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“Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth”:
Discerning Orthodoxy in the Early Church

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ABSTRACT

During the first four Ecumenical Councils, the Church had to face a number of controversies that threatened the fundamentals of its very own existence. These controversies were primarily of a Christological and Trinitarian nature. Consequently, these controversies were formally settled through the promulgation of doctrine, especially in the form of creedal formulas and anathemas. Notwithstanding this, certain heterodox teaching continued to persist in the Church due to various circumstances, primarily of a political nature.

Being of such a fundamental nature, these doctrines address the very heart of the Church's message, which is that of Divine Revelation, or the Encounter of the Divine with humanity. Such Revelation is communicated within the Church through the Sacred Scriptures and Tradition as mediated and interpreted through the Magisterium as the teaching office of the Church.

Along the years, various theologians have attempted to determine the orthodoxy of such doctrines, or lack of it, by identifying various characteristics. Notwithstanding their methodological differences, there is a universal consensus that orthodoxy manifests itself as an organic and dynamic reality as the Church engages with an ever-changing world. While it encapsulates a past event, it points towards the eschatological *Parousia*.

Keywords: Councils, Orthodoxy, Scriptures, Tradition, Magisterium.

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Introduction

This work is primarily of an ecclesiological nature. It seeks to identify the various factors that influenced the early Church in declaring certain fundamental teachings as being true and orthodox whilst others as being mistaken and heretical. Notwithstanding this ecclesiological emphasis, this work borrows its title from a Scriptural verse, namely from the second letter to Timothy. A brief exegesis of this verse is being provided as way of introduction, primarily to set the theological boundaries of this work within the scriptural understanding of its title.

The Greek original of the phrase taken from the Scriptures is “ὀρθοδομοῦντα τὸν λόγον τῆς ἀληθείας” (transcribed as *orthotomounta ton logon tēs alētheias*). It is part of the fifteenth verse of the second chapter of the above-mentioned letter (2 Tim 2: 15b). Whereas there is a general agreement that the translation into English of “τὸν λόγον τῆς ἀληθείας” is “the word of truth”, the translation of “ὀρθοδομοῦντα” is more diverse. A grammatical analysis of this verb shows that it can be classified as a “... Present Participle Active – Accusative Masculine Singular.”¹ According to Luke Timothy Johnson, “the participle *orthotomounta* is unattested in this construction elsewhere [in the Bible]. It is derived from *orthos*- (rightly/correctly) and the verb *tomein/temnein* (cut).”² Hence, according to Johnson the literal meaning of this verb is “cutting straight”, suggesting an act of surgery where Timothy is exhorted to ensure that the word of truth is free from any erroneous teaching that is like a gangrene to the body.³ The action of “cutting

1. “Text Analysis ‘2 Timothy 2:15’,” Bible Hub, accessed July 17, 2019, https://biblehub.com/text/2_timothy/2-15.htm.

2. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy* (New York: The Anchor Bible, Doubleday, 2001), 385.

3. Ibid.

straight” can be applied to other metaphors besides the surgical one, such as that of cutting a straight path through a maze of confused rubble, referring to the myriad of confusing teachings that a particular Christian community was experiencing especially on the raising from the dead. Whilst agreeing with this literal translation, Anthony Tyrell Hanson asserts that “such recourse to various cutting activities is unnecessary.”⁴ He says that similar to other terms, in *koinè* Greek, *orthotomein* changed its meaning from “to cut rightly” to simply “to do rightly.”⁵ Hanson’s opinion is however contested by those holding to the view that Timothy is not being encouraged or pushed to live rightly or do things rightly, but to cut straight paths through confusing doctrines for the Christians to have a more stable teaching available for them to live by. His role as the leader of his Christian community was primarily that of putting them on the path of the true doctrine.

As mentioned above, the translation of this particular term varies across various English versions of the Bible. Some versions prefer to adopt a more literal translation of the term; whereas others prefer a more liberal translation that fits better the general context and contemporary parlance.

