experience. Tyrrell’s valid insight, which Günther would second¹⁴—the insight that animated the modernist crisis, and to which so many *nouvelle* theologians felt called to respond—was that all dogmatic utterances were thoroughly contextually or historically conditioned. From this Tyrrell infers that any attempt at understanding the meaning of them required a scholarly training that few possessed.¹⁵ In order to make valid his own faith, let alone the *foi de charbonnier*, Tyrrell divests dogma of its scientific import. For Tyrrell, dogma is not a theological statement, but an ecclesiastically privileged statement that expresses and protects the data of a religious experience (i.e., revelation).¹⁶ To give dogma a *scientific* value is the ultimate heresy of what he calls “theologism.”¹⁷ Dogma might contain religious truth while containing scientific error in the same way that Scripture’s utterances about the sun moving round the earth is a prophetic, not

¹¹ In this summary, I am indebted to Alfred Vacant’s *Études théologiques sur les constitutions du Concile du Vatican d’après les actes du concile*, 2 vols (Paris: Delhomme et Brigue, 1985), 2:282–84.

¹² Eugene Kevane argues that many histories of Catholic modernism ignore the German-speaking precedents to the crisis at the turn of the twentieth-century, but credits Louis Billot’s philosophical treatment of it as being more thorough and accurate (*The Lord of History: Christocentrism and the Philosophy of History* [Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2018], 91–92; see also Louis Billot, *De immutabilitate Traditionis contra modernam haeresim evolutionismi*, 4th ed. [Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1929]).

¹³ George Tyrrell, *Through Scylla and Charybdis, or The Old Theology and the New* (London: Longmans, and Green, 1907), 335.

¹⁴ For Günther, dogmas do not “fall from heaven” (“vom Himmel gefallen”), but are the result of an interaction between an objective given and subjective self-understanding (Pottmeyer, *Der Glaube*, 440).

¹⁵ Tyrrell explains this over the course of many pages, but particularly in his response to Jules Lebreton in *Through Scylla and Charybdis*, 308–54, esp. at 336–37.

¹⁶ Tyrrell, *Through Scylla and Charybdis*, 203n1.

¹⁷ Tyrrell, *Through Scylla and Charybdis*, 202–13, 238, 308–54.

an astronomical, truth. Dogmas, for Tyrrell, inevitably must undergo the same criticism as Scripture.¹⁸

Hence, he essays to make sense of the Virgin Birth by comparing it to other symbols that teach us about a deeper spiritual truth, regardless of their historicity, such as the Child of Prague about Christ's Kingship and the sacred heart about Christ's love, and so the Virgin Birth about each Christian as a Christ-bearer.¹⁹

Because Günther and Tyrrell situate theology and science in relation to revelation and dogma differently, they become the inverse of each other with respect to development theory. For Günther, dogma progresses because *Wissenschaft* progresses. For Tyrrell, dogma does not "progress" because it has no philosophical, scientific, or "proper" value that would render it capable of progressing.²⁰

Both, however, are happy to revise dogma insofar as the Church's understanding of it is not necessarily maintained. The differences between Günther and Tyrrell reveal to us the different ways in which contemporary revisionists operate: either revise the dogma explicitly to fit contemporary intellectual culture or, more subtly, take the intellectual bite out of dogma so that one can re-interpret without tampering with the formula. Whether in a neo-Güntherian or neo-modernist mode, this refusal to maintain the same sense of dogma is still with us. Leo Scheffczyk points out:

Insofar as the dogma still has meaning for the new situation, it does not have to be explained in terms of its origin [*nicht genetisch erklärt*], but must be interpreted according to the new horizon of understanding. Instead of explaining the progress of dogma, there is a hermeneutic that is less interested in the immutable existence of dogma and its agreement with its origin than in its modern understandability. In this way the contemporary situation becomes the measure [*Auswahl- und Selektionsprinzip*] for the dogmatic content, the meaning of which is decided by scientific-hermeneutic theology. Therefore (according to a modern epistemological necessity that has not actually been proven), "transubstantiation" must be understood as "transfinalization," "original sin" as "sin of the world," the

¹⁸ Tyrrell, *Through Scylla and Charybdis*, 330–34.

¹⁹ Tyrrell does not outright reject the historicity of the Virgin Birth, but concedes that his understanding of dogma would allow him to do so, and would be contrary to magisterial teaching at the time he was writing; see his letter to Von Hügel in *George Tyrrell's Letters*, ed. M. D. Petre (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1920), 56–61.

²⁰ Tyrrell, *Through Scylla and Charybdis*, 12–13, 294–96, 324–25.

“Immaculate Conception of Mary” as a mere statement about the possibility of protection from sin, without the “new understanding” being checked [*nachgeprüft*] against the content of the original. Clearly, disinterest in the development of dogma leads de facto to its abandonment.²¹

Scheffczyk here highlights contemporary rejections of a defined dogma’s sense. Some rejections might be more attributable to a Güntherian, others to a Tyrrellian, conception of theology and science. Irrespective of their genesis, these rejections are akin to the nineteenth-century ones that catalyzed the teaching of *Dei Filius*.

Dogmatic Development according to Pius IX and *Dei Filius*

The teaching of *Dei Filius* on dogmatic development is anticipated by numerous interventions of the Pian magisterium, especially against Günther. For instance, in *Qui Pluribus* of 1846, we have a clear anticipation of *Dei Filius*:

Those enemies of divine revelation, exalting human progress with the highest praise, with a rash and sacrilegious daring would wish to introduce it into the Catholic religion, just as if precisely this religion were the work, not of God, but of men or were some philosophical discovery [*philosophicum inventum*] that could be perfected by human means.²²

Pius IX here is teaching that revelation, being something fundamentally received, is no human philosophy, capable of being perfected. This point will be reiterated in only slightly different terms in *Dei Filius*.

We also find a precursor to the maintenance of the same sense or meaning of the doctrine in *Qui Pluribus*: “The divine words should be received

²¹ Leo Scheffczyk, *Grundlagen des Dogmas, Einleitung in die Dogmatik*, Katholische Dogmatik 1 (Aachen: MM Verlag, 1997), 169–70 (trans. mine). Other examples could be given, such as the re-interpretation of final damnation as annihilationism. See, e.g., Edward Schillebeeckx, “Theological Quests,” in *Essays: Ongoing Theological Quests*, Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx 11 (London: T&T Clark, 2014), 111–61, at 137.

²² Heinrich Denzinger, *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, 43rd ed., Latin–German, ed. by Helmut Hoping and Peter Hünermann [DH], Latin–English ed. and trans. Robert Fastiggi and Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), no. 2777.

entirely according to the same sense [divina eloquia eo plane sensu sunt accipienda] as this Roman See . . . has always maintained.”²³

In his 1857 letter to Cardinal Geißel of Cologne (*Eximiam tuam*), Pius IX warns that, through Günther’s subordination of faith to reason, the immutability of the faith is disturbed: “The faith, which is always one and the same, while philosophy and human studies do not always stay the same and are not exempt from a multiple variety of errors.”²⁴

Pius’s *Syllabus* collects these rationalist and semi-rationalist errors, of which the most relevant to doctrinal development in *Dei Filius* include: reason as the sole judge of truth (no. 3); reason as the origin of religious truth and norm of such knowledge (no. 4); the conflation of philosophy and theology (no. 8); Christian dogma deemed subject to philosophical inquiry (no. 9). Perhaps the most important is no. 5, which reads:

Divine revelation is imperfect and hence subject to continual and indefinite progress, which ought to correspond to the progress of human reason.²⁵

Given these magisterial precedents, the teaching on dogmatic development in *Dei Filius* surprised no one.