This work chose for the title of this dissertation the literal translation, “rightly dividing”. It is inspired by an article in the international Catholic news weekly, *The Tablet*.⁶ This term is found in a number of English versions of the Bible, including the renowned King James Bible in its various editions, the Jubilee Bible 2000, the Webster’s Bible and

4. Anthony Tyrrell Hanson, *The Pastoral Epistles* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1982), 134.

5. *Ibid.*

6. John Chryssavgis, “The case for Constantinople,” *The Tablet*, 24 October 2018, accessed October 30, 2018, <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/features/2/14755/the-case-for-constantinople>.

Young's Literal Translation.⁷ Other literal translations include Darby's Bible translation of "cutting in a straight line". A less literal translation preferred by other versions is "rightly handling"⁸. The most popular Bible edition which adopted this translation was the English Standard Version and later the New Standard Version. The Douay-Rheims Bible also uses this translation. Other translations include "correctly handles" (New International Version), "correctly explains" (New Living Translation), "correctly teaching" (Holman Christian Standard Bible), "teaching (the message of truth) accurately" (NET Bible) and "straightforward dealing" (Weymouth New Testament).⁹ Johnson, on the other hand prefers "accurately delineate."¹⁰ Notwithstanding these various translations, similar to the Greek original, all versions imply that in order to keep the integrity of the faith as the word of truth, one needs to take a positive action. Complacency and inactivity go totally against the Christian ethic of protecting the true faith.

In order to serve its purpose this exegetic exercise needs however to go beyond the strict morphological analysis of the term and try to decipher its place within the wider literary and pastoral context in which it is situated. It is only then that the force of its true meaning, as intended by its New Testament author, could be best understood.

The Second Letter to Timothy forms part of a trilogy of letters attributed to the Apostle Paul called the "Pastoral Epistles". Besides the Second Letter to Timothy, this trilogy is comprised of the First Letter to Timothy and the Letter to Titus. However, unlike the

7. "Multilingual '2 Timothy 2:15'," Bible Hub, accessed July 19, 2019, https://biblehub.com/multi/2_timothy/2-15.htm.

8. Hanson, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 134.

9. "Multilingual '2 Timothy 2:15'."

10. Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 385.

other letters of a Pauline authorship, these three letters are addressed to individuals and have a particular content and style.¹¹ The main concern of these letters are the long-term doctrinal stability and the social standing of the fledging Christian communities under the care of the intended recipient, either Timothy or Titus. In these epistles, the long-term doctrinal stability entails a two-pronged approach. Firstly, it needs to confront false teachers by directly preaching the right doctrine rather than engaging in slander and useless debates. Secondly, it calls for exemplary behaviour from all members of the community by keeping steadfast in their faith. Potential officeholders (bishops, elders and deacons) should ensure that they enjoy a good reputation.¹² In fact, in the first part of this verse (15a), the author instructs the original recipient of his letter that, as a leader of a Christian community, he should “present (παραστήσαι) yourself as a proven workman with no reason for shame (ἀνεπαίσχυντον)”. As will be argued later on, the credibility enjoyed by the Council Fathers, reinforced with their deep scriptural, theological and philosophical knowledge and their courage to speak openly and without shame (what in Greek is known as παρρησία) was one of the determining factors contributing to their teachings being declared as orthodox. Besides being thoroughly Pauline (since it is also found in other letters attributed to Paul) this “thought (here) is pervasive in ancient moral teaching: unless character is tested and proved, it cannot be considered fully formed.”¹³ Elsewhere in the same epistle, the author elaborates about how the Christian leader should conduct himself in “rightly dividing the word of truth”.

11. Benjamin Fiore, *The Pastoral Epistles: First Timothy, Second Timothy and Titus* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2007), 5.

12. Ibid.

13. Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 384.

“He should teach with sincerity and genuineness (1:5, 1:13, 2:22), he should avoid cravings for novelty and stay steady (2:22, 3:14) and sober in every respect (4:5); he should aim at righteousness, faith, love and peace (2:22), he should show kindness and forbearance (2:24), and he should hope for the conversion even of those who have fallen into the trap of the devil (2:25-26).”¹⁴

The concept of being “proven” also implies a process which entails a certain longevity. It is by going through a number of critical situations across a considerable stretch of time that one’s character is tested and eventually proven. The first letter of Peter speaks about “the proven genuineness of your faith” and compares it with the process of gold going through fire to be purified (1 Pt 1: 7). The author of the second letter to Timothy speaks of endurance as a way of proving oneself. In this epistle, one finds three forms of endurances: that coming from outside (from non-believers), that caused from within by fellow believers who teach wrongly and deceive others and that caused by sheer indifference from knowing the word of truth.¹⁵ Taken from a communitarian perspective, one way of ascertaining the veracity of a particular article of faith is by seeing whether it has stood credence over a long period of time within various Christian communities. Tradition is thus another critical factor in determining a “proven” faith.

This particular verse was also commented upon by a number of early theologians including Church Fathers. In his *Letter against Celsus*, Origen comments on the first part of the verse (15a), namely on “present yourself as a proven worker”. The second part of the verse (15b) “rightly handing the Word of Truth” was commented upon by various early theologians including John Chrysostom (*Homilies on 2 Timothy 5*), Theodore of Mopsuestia (*Commentary on 2 Timothy*), Theodoret of Cyr (*Interpretation of the Second Letter to Timothy*), Ambrosiaster (*Commentary on the Second Letter to Timothy*) and

14. Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 326.

15. Ibid.

Pelagius (*Pelagius's Commentary on the Second Letter to Timothy*).¹⁶ This shows that early theologians indulged into exegetical biblical works, and their status within the early Christian community meant that they were not only a reference point with respect to the content of their theological treatises but also for their methodology in discerning true faith. Such a methodology which was rooted and immersed in Scriptures was indeed critical in cutting straight paths through confused and convoluted different teachings. Their writings have for long been considered as an intrinsic part of the deposit of faith together with the Holy Scriptures, tradition and magisterium.

Inevitably, this letter to Timothy, like all the other epistles, was written with a particular objective in mind and in a particular historical and political milieu - both of an ecclesiastical and a wider geo-political nature. After making a number of historical observations, Fiore concludes that the three Pastoral Epistles were written "around 80-90 C.E., between Paul's death in the mid-60's and the mid-nineties (the date of *1 Clement*) and the early 100's when Ignatius flourished and was martyred."¹⁷ From the contents of this letter, it is clear that the ecclesiastical landscape of this particular Christian community to whom Timothy belonged was fraught with persons preaching erroneous teachings. Two such persons are mentioned, namely Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Tim 2: 17b-18). Hanson concludes that these were "genuine opponents of Paul."¹⁸ Reference to Paul's opponents has led other authors to concur with the hypothesis that the Second Letter to Timothy, together with the other Pastoral Letters (1 Timothy and Titus), were written after Paul's martyrdom since they tend to refer to

16. Peter Gorday, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Colossians, 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 249.

17. Fiore, *The Pastoral Epistles: First Timothy, Second Timothy and Titus*, 20.

18. Hanson, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 135.

persons who embraced Gnostic teachings. While certain authors maintain that these three letters contain genuine fragments from Paul's letters, the most probable dating of the three letters is somewhere between 80 and 150 C.E., although "a time much before 100 CE seems unlikely."¹⁹ In this context, the use of the Apostle Paul's name as a pseudonym is not a particular problem since "these letters are testimony to the faith of the young church and among the first attempts to adapt the Pauline message in the acknowledgment that the particularities of Paul's day no longer apply."²⁰

Like similar Christian communities of the time, Timothy's Christian community was living within a predominantly pagan (i.e. non-Christian) context and therefore their living according to a clear set of beliefs which stood the test of time also had a kerygmatic function by modelling their "ideal belief and behaviour to those outside the community and thereby win their esteem for the community's members and its belief system."²¹ As will be seen later on in this work, both internal ecclesiastical politics and the wider political realities played a very significant role in the determination of establishing a teaching's orthodoxy or lack of it.