Because erroneous theories of doctrinal evolution are, at their root, due to a rationalist error (whereby reason becomes the ultimate criterion of religious truth at the expense of authority, both divine and ecclesial), the first teaching concerning doctrinal development in *Dei Filius* can already be found in the third canon of chapter 2:

If anyone says that a human being cannot be divinely elevated to a knowledge and perfection which exceeds the natural, but of himself can and must reach finally the possession of all truth and goodness by continual development [*iugi profectu*]: let him be anathema.²⁶

While not speaking directly to development theory per se, it does speak to a crass rationalist theory of evolution in knowledge. This canon condemns

²³ DH, no. 2781.

²⁴ DH, no. 2829. Cf. Pius’s condemnation of a similar tendency in Jakob Frohschammer in his 1862 *Gravissimas Inter* (DH, nos. 2850–61, esp. 2857–59).

²⁵ DH, nos. 2901–80, esp. 2903–9.

²⁶ Vatican I, *Dei Filius* [DF] ch. 2, can. 3, trans. Norman P. Tanner in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 vols. (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 2:804–11, at 810.

that rationalism—referred to by Vincent Gasser as “progressionist”²⁷—which excludes the supernatural order (divine revelation, grace, authority) from progress in religious knowledge whatever. But for the condemnation of false theories of *dogmatic* development held by semi-rationalists, one must turn to the last paragraph of chapter 4:

For the doctrine of the faith which God has revealed is put forward not as some philosophical discovery capable of being perfected by human intelligence, but as a divine deposit committed to the spouse of Christ to be faithfully protected and infallibly promulgated.²⁸ Hence, too, that meaning of the sacred dogmas is ever to be maintained which has once been declared by Holy mother Church, and there must never be any abandonment of this sense under the pretext or in the name of a more profound understanding. May understanding, knowledge and wisdom increase as ages and centuries roll along [and in the progress of ages], and greatly and vigorously flourish, in each and all, in the individual and the whole Church: but this only in its own proper kind [but only within the proper limits], that is to say, in the same doctrine [within the same dogma], the same sense [the same meaning] and the same understanding [the same judgment].²⁹

First, we observe that divine revelation is specified as a teaching (*doctrina fidei*), and that this teaching is entrusted as “a divine deposit” (*divinum depositum*).³⁰ The allusion to 1 Timothy 6:20 is clear: “O Timothy, guard

²⁷ *Relatio* of Vincent Gasser in Vacant, *Études*, 1:672.

²⁸ Cf. *Pastor Aeternus*, ch. 4 “For the holy Spirit was promised to the successors of Peter not so that they might, by his revelation, make known some new doctrine, but that, by his assistance, they might religiously guard [*sancta custodirent*] and faithfully expound [*fideliter exponerent*] the revelation or deposit of faith transmitted by the apostles” (Tanner, *Decrees*, 2:816).

²⁹ *DF IV* (Tanner, 2:809; with Fastiggi’s Denzinger translation in brackets).

³⁰ The echoes of Vincent of Lérins are already here, before we even get to the second canon: “What is *the deposit*? It is that which has been entrusted to you, not that which has been discovered by you; that which you have received, not which you have invented; not a matter of innate intelligence, but of instruction [*Quid est depositum? Id est, quod tibi creditum est, non quod a te inventum; quod accepisti, non quod excogitasti; rem non ingenii, sed doctrinae*]” (*Commonitorium* 22; *Patrologia Latina* [PL], 50:667; trans. mine).

what has been entrusted to you [depositum custodi].” The conceptualization of revelation as a deposit represents its objective and immutable character.³¹

Furthermore, the Council fathers contrast this deposit of doctrine with some philosophical discovery (*philosophicum inventum*). Here the distinction between the natural and supernatural orders established earlier in the chapter are determinative: philosophical discoveries can be perfected by human inquiry, trial and error, and reflection (*humanis ingeniis perficienda*); a divine deposit, however, belonging to the supernatural order, comes from God because its object surpasses that which is connatural to reason. This supernatural deposit, therefore, cannot be perfected, but, as something received, must be “faithfully protected and infallibly promulgated [*fideliter custodienda et infallibiliter declaranda*].”

These two verbs are significant. *Custodire* means to “safeguard, protect, keep safe”; *declarare*, to “announce, testify, or make known,” implies a judgment that interprets or gives a meaning to some set of data.³² According to one commentator, the magisterium’s mission to safeguard pertains to the deposit’s immutability, while its mission to declare, and hence interpret, pertains to its progress.³³ That the formula alludes to progress in dogma is also based on the fact that the formula was simply replacing Franzelin’s original “cuius custodia, explicatio et definitio,” whose “explicatio et definitio” was, according to Franzelin himself, meant to affirm true dogmatic progress (*verus profectus*).³⁴

The fathers also teach that this deposit is delivered not to human individuals, but to the Spouse of Christ. The Council fathers could have used any image for the Church, but they chose spouse, presumably to emphasize here the requisite fidelity to Christ. Implicit here is also that an unfaithful spouse who corrupts that gift with which she has been entrusted becomes a bad mother to her children, for whom that treasure was intended.³⁵ For the Church to be a good *mater*, she has to be a good *magistra*.

Continuing with the text, we see that, because revealed doctrine is

³¹ Pottmeyer, *Der Glaube*, 446–47.

³² Vacant appeals to Franzelin’s 1870 *De divina traditione et scriptura*, thesis 26, Eph 4:11 (*Études*, II, 2:304–5). Safeguarding and declaring are the two ways in which the magisterium fulfills Christ’s great commission of teaching all that has been commanded, and in this way, involves both dogmatic immutability and progress.

³³ Vacant, *Études*, 2:305.

³⁴ No. 24 in the *Adnotationes in Acta et decreta sacrosancti oecumenici concilii Vaticani*, ed. Theodor Granderath, Collectio Lacensis 7 (Freiburg- im Breisgau: Herder, 1982), col. 537.

³⁵ Vacant, *Études*, 2:290.

already perfect (not impeccable but complete), the “meaning [*sensus*] of the sacred dogmas is ever to be maintained” and “there must never be any abandonment of this sense under the pretext or in the name of a more profound understanding.” Here, the sacred dogmas refers to the Church’s authoritative, solemn, interpretation of God’s word, entrusted as a “deposit.” This interpretation, being historical and finite, is also infallible and irrevocable and, therefore, cannot be abandoned for some other, ostensibly more profound interpretation.³⁶ This “more profound understanding” (*altior intelligentia*) is directly aimed at Günther and his disciples’ idealism in whose key they have transposed Catholic doctrine.³⁷ Crucially, *Dei Filius* does *not deny* that the Church can acquire a more profound understanding of the revealed deposit. But this deeper understanding cannot abandon the sense of the doctrine that came before it. Otherwise, one is no longer deepening one’s understanding of the deposit, but proposing something new.

Next comes Vincent of Lérins’s famous passage from the *Commonitorium* which contains his so-called “second canon”: “in eodem scilicet dogmate, eodem sensu, eademque sententia.”³⁸ The popularity of this text soared in the nineteenth century. Joseph Kleutgen already appealed to the second canon in his initial critique of Günther in *Theologie der Vorzeit*.³⁹ Giovanni Perrone used it when he drafted *Ineffabilis Deus* in order to justify the Immaculate Conception as a legitimate development of dogma.⁴⁰ It is closely paraphrased two years later in Pius IX’s encyclical *Singulari Quidem* (1856):

There is great progress! But it is truly the progress of faith [*vere profectus sit fidei*], which is not change [*non permutatio*]. The

³⁶ This distinction between “deposit” and “dogma” begins in the medieval period. With Vincent, the two are identical (Pottmeyer, *Der Glaube*, 449–53, and see the notes for the studies Pottmeyer cites in support).

³⁷ Pottmeyer, *Der Glaube*, 447.

³⁸ The first canon is his “Quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est” (Vincent of Lérins, *Commonitorium* 2 [*PL*, 50:640]).

³⁹ Joseph Kleutgen, *Die Theologie der Vorzeit vertheidigt* (Münster: Theissing, 1860), 4:698n2. Despite Kleutgen’s coming late to the text, his influence was more decisive than Franzelin’s, as he was called upon to rework Franzelin’s schema. See Winfried Schulz, *Dogmenentwicklung als Problem der Geschichtlichkeit der Wahrheitserkenntnis: eine erkenntnistheoretisch—theologische Studie zum Problemkreis der Dogmenentwicklung* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1969), 89.

⁴⁰ For a summary of nineteenth-century theological reception of Vincent’s second canon, including Vatican I, see Guarino, “Vincent of Lérins and the Hermeneutical Question,” 494–511; see also Guarino, “St. Vincent of Lérins and the Development of Doctrine,” *Logos* 17, no. 3 (2014): 103–17.

intelligence, wisdom, and knowledge of everybody should grow and progress . . . but always in the same fashion and doctrine, in the same meaning and judgment, so that we can speak in a new manner rather than new substance [*ut cum dicantur nove, non dicantur nova*].⁴¹

Here Pius IX's paraphrase draws on both chapters 22 and 23 of the *Communitorium*, the former of which contains the line in which Vincent enjoins others to speak in a new manner rather than saying something new ("dicas nove, non dicas nova"). This line, which immediately precedes the second canon of chapter 22, is present in Franzelin's pre-conciliar work, and appears again in the various *relationes* of the Council fathers.⁴² Appealing to Vincent, Franzelin himself argues that what constitutes a *profectus in intelligentia dogmatis* rather than a *permutatio dogmatis* is making what is less well (*minus diserte*) or obscurely expressed and implicit to be eloquent (*disertius*), clear (*clarius*), and explicit (*explicite*), rendering it more distinctly understood (*intelligatur distinctius*).⁴³

Vincent's second canon eventually comes to replace a passage in Kleutgen's draft, which runs:

Therefore, one applies oneself piously and praiseworthily to the ever fuller understanding of the doctrine of faith according to [the Church's] declared teaching. However, every change of those things which have been established by the infallible magisterium of the Church must be considered, not an increase of understanding, but a corruption of error.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Pius IX, *Singulari Quidem* (1856), §8, in *Papal Encyclicals (1740–1878)*, ed. Claudia Carlen (Wilmington, NC: McGrath, 1981), 341 (Latin in *Pii IX Pontificis Maximi Acta* [Rome: Typographia Bonarum Artium Habita Facultate, 1858], 2:517). The process whereby Vincent of Lérins enters into the final text is thoroughly and accessibly narrated by Guarino in "Vincent of Lérins and the Hermeneutical Question," 503–9.

⁴² The Hungarian Bishop Simor of Esztergom, in his *relatio* on March 18, presenting the *schema reformatum*, makes reference to Vincent: "ecclesia nove dicit et non dicit nova" (*Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, ed. Ioannes Dominicus Mansi, vol. 51 [Leipzig: H. Welter, 1923–1927], cols. 42–48). Franzelin's critique of Günther, along with his appeal to Vincent in that very context, reappears in his *De divina traditione et scriptura*, thesis 25: "On the conjoined office of guardians and teachers of the faith, and the manner of explaining the deposit [De munere coniuncto custodum atque doctorum fidei, et de modo explicationis depositi]" (trans. mine).

⁴³ Granderath, *Acta et decreta*, col. 537.

⁴⁴ Granderath, *Acta et decreta*, col. 1631: "Quare ad eam secundum hanc declarationem plenius semper intelligendam pie et laudabiliter incumbitur; omnis autem commutatio

Considering this formulation by Kleutgen serves as a key to understanding the purpose of Vincent's second canon. Why they replaced Kleutgen with Vincent is unclear. For our purposes, we would only note that, according to the *relatio* of Bishop Louis-Édouard-François-Desiré Pie on April 8, 1870, the intention behind the inclusion of the Lerinian's quotation is to articulate a sound understanding of "true progress" in doctrine.⁴⁵ Not wanting in terms of theological substance, then, perhaps Kleutgen's more technical formulation was replaced by Vincent's in order to elevate the text with a patristic source that was already in the Pian magisterial ether.

The quotation from the *Communitorium* acknowledges a certain kind of dogmatic progress. "May understanding, knowledge and wisdom increase"⁴⁶ and "vigorously flourish," say the Council fathers with Vincent. This increase happens in time, as "ages and centuries roll along." Alfred Vacant rightly observes that the temporal aspect of progress also implies a contextual aspect. Just as one's personal development depends to a significant extent on external factors, so does the development of doctrine. The farmer's hands are different from a pianist's. In the same way, Vacant acknowledges the significance of the context or environment in which doctrine grows.⁴⁷ This development occurs "in each and all, in the individual and the whole Church;" that is to say, in individual Christians and in the whole Church as a corporate person or collective whole.⁴⁸

eorum, quae infallibili ecclesiae magisterio stabilita sunt, non profectus intelligentiae, sed corruptela erroris reputanda est" (trans. mine).

⁴⁵ Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum*, 51:366–67.

⁴⁶ As the Council fathers do not explain the sense of the Vincentian canon, theologians and commentators are free to offer a more developed interpretation that might be consonant with, but goes beyond, the meaning of the canon in *Dei Filius*. This, it seems, is what Vacant does to good effect in his commentary on the *intelligentia*, *scientia*, and *sapientia* in *Dei Filius*, notably, in a Thomistic key, relating them not only to the intellectual virtues but also to the corresponding gifts of the Holy Spirit. This progress in understanding, knowledge, and wisdom, according to Vacant, takes place both before and after dogmatic definitions, wherein more of what is implicit, confused, or uncertain is rendered explicit, precise, and certain (*Études*, 2:314–19).

⁴⁷ Vacant, *Études*, 2:307. The sensitivity to history that Vacant exhibits becomes more pervasive in the decades following Vatican I.

⁴⁸ This phrase brings to the fore the ecclesiological dimension of teaching. Whatever the personal contributions of individuals—bishops, their theologians, and their flock—when it comes to an authentic interpretation of the faith, it is the Church herself (not the sum total of her members) interpreting and teaching. See my "Ecclesia Docens et Cogitans: Doctrinal Development and the Illative Sense of the Church," *Newman Studies* 15, no. 1 (2018): 5–28, at 23–27.