The aim of the first chapter of this work is twofold. First, it shall contextualise the councils in their particular socio-political context. Secondly, it shall provide a presentation of the doctrinal material discussed during the first four ecumenical councils that was mainly either of a Christological or a Trinitarian nature. Consequently, this work will be also reviewing the predominant heresies which, generally speaking, served

19. "Issues surrounding the authorship and dating of The Pastoral Epistles," *Pastorals.pdf*, accessed March 24, 2020, <http://otagosh.tripod.com/pastorals.pdf>.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Fiore, *The Pastoral Epistles: First Timothy, Second Timothy and Titus*, 6.

as the main motivator that lead councils to define and solemnly declare the Church's orthodox doctrine concerning its main tenets of faith.

In the second chapter, the sources from which doctrine originates, flows and is interpreted are identified and discussed in the light of *Dei Verbum*, the dogmatic constitution of the Second Vatican Council. The main concepts discussed in this chapter are those of Divine Revelation, Sacred Scriptures, Tradition and the Magisterium. It shall be argued that in spite that these concepts could be analysed separately, from a doctrinal perspective they are intimately and organically related.

The hypothesis employed in the third chapter of this dissertation is that it is not only a solitary characteristic that is in play in constituting a particular teaching as being orthodox but rather a dynamic interaction of a combination of these sources or factors. This is done by comparing and contrasting conceptual frameworks of two theologians, John Henry Newman and Edward Schillebeeckx, who lived in different eras and who employed different methodologies to their theological thought about the development of orthodox doctrine. It is argued that notwithstanding differences between these two theological frameworks, a certain convergence is found in their vision of what constitutes orthodoxy in Christian doctrine.

Chapter One

Christological and Trinitarian Controversies of the First Four Ecumenical Councils

1.0 Introduction

Coming to know the real identity of Jesus has been of fundamental importance for the early Christian Church, especially in the first five centuries of its existence. Peter's reply to Jesus's question "Who do you say I am?" that "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Mt 16: 15-16) manifested to the early Christians that Jesus' identity is intimately bound to his soteriological mission. Peter's confession attributes to Jesus two titles that are heavily laden with biblical overtones: that of "Messiah" and that of "Son of God". The Messiah, or the Anointed, had been long promised to the Jewish people as the ultimate liberator who would have freed them from all their oppressors, and consequently, they would have been able to freely worship God in the Temple. The term "Son of the living God" was more problematic since the term "son of God" had been used in a myriad of contexts in the Jewish scriptures and not necessarily having a divine significance.

As the early Church started to evolve, first within a Jewish context, and later in the more cosmopolitan milieu of classical Greece and the Roman Empire, it sought to articulate the basic tenets of what it stood for, with the identity of its Founder being the most pressing of all. Basic questions about the messianic nature of Jesus' mission and the nature of his sonship to God gave rise to different speculations. Whereas there was a consensus on Jesus' identity as the one anointed by God who died on a cross to save not only the Jewish people but also all who believed in him, his divine status was less clear.

Although the Gospels did attribute divine properties along with human ones to Jesus, they did not attempt to explain their co-existence. A possible reason for this lack of explanation was that at the time of the writing of the Gospels, the Church's understanding and articulation in this regard were still very limited. The relationship between the *Logos*, which has been always with the Father, and the incarnate Jesus Christ had not yet fully evolved.

Nevertheless, as the early Christian Community started to grow and disperse outside the Jewish geographical, cultural and religious confines, the need to address certain foundational issues became more urgent, both for doctrinal and apologetic reasons.

One of the earliest controversies that rose in the fledging Church was about the relationship of Christ to God the Father. Was Jesus equally divine to God or was he a subordinate demi-god? How did Jesus come into being and what is his nature? Was he created by God or was he always with God as His *Logos*? If Jesus was divine of sorts, what has happened of his divinity when he became man? Was it suspended, hidden or accommodated within his humanity? If Jesus was divine, how was it possible that he suffered and died on a Cross? Was his suffering and death therefore simply a charade or a make-believe? The early Church attempted to answer these questions by formulating a number of professions of faith, called "creed" (from the Latin *credo*) or *σύμβολον* in Greek that conveys a common statement. These professions of faith were formulated simultaneously by various Christian communities in the first centuries, through which they articulated their faith in God the Father, in Jesus as Saviour and in the Holy Spirit as Paraclete; however it was only in the Nicene Creed (325) where the

divine and human natures of Christ were clearly spelt out. Notwithstanding this, Christological controversies persisted even long after the promulgation of this Creed.

During the early times of the Church when theological speculation on the soteriological relationship between Jesus' divinity and humanity was rife, Christians took sides with conflicting theological versions that all enjoyed some kind of support, even among bishops and emperors alike. The divisions caused by such controversies did not stop with the learned but also seeped among the "common" believers, even taking the form of partisan politics! Both Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus have described the strife that such controversies caused among Christians, with the latter saying that "[e]ven women in the drawing-room, that sanctuary of innocence, are assailed, and the flower of modesty despoiled by this rushing into controversy."¹

However, eventually the hierarchical Church realised that such widely diverse explanations were harming the unity of the Christian community and therefore it needed to enter into a process of discernment, articulation, and the promulgation of a particular position as its definitive doctrine. Since from time to time, these Christological controversies re-emerged with different variations, the Church felt the need to go through this deliberative process a number of times. This means that before the Church officially pronounced itself, these controversies were an integral part of the Church's evolving search for the right teaching.² A side within a controversy would eventually be

1. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orations XVII.2*, in Jaroslav Pelikan, "Between Ecumenical Councils: The Orthodoxy of the Body of the Faithful," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 48 (2013): 95.

2. Notwithstanding this apparent tolerant approach towards different, and sometimes conflicting, beliefs in the pre-Nicaean Church, the early Church combatted heresy assiduously. The first person who has been known to be declared as a heretic was Marcion of Pontus (or Sinope) who lived in the second century (85-160 A.D.) and who preached that the god who sent Jesus in the world was a higher deity than the god of the Old Testament. He was declared a heretic in 144 A.D.

considered as heretic if its teaching constituted dissent from the explanation formally declared by the Church as being “orthodox”.

At a later period, once the identity of Christ in relation to God the Father was somewhat established – even though Christological controversies persisted - the attention of the early Church turned on the nature of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, to what had happened in the Christological controversies, different movements holding different Trinitarian views arose. Being equally of a fundamental nature to the Christological standpoint, eventually the Church also felt the need of defining as doctrine the relationship of the Holy Spirit with the rest of the Trinity.

The method that the Church eventually adopted to engage in this process was called a “council” (from the Latin *concilium*) or a “synod” (from the Greek *σύνδοδος*)³ which consisted in the gathering of a number of bishops and other senior Church and state dignitaries who together deliberated on particular doctrinal, liturgical or disciplinary issues. There were two types of such gatherings. Those called “particular” and those called “ecumenical”. Whereas the former generally used to be a relatively small gathering of a group of bishops who were coming from nearby dioceses to discuss issues related to their region, the latter was considered to represent the universal Church and generally discussed issues of a more universal interest.⁴ Christological and Trinitarian controversies in the early Church were addressed both in particular and ecumenical councils.

3. Literally, “going the same road together.”

4. Charles Munier, “Council,” in *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, Vol. 1, ed. Angelo Di Berardino, trans. Adrian Walford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 204.