It is important to note here that the progress of our understanding of revelation is not a perfection of revelation (which already exists in the Godhead from whom this revelation emanates),⁴⁹ but a perfection of our knowledge of the revelation. In other words, it is the subjective aspect of dogma that is increasing, despite the fact that we often say, with *Dei Filius*, that there is “progress in doctrine” or that “doctrine develops.” One helpful way of understanding this potential point of confusion is to note that a doctrine is ultimately a kind of judgment. If human knowledge, unlike angelic knowledge, grows through a series of successive judgments, then we can say that doctrine grows, not in the sense that the deposit’s substantial content increases, but that successive judgments (and, hence, articulations) concerning its content are added to the deposit. There is, then, no progress in revelation per se, but only *quoad nos*.⁵⁰

While this understanding increases, it does so only according to specific parameters according to which the meaning of a dogma, once declared by the Church, is maintained: “sed in suo dumtaxat genere, in eodem scilicet dogmate, eodem sensu eademque sententia”—“in its own proper kind, in the same doctrine, the same sense, and the same understanding.” Dogma evolves only “within the limits imposed upon it by its own immutable nature.”⁵¹

Each of these parameters or limits deserve attention. *In suo genere*: “in its own proper kind” refers to the nature of the thing being developed. The nature of what is being developed is *revealed doctrine*, or our understanding of mysteries which we can come to understand only because God has revealed them to us, not because they are in any way discoverable.⁵² If they were discoverable, our understanding of them could be perfectible, but because they are revealed, our understanding is limited to what is given to us by God through the Church. *In eodem dogmate*: “in the same doctrine” pertains to the specific doctrinal judgment that is being elaborated, whether it is Christological doctrine, Eucharistic, or other. In his *Communitorium*, Vincent compares doctrine to seeds planted and harvested. If

⁴⁹ Vacant, *Études*, 2:297.

⁵⁰ This interpretation is corroborated by Kleutgen in his *Theologie der Vorzeit*, 4:968–67.

⁵¹ McGrath, *The Vatican Council's Teaching*, 129.

⁵² Bernard Lonergan notes that the object of permanence here is the meaning of revealed mystery, as opposed to revealed truth generally. For, some revealed truths can also be known by reason, and if this is the case, then “truths within reason’s competence would seem capable of being known more accurately with the progress of science.” It is otherwise with mysteries, which totally transcend reason’s competence and, by virtue of being revealed, “stand beyond the status of the products of human history” (*Method in Theology* [London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971], 322–23).

the doctrine sown was wheat, one should be able to harvest wheat, and so on—the same doctrine.⁵³ When a new dogma emerges, it is articulating the same doctrine in a newer, deeper, more profound way.

The last two phrases, *eodem sensu et in eadem sententia*, come from the Vulgate of 1 Corinthians 1:10: “I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.” *Eodem sensu*, “the same mind or same sense,” means that the Church maintains the same meaning that she once gave to a dogmatic formula. The sense or meaning is maintained when a newer (i.e., different) formulation accords with a previous interpretation. What is permanent and “ever to be maintained” is the meaning or sense of the dogma, not necessarily the formulation. The phrase *eadem sententia* is slightly more ambiguous.⁵⁴ It can mean the same understanding, or the same judgment, but even the same way of thinking, the same purpose, intention, or the same feeling or sentiment. Given the scriptural context of Paul’s exhortation to the Corinthians, it would make sense to understand *eadem sententia* as “same judgment” in the sense of an ecclesial consensus or common approval that is manifest in what and how the Church teaches. Vacant, for example, uses the French *sentiment* or opinion to render *sententia*. The Church’s opinion, position, or *sententia* concerning revealed doctrine is discernible, for example, in the elucidations or explanations of that doctrine provided by her. One is maintaining the same *sententia*, the same judgment, the same pronouncement, of the Church when one is developing or appealing to theological explanations that have been unanimously held by the Church, even those that are not fixed in dogmatic formulae.⁵⁵ In short, *eodem sensu et eadem sententia* are ultimately criteria—the first with respect to the objective, while the second speaking more to the subjective—that seek to uphold the material continuity or homogeneity of Tradition, and thereby seeks to prevent the Church from abandoning landmark dogmatic achievements in the Tradition.⁵⁶ Vincent’s second canon is the criterion that

⁵³ Vincent of Lérins, *Communitorium* 23 (PL, 50:668).

⁵⁴ St. Paul’s Greek, while not crucial to our interpretation of St. Vincent of Lérins, is still instructive: γνώμη (*gnōmē*), which can mean opinion, counsel, judgment, intention, decree, or resolve.

⁵⁵ This, at least, seems to be similar to what Vacant holds (see *Études*, 2:314–16).

⁵⁶ The work of Guarino is especially helpful here, not only in his explanation of Vincent’s rule, but also in his application of that rule to the Second Vatican Council (Thomas G. Guarino, *The Disputed Teachings of Vatican II: Continuity and Reversal in Catholic Doctrine* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018], esp. 15–16). See also, in particular, Thomas Guarino, *Vincent of Lérins and the Development of Christian Doctrine* (Grand

Günther's anti-rationalism violates: Günther gives dogmatic formula not the same meaning, *idem sensus*, but a foreign one, a *sensus alienus*.

Contemporary Approaches to Dogmatic Development

The Challenge of Contemporary Hermeneutics

According to Mark McGrath, while *Dei Filius* affirms legitimate dogmatic progress, it refrains from explaining *how* or the *manner in which* this progress occurs.⁵⁷ Detailed explanations of this *how* are generally dealt with by theologians, and the drafters of *Dei Filius* (e.g., Franzelin and Kleutgen) generally held to a logical explication theory.⁵⁸ In subsequent decades, however, other nineteenth-century influences (e.g., Newman and Tübingen) held greater sway among theologians on this question, such that, with *Dei Verbum*, a modest step was taken in this regard. There the Council fathers explain that the Church's understanding of the deposit grows (1) through contemplation and study, (2) through an experiential understanding of spiritual things, and (3) through the guidance of the infallible episcopal college.⁵⁹

In its specification of the *how* of development, *Dei Verbum* §8 uses the same verbs—*proficere* and *crescere*—as Vincent and *Dei Filius* and references the relevant text.⁶⁰ The most coherent interpretation of *Dei Verbum*, then, is that it is able to explain *how* the Tradition develops precisely because it already presupposes with *Dei Filius* the immutability of the deposit.

Contemporary theological tensions arise not from what the two constitutions say, but rather from what they do not. If *Dei Filius* said nothing about the historical conditionality of dogmatic teaching, the hermeneutical questions concerning the *sense* of dogma and how to identify it, and

Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), esp. the first chapter.

⁵⁷ McGrath, *The Vatican Council's Teaching*, 126.

⁵⁸ Without exploring it further, the two key texts that exemplify this are Kleutgen's pre-conciliar *Theologie der Vorzeit* and Franzelin's post-conciliar *De divina traditione et scriptura*.

⁵⁹ Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum*, §8.

⁶⁰ *Dei Verbum*, §8 (note 5). On the other hand, the absence of an explicit reference to Vincent's second canon, rather than just a general one to *Dei Filius*, must be considered. Guarino has done this thoughtfully in "Vinc nt of Lerins and the Hermeneutical Question," 514–17. The likely grounds for this rejection were not that the theological commission believed that the meaning of dogmas, once defined, could indeed be changed, but that including the second canon did little to encourage or promote theological awareness of historicity and development, and could be used by some to resist any reform of the tradition.

the criteria by which one judges the point at which this *sense* has been abandoned (and not simply recast or supplemented), *Dei Verbum* did not do much better. Theology, however, has made real progress in this regard. I submit that the real reason *Dei Filius*'s teaching on development is more relevant than ever is because the problem to which it was responding—namely, the doctrinal consequences of Güntherian semi-rationalism—still exist today. And while some of the theological solutions to Günther are not present in *Dei Filius* itself but come after, those solutions rely, in part, on the dogmatic principles of revelation's immutability as laid out in *Dei Filius*.