Notwithstanding this typological distinction, equating “ecumenical” with “universal” needs to be done with caution. Although literally “οικουμένη” means “the inhabited world”, in reality it referred to the realm of the Roman Empire. More specifically, the first ecumenical councils were all held in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire and were primarily attended by bishops belonging to the Eastern churches which, geographically, made part of the Byzantine Empire. This accounts to the fact that the documents produced by these councils were in Greek. Furthermore, the ecumenical status of these councils was generally awarded retrospectively, as a recognition of the universal relevance that the teaching emanating from such a council had. For example, the (first) Council of Constantinople of 381 “was elevated to ecumenical significance in the Definition of the Council of Chalcedon (of 451).”⁵ This was done in order to affirm this Chalcedonian definition as part of the deposit of faith of the universal Church. The Catholic Church recognises 21 of its councils as being “ecumenical”. The Orthodox Church recognises only the first seven of these councils to be such, being those which took place before the Great Schism of 1054.

This work shall now look at the first four of these ecumenical councils, namely those of Nicaea (325), the First Council of Constantinople (381), the Council of Ephesus (431) and the Council of Chalcedon (451). Typically these councils were convoked to discuss major doctrinal controversies which, at the time, were causing serious divisions in the Church and it was both in the Church’s and the Roman Empire’s interest to settle since they were threatening their respective unity and stability. Whereas in actual fact these controversies lingered on for a number of decades after the conclusion of the respective

5. Richard Price, “East and West at the Ecumenical Councils,” accessed February, 14, 2020, https://www.academia.edu/36337866/East_and_West_at_the_Ecumenical_Councils.

ecumenical council invoked to address them, for the sake of this work they shall be dealt with to the point of the council's declaration on each of these controversies, hence when the orthodox position was defined.

1.1 The Council of Nicaea and Arianism

The first council considered to be “ecumenical” was that held at Nicaea in 325. This council was preceded by a number of councils that were considered to be of a local nature. The circumstances leading to the convocation of this council were primarily political. It was convoked by Emperor Constantine, whose primary aim was to settle the divisions that existed among the eastern bishops as a consequence of the teaching of an Alexandrian priest named Arius about the nature of Christ. These teachings had gained certain support in the East outside Egypt, where he has already been condemned by his bishop in Alexandria.⁶ This condemnation was confirmed during the local synod of Antioch of 324, which was mainly attended by around a hundred of bishops from Egypt and modern-day Libya.⁷

When convoking the Council, Constantine's intentions were clearly political rather than doctrinal since he considered this doctrinal division as seriously threatening the integrity of the newly united Roman Empire following his victory over Licinius, the eastern Emperor, in 324. In fact, earlier, Constantine had already attempted to mediate this controversy through his envoy Ossius of Cordova. Following the failure of this mediation, Constantine convoked a council to meet at Nicaea in Asia Minor in spring of

6. Manlio Simonetti, “Arius-Arians-Arianism,” in *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, Vol. 1, ed. Angelo Di Berardino, trans. Adrian Walford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 76.

7. Charles Kannengiesser, “Nicaea,” in *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, Vol. 2, ed. Angelo Di Berardino, trans. Adrian Walford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 595.

325 with the aim that the conciliar Fathers issue a formula of faith which was convenient for all present. This council had two items on its agenda: the Arian controversy and setting a date for Easter. Due to its doctrinal interest, this work will be focusing on the first item. Before discussing the Council's reaction to the Arian controversy, a brief account of this controversy will be provided.

The central theological issue at Nicaea was "the status of the Word and His relation to the Godhead."⁸ Arius' position departed from the premise of affirming God as being absolutely unique, transcendent and the unoriginated source (*αγέννητος αρχή*) of all reality. By implication, He is indivisible and therefore His divine substance (*ουσία*) cannot be shared or communicated. Should His divine substance be shared with another being, then this would result in the Godhead being both divisible and changing, which is inconceivable. Since God's divine substance cannot be communicated, everything that came to existence is in effect the result of His *ex-nihilo* act of creation.

From Arius' position described above, four Christological statements followed. Firstly, the Son is a creature (*κτίσμα* or *ποίημα*) who was created out of nothing by God the Father. This means that for Arius, the principle of the Son's "generation" by the Father was equivalent to "be made". Whilst admitting that Christ is the perfect creature, he is still a creature and therefore belongs to the contingent order. Secondly, being a creature the Son must have had a beginning. Whilst agreeing that the Son was born outside time, however before His generation He did not exist. This position is crystallised in the Arian slogan "There was [a time] when He was not." The orthodox belief that the Son is co-eternal with the Father, for Arius, would have led to the

8. John Norman Davidson Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1968), 223.

erroneous position that there are “two self-existent principles”, hence bringing the downfall of monotheism. Thirdly, Arius held that the Son has no communion or direct knowledge of the Father. Notwithstanding the fact that the Son is God’s Word, ontologically He is totally separate from God. Whilst participating in God’s Word and Wisdom, the Son cannot understand fully the ineffable Father. His knowledge is proportional to His capacity. Lastly, the Son was subject to change and had a sinning nature. It was only through God’s grace and providence that he resisted temptation and remained firm in His virtuous resolution. Calling the Son as “God” or “Son of God” were only honorary titles. As regards the Holy Triad, Arius’ position was that they are ontologically different beings, not sharing in their substance or even nature.⁹

The collective response to Arius’ teaching by the conciliar Fathers gathered at the Council of Nicaea was the formulation of the Nicene Creed. The formulation of professions of faith was a common practice, and as has already been mentioned above, by the time of the Council of Nicaea, a number of these professions were already been produced throughout the Church. However, “[t]he polemical originality of the “faith of N[icaea]” lies in these words: “from the substance of the Father” and “true God from true God, generated, not created, consubstantial with the Father.”¹⁰ The Nicene Creed was therefore essentially anti-Arian in declaring that the Son shares from the same divine substance as the Father and therefore He is a true God and that while He was generated, He was not created. The anathema by which this profession of faith concluded leaves little doubt that this was being solemnly declared as part of the Church’s deposit of faith and consequently was to be believed by all. In spite of an initial

9. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 227-229.

10. Kannenglessner, “Nicea”, 595.

hesitancy among the majority of the conciliar fathers to accept this formula, in the end only Arius and two supporting bishops refused to accept it. Although with the Council of Nicaea, the Church did not necessarily see the end of the Arian heresy, this ecumenical council was instrumental in defining such a fundamental piece of doctrine.

In the final analysis, the Council of Nicaea

“imposed not only the condemnation of the main propositions of Arius but also a profession of faith which, affirming the Son homoousios with the Father (= of his own substance, consubstantial); in the eyes of the Origenians this threatened to absorb the person of the Son in that of the Father as proposed by radical monarchism.”¹¹

This might have been one of the reasons why the Nicene Creed was not immediately acknowledged and adopted by the universal Church as anticipated by the conciliar Fathers.

1.2 The First Council of Constantinople and the Pneumatomachians

The First Council of Constantinople, which later came to be recognised as the Church's second ecumenical council, was convoked by Emperor Theodosius I. Similarly, to his predecessor Constantine, he convoked this council following a military victory, this time against the Goths, as an attempt of consolidating the unity of the empire. On 28th February 380 he promulgated an edict entitled *De fide catholica*, through which he imposed the Nicene profession of faith on all of his subjects. The convocation of the First Council of Constantinople followed a few months later in late 380 or early 381, addressed exclusively to the bishops of the Eastern Empire. This council was

11. Manlio Simonetti and Emanuela Prinzivalli, *Storia della letteratura Cristiana antica* (Casale Monferrato: Edizione Piemme, 1999), 240. My translation from the original Italian text: “impose non soltanto la condanna delle principali proposizioni di Ario ma anche una professione di fede che, affermano il Figlio homoousios col Padre (= della sua stessa sostanza, consustanziale) agli occhi degli origeniani minacciava di assorbire la persona del Figlio in quella del Padre alla maniera del monarchismo radicale.”