Like Günther of last week and the modernists of yesterday, the revisionists today accord only a provisional status to dogma. As neo-modernists, they subordinate dogma to experience; as neo-Güntherians they have assimilated certain elements of post-modern philosophy and the linguistic turn, which, in theological discourse, seem to render obsolete not only *Dei Filius* but also *Dei Verbum* and the entire post-conciliar magisterium, which repeatedly makes a distinction between what Pope John XXIII referred to as "the truths contained in our venerable doctrine," on the one hand, and the "fashion in which they are expressed," on the other. As Thomas Guarino points out, the statement by John XXIII not only implies Vincent's canon but actually cites it in the official Latin version (despite its absence in various vernacular versions), thereby bringing it into various conciliar debates.⁶¹

But to maintain the same meaning and judgment of dogma, one has to be able to identify them. For the radical hermeneuticist, one cannot identify and isolate *the* meaning of a dogma because one cannot distinguish and isolate the content from its form. To acknowledge certain contingencies in the formulation is not enough. To concede that all meaning is contextual, or that context is the necessary condition for meaning to be communicated, is not enough. For these latter-day neo-Güntherians—who, like Günther himself, are looking to solve a real problem that is posed by historical change in the Tradition—the Vatican Councils, along with

⁶¹ Guarino, "Vincent of Lérins and the Hermeneutical Question," 512. The relevant passage of *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia* reads: "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. For the deposit of faith, the truths contained in our venerable doctrine, are one thing; the fashion in which they are expressed, *but with the same meaning and the same judgement*, is another thing" (trans. Joseph Komonchak, jakomonchak.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/john-xxiii-opening-speech.pdf). The original is in *Acta Sanctae Sedis* 54 (1962): 792.

St. Vincent and the classical theological tradition, would be considered to exhibit a hopeless hermeneutical *naïveté*. They all share the mistaken assumption that one can actually identify the substance or nugget of a doctrine that must ever be maintained, while that which is accidental to the doctrine can be reformed, disposed, precised, as the case may be. For the neo-Güntherians, this is an impossible task. Instead of identifying and safeguarding a particular dogmatic meaning (which anyway eludes us), it is better to re-contextualize the Gospel by re-interpreting it in such a way that it answers to the contemporary conditions of today—the state of science, reason, and experience.

While I cannot respond directly to the hermeneutical turn here, I can, appealing to Congar's gloss on *Dei Filius*, elaborate the rationale behind a theological position that upholds the intelligibility of dogma such that maintaining its meaning becomes possible.

In Congar's theological handbook published in 1962, his eighth thesis echoes the formula of *Dei Filius*: "It is always necessary to maintain the meaning of sacred dogmas that are determined once for all by our Holy Mother Church."⁶² For Congar, the Church uses a formula to express *her* meaning, not the meaning that a concept might have had in a philosophical system. "When she adopts a formula, the Church knows that which she wants to say and it is the meaning [*sens*] of her conviction that matters. The words are for her only an instrument to express it."⁶³ In that way, a technical term that is borrowed from a philosophical system, for example, is used by the Church in her own way for an extended period, purifying its meaning to suit her own purposes and thereby appropriating the word *from* a technical setting, whose meaning is known to the specialist alone, *for* an evangelical purpose whose meaning is accessible to all, even if explanation or catechesis be necessary. The Church might also use a philosophical notion in order to lay hold of reality or for its truth content (*simple contenu de vérité*) rather than for its particular philosophical form or its particular role in a philosophical system.⁶⁴ In her dogma, the Church avoids as much as possible expressions that are too reliant on technical terms. (E.g., the Church avoids use of "accidents" and uses instead "Eucharistic species."⁶⁵)

For Congar, the meaning that the Church intends to express can be investigated by historical study and is accessible to all humans by virtue of

⁶² Congar, *La foi et la théologie* (Paris: Desclée, 1962), 62 (all translation from *La foi* is mine).

⁶³ Congar, *La foi*, 64.

⁶⁴ Congar, *La foi*, 65–66.

⁶⁵ Congar, *La foi*, 65.

a *sens commun*, a common sense, a human capacity for the real.⁶⁶ There is nothing that the Church teaches, even in its most abstract language, that cannot be expressed or explained in a way that is accessible to the human's common sense. Again, at times, history will be necessary to discern the meaning, for the term alone does not necessarily communicate the Church's meaning *prima facie*. But once discerned, that meaning is accessible to the Church, the theologian, the catechist, or the parent, all of whom can, in turn, communicate that meaning in non-technical terms which all can understand.⁶⁷

It is the meaning that the Church gives to an expression, the Church's *sensus*, that is important, invariable, and ultimately, absolute. It is in dogma itself that two crucial aspects of this last paragraph in *Dei Filius* intersect: there must be in the deposit of faith a meaning that is (1) immutable and intelligible if (2) the Church is to guard and infallibly declare it.⁶⁸ If, by virtue of a radical hermeneutics, we are actually incapable of accessing the perennial *sensus Ecclesiae* of a given dogma, then the Church would be rendered incapable of fulfilling her mandate to "hold fast" to apostolic

⁶⁶ Congar himself refers to a *sens commun*. There are "technical expressions borrowed from a terminology which go beyond that of the *sens commun*" (*La foi*, 64); the words of a formula "affirm nothing that cannot be expressed in terms accessible to the *sens commun*" (65). Despite their historical situatedness, for example, in the Greco-Latin milieu, dogmatic formulations use common notions (*notions communes*) which are, ultimately, with the requisite effort, translatable into (i.e., capable of being explained or taught in) the language of all times and peoples (69). For an exposition, critique, and defense of "common sense" and the intelligibility of dogma, see Guy Mansini, "The Historicity of Dogma and Common Sense: Ambroise Gardeil, Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, Yves Congar, and the Modern Magisterium," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 18, no. 1 (2020): 111–38.

⁶⁷ When the Council of Vienne defines that the "rational and intellectual soul" is the "form of the body" (*forma corporis humani*), the Church is not defining and thereby inserting Aristotelian hylomorphism into the deposit of faith, but is defining something about our religious relationship with God: "Jesus saves the entire human and unites the entire human to God, and not simply a spiritual soul without an essential link with our body promised at the resurrection" (Congar, *La foi*, 65). Congar is appealing to the study by Michel Debièvre, "La définition du Concile de Vienne sur l'âme, 6 mai 1312," *Recherches de science religieuse* 3 (1912): 321–44.

⁶⁸ We can see here that, in addressing Günther's theology, *Dei Filius* proceeds from what is more certain for Günther to what is less. Günther does not deny the magisterium's prerogatives; he believes that the magisterium is itself guided infallibly to teach the deposit ever more accurately, but in a way that might entail abandoning a previously defined meaning. *Dei Filius* first states that the Church guards and declares the deposit (with which Günther agrees), but states that, pace Günther, such guarding and declaring involves precisely the maintenance of the same sense.

teaching, or to teach the nations *all that Christ commanded*, or to defend that faith which was “once for all delivered to the saints” (2 Thess 2:15; Matt 28: 19–20; Jude 1:3). Nothing less than the catholicity of the faith is at stake. Testifying against this radical hermeneutical conclusion is the Church’s experience of evangelization and her real, if only partial, missionary success.⁶⁹

It is true that there is no one criterion accessible to all by which the homogeneity of a development can be determined, for the solemn judgment of the magisterium is not a willful one, but one based on theological argument, historical research, and a deep-seated instinct on the part of the faithful. If this were not so, there would be no reason for theologians to debate.

The enduring sense or meaning of a dogmatic formula, even after a definition, is not always immediately apprehendable, but it is discernible with time, effort, study, reflection, and—it must be added—a consideration of the historical circumstances or challenges which give rise to and shape that study and reflection. In a word, in some difficult cases, the *meaning* of a dogma might take time to be properly distilled. What is the exact meaning of “extra ecclesiam nulla salus”? The *prima facie* or literal interpretation of the words themselves is not enough to get it. Against radical hermeneuticists, then, I would argue that identifying the enduring *meaning* or *sense* of dogma is indeed possible and, once identified, accessible to all Christians, whatever their intellectual acumen; but with them, I agree that it is not always a straightforward or intuitive process. The challenge requires effort and attentive discernment.

The challenge, then, remains: how does one address theologically contemporary questions and novel situations without altering the meaning of dogma that was defined in a bygone age? How does one incorporate or assimilate new insights into one’s theology without letting what is new change the substance of what is old?

The Permanence of Dogmatic Meaning: Examples of Its Maintenance

Development means *change*. This is precisely what the organic images of Vincent (and later of Newman) are meant to convey. The same substantial subject is not a new subject, but the same subject existing in a new way (i.e., in a grown, matured, way). This is presumably what Vincent means when he writes, “teach still the same truths which thou hast learnt, so that though thou speakest after a new fashion, what thou speakest may not be

⁶⁹ See Congar, *La foi*, 69.

new [dicas nove non dicas nova].”⁷⁰ A developed Peter does not become Paul; a developed Peter, rather, exists in a new, developed, way.

Applying this “criterion of identity”—as Reinhard Hütter calls it—to an analysis of the homogeneity of the Christian doctrinal tradition requires a sensitivity to the weight of a particular doctrine. A newer teaching cannot contradict a defined dogma because truth, once established—even in an imperfect and limited way—cannot cease to be true. The very notion of “contradiction” also indicates the seminal role of logical reasoning in the theological endeavour that seeks to establish this homogeneity within the dogmatic tradition.⁷¹ Where a discontinuity (or contradiction) is identified in undefined, non-infallible doctrine, does the need to establish homogeneity disappear? I would answer: negative. But the locus of this homogeneity has to shift to something broader and deeper than what immediately preceded the newer teaching. By the different examples below, some dogmatic, others not, I hope to show how Vincent’s “docas nove non dicas nova” can apply to both, albeit differently.

To say something new *simpliciter* amounts to abandoning the original meaning once given to a particular dogma. Replacing “transubstantiation” with “transignification,” for example, is saying something “new,” which, in this context, is a failure to maintain Vincent’s second canon. Re-defining the matrimonial bond’s “indissolubility” to denote an aspiration of the marital bond rather than an intrinsic dimension of it, would be giving the term a new meaning that contradicts the one given to it by the Church. It is clear what to avoid. But given these constraints, is Vincent’s exhortation to avoid saying something new and, instead, to simply say it in a new way, naïve and reductive? Is there any real bite or significance in saying something “in a new way”?

The simplest way of saying something (that is, teaching the faith) in

⁷⁰ Vincent, *Comm.*, XXII, Schaff ed, *Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. Second Series*. XI (Edinburgh: T&T Clark). Cf. International Theological Commission, *The Interpretation of Dogma* (1989), III.1: “In this process in history, the Church adds nothing new [*non nova*] to the Gospel, but she constantly renews [*noviter*] the newness of Christ” (vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_1989_interpretazione-dogmi_en.html).

⁷¹ Absent this appeal to theological reason, as Reinhard Hütter rightly observes, the alternative is a theological voluntarism, authoritarianism, or anti-intellectualism, separating magisterial teaching from theology (“Progress, Not Alteration of the Faith: Beyond Antiquarianism and Presentism—John Henry Newman, Vincent of Lérins, and the Criterion of Identity of the Development of Doctrine,” *Nova et Vetera* [English] 19, no. 2 [2021]: 333–91, at 3778–85, esp. 379).

a new way is to use new but equivalent expressions⁷²—perhaps less technical—to communicate a dogma whose original meaning may elude us. What does “consubstantial with the Father” or “one person in two natures” mean? Explaining—or better, *transposing* (to use Bernard Lonergan’s phrase)—the Church’s meaning from one context into another is tantamount to what a good catechist or religious instructor does: one proclaims the faith anew while maintaining the original meaning intended by the Church’s original pronouncement.

But saying something in a new way can mean saying something that enhances or lays hold of another, newer aspect or dimension of the deposit of faith while not replacing or substituting a new meaning for a defined one. This is tantamount to the traditional understanding of doctrinal development as rendering explicit that which has been implicit; that which is obscure and confused, clear and precise; that which is only probable, certain.

This way goes beyond simply using newer but equivalent expressions and places the novelty on the level of precision or depth. The obvious examples here are the Marian definitions of 1854 and 1950. They are saying something—that is, they are teaching the truth about Mary—in a new way by maintaining, shoring up, and building upon her divine maternity defined in 431.⁷³

There are, however, more complex ways of saying something in a new way. One is also uttering the same dogma in a new way by using newer philosophical insights to elaborate a dogma theologically. This is what is happening when—sticking with Mariology for the moment—John

⁷² What exactly amounts to an “equivalent expression” is not easily determined. In his dispute with Henri Bouillard, Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange argues that an equivalent term is one thing, but a different notion changes the nature of a judgment. Such a new judgment might be coherent with the previous one; it may not necessarily contradict its antecedent, but it is no longer the same judgment and, hence, in judging differently, what we come to then understand is then different (“Vérité et immutabilité du dogme,” *Angelicum* 24, no. 2 [1947]: 124–39, at 131–35). To use a new notion would be to develop a theological elaboration, which is legitimate only if it does not seek to replace the defined notion.

⁷³ The same can be said of certain interpretations of Eucharistic doctrine. “Transsignification” and “transfinalization,” when taken to exclude or replace “transubstantiation,” would violate Vincent’s second canon and so be an attempt to say something new; when taken as a theological elaboration of the consequences of substantial change in the Eucharist, these same terms can assist in communicating the truth of the Eucharist in a new, and, indeed, enhanced way by reflecting on the finality and meaning of the sacrament. For contours in which the terms must be understood in order to uphold the dogma of transubstantiation, see Paul VI’s *Mysterium Fidei* (1965).

Dadosky re-conceives the dogma of the Immaculate Conception according to Girardian categories. Mary's sanctifying grace breaks the recurrent cycles of mimetic rivalry, violence, and scapegoating. Dadosky opens up the social dimension of grace in the dogma while never abandoning, but supplementing, the dogma's meaning as defined in 1854.⁷⁴

In a similar fashion but in a different area, the Church's immutable teaching on the nature of marriage and the morally licit ways to achieve its ends are taught in a new way by John Paul II in his "Theology of the Body."⁷⁵ He is not simply using equivalent but less technical expressions, but is appropriating newer philosophical insights about, for example, language of the body, precisely in order to maintain the same sense and the same understanding or judgment of the Church. Another example might be contemporary hypotheses on how God created our first parents in part through the instrumentality of evolving species.⁷⁶ Is this not saying the same thing—maintaining the dogma of creation, including the creation of the human soul—in a new way, in a way in which, prior to Darwin, Catholic scholars never did and, indeed, never could?

Saying something in a new way, then, means not only using newer expressions, but saying something in a new context with newer developments. This kind of development exemplifies how contemporary theology has moved beyond *Dei Filius* and its scholastic drafters while maintaining its teaching on the immutability of the deposit. *Dei Filius*, while admitting authentic doctrinal progress, never quite comes to terms with historicity and the plurality of formulations that, say, Newman or Tübingen theologians acknowledged.⁷⁷ Such an acknowledgement has never been completely absent (e.g., witness the theological diversity of the medieval schools), but the diversity of theological elaboration that is recognized today is greater.

⁷⁴ John D. Dadosky, "Woman without Envy: Toward Reconceiving the Immaculate Conception," *Theological Studies* 72 (2011): 15–40.

⁷⁵ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books, 2006). See in particular the substantial introduction to the volume by Waldstein on 1–128.

⁷⁶ E.g., Nicanor Pier Giorgio Austriaco, "Defending Adam After Darwin: On the Origin of *Sapiens* as a Natural Kind," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 92, no. 2 (2018): 337–52.

⁷⁷ Guarino, "Vincent of Lérins and the Hermeneutical Question," 510. Guarino asks here, for example, whether there is not something true in Günther's "recognition that a dogmatic formula offers *aliqua veritas* [some truth]" and whether "the formula may, in fact, be only *aptissima* [fittest] for a particular age," concluding that neither admission "would necessarily militate against the realism that Franzelin is interested in defending."

What is key is that there is no contradiction between maintaining the sense and meaning of immutable dogma, on the one hand, and allowing for diverse theological elaborations of that dogma, on the other.

Puzzling or difficult cases of doctrinal development remain. These cases, unlike those we have looked at thus far, are not characterized by using different and more accessible but nevertheless equivalent terms; nor by adding precision to an already-defined dogma whose original meaning is retained; nor by deploying newer insights from reason to uphold a doctrine of faith or morals. Rather, the difficulties emerge in those cases where a particular aspect which, *prima facie*, seems to be part and parcel of traditional Catholic teaching is simply jettisoned. These cases are often called “reversals.” They constitute the opposite of the tidy, linear progress, from, say, Nicaea to Ephesus to Chalcedon, or from the *Theotokos*, to the Immaculate Conception to the Assumption.

So-called “reversals” or “dramatic” developments are easier to account for when they never involved infallible teaching or a dogmatic definition. This is how Vatican II’s teaching on religious liberty is often justified: the mere toleration of other religions and the ideal confessional state were never infallible teaching. That the doctrine of limbo no longer enjoys the unanimity it once did, but in fact has practically been cast aside,⁷⁸ is dealt with simply by pointing out that the doctrine and sense of limbo never needed to be retained because it was never defined as being a part of the deposit of faith. Something similar can be said to have happened to the doctrine of Jesus’s beatific vision.⁷⁹

Similarly, there exist doctrinal developments whose changing matter pertains to popular presentations or non-infallible theological elaborations of a given dogma such that the dogma itself, though infallibly taught, is untouched by the changes. Presentations and theological speculations about purgatory, for example, vary radically and have changed over the centuries, despite the practical ubiquity of some points for more than a millennium; but the Church has never defined anything about purgatory’s

⁷⁸ International Theological Commission, *The Hope of Salvation for Infants Who Die without Being Baptized* (2007), vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20070419_un-baptised-infants_en.html.

⁷⁹ The contemporary magisterium’s silence on the matter, including the *Catechism*’s, as well as the increasingly ecclesial toleration of theologians who deny it, seems to cause no problem because Christ’s beatific vision, though at one point practically universally held—at the very least, as *sententia communis* or, in some books, as an even higher *sententia certa*—was never defined as revealed. In a word, doctrine that has never been taught *de fide*, even if practically ubiquitous, is not subject to Vincent’s second canon.

duration, its location, or the nature of its fire (if it even has one). The defined meaning of purgatory—that souls are purified and that the Church’s prayer aids them—is untouched by these variations.⁸⁰

In making sense of these “reversals” or dramatic developments, it is theologically crucial to establish that what is being reversed or jettisoned is not infallible teaching. But to stop there seems inadequate, too easy. A mechanical process of establishing the meaning and weight of a teaching—however straightforward or difficult that might be—does little to determine whether the outcome of that reversal (the newer teaching) is an authentic *profectus* or a corrupt *permutatio* of the deposit. It is one thing to establish that limbo was only a common theological opinion, never defined; it is another to infer that the teaching of entrusting unbaptized infants to the mercy of God (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* §1261) is homogeneous with the deposit. It is one thing to establish that even long-standing authentic magisterial teaching, such as that on the relationship between Church and state, is neither dogma nor infallible; but it is another to conclude that the teaching on religious freedom (as given in *Dignitatis Humanae*) is an authentic development.

In such cases of reversals or so-called dramatic developments, establishing homogeneity requires more of a retrieval of deeper principles than the maintenance of the *idem sensus* of a teaching that immediately preceded a newer teaching. For, when an immediately antecedent teaching is dropped, one no longer has that antecedent teaching to measure the developed teaching against. In lieu of the immediately antecedent teaching (which is being left behind), other points of reference become determinative. This is where a theory of development such as Newman’s becomes crucial. His “notes of authentic development” are more versatile. The Vincentian “preservation of type” is only one note of seven.

In the case of *Dignitatis Humanae*, for example, two of Newman’s notes are particularly relevant: “power of assimilation” and “conservative action upon the past.” (This is not to say that other of his notes could not apply.) *Dignitatis Humanae* is the result of, among other factors, the Catholic doctrine’s assimilation of what Benedict XVI called the “true conquests of the Enlightenment.”⁸¹ It also shored up—or exerted conservative action

⁸⁰ Such speculations, no matter how traditional and pervasive in the tradition, do not constitute the dogma of purgatory. The relatively novel presentations of purgatory by some such as Catherine of Genoa, Newman, and Benedict XVI do not violate Vincent’s second canon precisely because they are saying the same thing (i.e., the defined dogma) in a *new way*.

⁸¹ Benedict XVI, Address to the Members of the Roman Curia at the Traditional

upon—past Christian teaching on conscience and human dignity. As Guarino points out, there was both *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento* at work here.⁸² The result is a definite discontinuity between conciliar and pre-conciliar teaching on particular points, made possible and legitimate, however, by a deeper continuity pertaining to other points, especially *de fide* teaching on Christ, the Church, and salvation.

Underlying this way of achieving continuity is a deeper instinct on the part of the faithful that—when confronted with a wide panorama of classical teaching, Gospel witnesses, and historical precedents and customs—can detect the congruity of a newer teaching with the Christian faith. In Newman's theory, the primary point of reference for contemporary developments is not an immediate doctrinal antecedent, but the Christian idea, whose numerous "aspects" are brought to bear on newer questions.⁸³

In addition to these non-infallible reversals stand those teachings that have been unambiguously taught by the ordinary magisterium and on occasions reiterated extraordinarily, but whose sense, at least *prima facie*, seems to have changed drastically. The dogmatic axiom "*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*" is a perfect example. The patristic understanding of the axiom, culminating in the fifteenth-century Florentine decree, says nothing about invincible ignorance or the possibility that one can be saved without an explicit intention to be baptized. By the nineteenth century, however, Pius IX is happy to declare that all those invincibly ignorant of the Catholic religion, but who seek the truth and follow the natural law, can be saved.⁸⁴ The example brings to the fore an issue of hermeneutics: the theologian, using the best tools available to him or her, both historical and theological, must discern which appended judgments are truly corollaries of the dogma—that is, which are intrinsic or essential to the dogma—and which ones only "accompany" the dogma coincidentally, as it were, for example, by being simply assumptions held by those who professed the dogma, assumptions which are extrinsic to, or are not essential components of, the dogma.⁸⁵

Exchange of Christmas Greetings, December 22, 2006 (see the "speeches" section of Benedict's page on the Vatican website)

⁸² Guarino's treatment is brief but very *ad rem*. See Guarino, *Disputed Teachings of Vatican II*, 190–203, esp. 193–94.

⁸³ I want to thank Lewis Ayers for his helpful comments on this after the symposium.

⁸⁴ Such a line is simply reiterated in *Lumen Gentium* §14.

⁸⁵ E.g., such hermeneutical discernment becomes necessary with respect to Aristotelian categories of substance and accident with respect transubstantiation as defined by Lateran IV and reiterated at Trent.

In this case, the practical judgment that was attached to the axiom throughout antiquity—namely, that all who found themselves outside the Church were outside of it in a culpable way and therefore deserved damnation—has been dispensed with. Consequently, dispensed with is also the judgment that one group or another (e.g., Jews or heathens) cannot be saved. In this way, the Catholic theological tradition has slowly distilled the essence of the axiom, or the dogmatic meaning of the axiom which must ever be maintained: God provides the means of salvation only to the Catholic Church and has commissioned only this Church to carry out his saving work.⁸⁶ When, then, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith condemned *de iure* soteriological pluralism, or theories about parallel paths of salvation, it did so not because it denied that non-Christians can be saved or because it somehow regressed from the achievement of Vatican II's teaching on this matter, but because such pluralistic or parallel soterologies violate Vincent's second canon; the distilled and authentic meaning of "extra ecclesiam nulla salus" is not maintained in these newer theories.

What cases like *Dignitatis Humanae* and "extra ecclesiam nulla salus" have in common is that fulfilment of Vincent's second canon involves the abandonment of certain judgments. Some of these had been taught explicitly (e.g., particular points in the papal magisteriums of Pius IX and Leo XIII). Others had been left more or less implied (e.g., that those who find themselves outside the Church are outside of it *culpably*). At first glance, it may seem odd to suggest that a continuity of the "same meaning" is even relevant in this dynamic of "continuity and discontinuity at different levels." Benedict XVI comments that these abandoned judgments are contingent in nature. "The Church's decisions on contingent matters—for example, certain practical forms of liberalism or a free interpretation of the Bible—should necessarily be contingent themselves, precisely because they refer to a specific reality that is changeable in itself."⁸⁷ With this crucial observation, one is in a better position to specify Vincent's second canon: the *sense* that is to be ever-maintained is the sense that pertains to immutable aspects of revelation which, in turn, have as their ultimate principle God's own immutability. This is precisely what the Hungarian primate of Esztergom, János Simor, points out in his *relatio*: "To keep and preserve the deposit of faith, . . . that is the principle task and duty of the

⁸⁶ For a more detailed analysis, see Andrew Meszaros, "Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus: Lessons for Doctrinal Development Theory in Catholic Theology," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 24, no. 1 (2022): 100–121.

⁸⁷ Benedict XVI, Address to the Roman Curia at the Traditional Exchange of Christmas Greetings, December 22, 2005 (English from Vatican website).

Church. Objects of discipline can change according to the circumstances of the times, things, and people; but faith itself is immutable just as God is immutable, from whom it proceeds.”⁸⁸

Here we arrive at the threshold of a reflection on the relationship between metaphysics and (the development of) doctrine. “The truth of an affirmation does not consist in its conformity with points of human knowledge in every epoque; it consists in its conformity with the reality of things.”⁸⁹ If the reality does not vary, then the judgment conforming to that reality cannot vary. And the Church’s gift of sharing in God’s own infallibility in her teaching means that her judgments of revealed reality cannot be in error and, therefore, are irreformable. Bernard Lonergan states:

What is true, is permanent: the meaning it possessed in its own context can never be denied truthfully.... One is denying divine transcendence if one fancies man has at his disposal the evidence that would enable him to substitute some other meaning for the meaning that has been revealed.⁹⁰

The immutability of divine revelation (and the dogma that communicates it) supposes, then, that sacred teaching conforms to an unchanging reality, whether it is God’s nature itself or the mode of the Incarnation defined by Ephesus. It is an immutable God who speaks to us his eternal decrees (see ch. 2 of *Dei Filius*).

Conclusion

In his history of Vatican I, which engages most with papal primacy and infallibility, the Jesuit historian John W. O’Malley acknowledges that *Dei Filius* fulfilled an important purpose by asserting “a few basic truths that served the church as solid guidelines in a shifting reality” and that the iteration of these truths was “badly needed in a world that many religious people believed was in danger of going spiritually barren.”⁹¹ Among these

⁸⁸ Granderath, *Acta et decreta*, cols. 80–88 (at col. 81): “Depositum enim fidei illibatum custodire atque conservare, ita ut ex eodem nec iota unum, nec apex unus aut pereat aut vero immutetur, hoc est praecipuum Ecclesiae munus et officium. Disciplinary obiecta pro temporum, rerum et personarum circumstantiis mutari possunt; fides vero ipsa immutabilis est sicut immutabilis est Deus, a quo procedit” (trans. mine).

⁸⁹ Vacant, *Études*, 2:286.

⁹⁰ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 323.

⁹¹ John O’Malley, *Vatican I: The Council and the Making of the Ultramontane Church*

he includes (2) the existence of God and his knowability; (2) that faith and reason are compatible and that faith itself is not unreasonable; and finally, (3) that faith opens up to us a realm that transcends our human understanding. Conspicuously absent from this list is the last paragraph on the immutability and progress of dogma. There is, rather, a tacit disapproval of the teaching that our understanding of dogma cannot change “under the pretext of a more profound understanding.”⁹² The document’s limitations arise from what he calls the

style of thinking that rests upon abstract, ahistorical arguments, in which Christian truths stand above and apart from the historical contexts in which they were formulated and above and apart from the centuries through which they travelled.⁹³

The reason why assessments such as this are so familiar to us is because there is some truth to it: one of the most prominent characteristics of the *nouvelle théologie* was an attention to the historical and therefore contingent factors that contributed to doctrinal judgments and formulations. In a similar vein, Newman’s *Essay on Development* was novel in part because the coherent development of Catholicism was being defended not primarily by witnesses to its supernatural origins, but by recognizing it as a historical “idea” like so many others that take time to develop. Indeed, Newman and the *nouvelle théologie* recognized that Christian truths—understood as the body of doctrine which Christians believe—do not “stand above and apart” from history. But they can and must be distinguished from it, for they lay hold of realities that transcend history.

The entire exercise of trying to make sense of how God reveals himself to us in history makes sense only if Vincent’s second canon—“canonized,” as it were, by *Dei Filius*—is still perennially valid. Because God the Son is hidden but recognizable in the flesh, so can divine truth be hidden though recognized in history.

Without this capacity to identify enduring truth, doctrinal development no longer becomes an ever-more profound understanding of the deposit, but a succession of different propositions which express the Church’s historico-contextual religious experiences. But if that is the case, one is no

(Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2018), 177–78.

⁹² O’Malley refers to this point twice on 171 and 177 of *Vatican I*. The first reference is followed by “the teaching of *Dei Filius* reflected much of what they had learned in their seminary days.”

⁹³ O’Malley, *Vatican I*, 177.

longer talking about doctrinal development. As noted by Vincent and the last paragraph of *Dei Filius*, nothing less than the supernatural character of Christianity is at stake.

The teaching of *Dei Filius* on dogmatic development both affirms dogmatic progress and defines its limits. Because it is silent as to the precise manner of this progress, theologians are at liberty to investigate explanations and theorize about this progress within the limits *Dei Filius* sets out with St. Vincent. But because those limits are situated squarely within the immutable God who reveals, the teaching of *Dei Filius* cannot be pitted against the more dynamic §8 of *Dei Verbum*, much less dismissed as a specimen of nineteenth-century intransigence. It is no less severe or restrictive than what the fathers at Vatican II taught in *Gaudium et Spes*:

The Church also maintains that beneath all changes there are many realities which do not change and which have their ultimate foundation in Christ, Who is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever.

N.V.