inaugurated at the imperial palace in May and was concluded in July 381.¹² Around 150 bishops attended, belonging to different factions primarily based on their theological leaning with respect to some Christological or Trinitarian controversy. This council was presided by Meletius, an Antiochene bishop, who led a delegation of around 71 bishops from the entire Eastern region. The Alexandrians were not present at the inauguration but joined the council later. The emperor also invited a group of 36 bishops, known as “Macedonian” bishops. Bishops of notable importance who were present included the Cappadocian bishops Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa and Cyril of Jerusalem. These three bishops, together with Athanasius of Alexandria (+373) and the Cappadocian Basil (+379), were among the protagonists in the earlier development of the theological thought - prior to the Council - about the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Paulinus of Antioch chose not to attend.¹³

Whilst this council has discussed certain organisational matters (such as establishing the bishop of Constantinople as having primacy in honour after that of Rome) and also disciplinary measures (such as the annulment of the episcopal ordination of Maximus the Cynic), this council’s doctrinal thrust was twofold.

In its first canon, the council affirms the authority of the Council of Nicaea and anathematizes every heresy. Specifically it mentions the following heresies: “that of the Eunomians, or the Anomians, that of the Arians, or Eudoxians, that of the Semi-Arians, or Pneumatomachians, that of the Sabellians, that of the Marcellians, that of the

12. Charles Kannengiesser, “Constantinople,” in *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, Vol. 1, ed. Angelo Di Berardino, trans. Adrian Walford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 196.

13. Kannengiesser, “Constantinople.”

Photinians, and that of the Apollinarians.”¹⁴ Some of these heresies, such as Arianism, were already condemned during the Council of Nicaea but apparently, they continued to persist under some form or another. Other heresies such as Apollinarianism and that advocated by the Pneumatomachians were relatively recent, although they may have already been condemned in some local synod or by individual bishops in diocese where such heresies were stronger.

The second significant doctrinal development that happened at the Council of Constantinople was the elaboration of the Trinitarian doctrine as defined in the Nicene Creed, in particular about the Holy Spirit. The first clear evidence of this creed however, became apparent in the canons of the council of Chalcedon of 451, more than seventy years after the conclusion of the Council after which it is named.¹⁵

Following the inauguration of the council, the first task that the bishops undertook, with the support of Emperor Theodosius, was to proclaim unanimously the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Moving directly to a proclamation without devoting time for discussion indicates that such belief was already considered as part of the deposit of faith by the Church at large, even before the First Council of Constantinople. What the bishops sought to do was simply to formalise this article of faith. However, this hasty declaration was blocked by the Pneumatomachean (later known as “Macedonians”) bishops who were invited to the Council by the Emperor himself, probably in the hope that they would have been dissuaded in their heretical belief and therefore achieve unity of belief.

14. Peter Hünermann, Helmut Hoping, Robert L. Fastiggi, and Anne Englund Nash, eds., *Compendium of creeds, definitions, and declarations on matters of faith and morals* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 151.

15. Richard P.C. Hanson, “Creeds and Confessions of Faith”, in *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, Vol. 1, ed. Angelo Di Berardino, trans. Adrian Walford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 207.

The Pneumatomacheans¹⁶ opposed the full deity of the Holy Spirit. The moderate strand of this movement accepted that the Son is consubstantial with the Father, whereas the radicals avoid speaking of the Son as being consubstantial with the Father but rather spoke in terms of “like in substance” or “like in all things.”¹⁷ When it came to the Holy Spirit, Eustathius of Sebaste, one of their leaders, wrote that “he did ‘not choose to call the Spirit of God nor presume to call Him a creature.’ ... ‘He occupies a middle position, being neither God nor one of the others (i.e. creatures).”¹⁸ Partly, they based their belief on the scriptural silence about the divinity of the Holy Spirit.

Ultimately, the opinion of those in favour of the Holy Spirit’s divinity prevailed. In the Nicene creed there was a brief reference to the belief in the Holy Spirit, “[a]nd in the Holy Spirit”¹⁹, without any explicit reference to His divinity. In the Symbol of Constantinople this was conspicuously elaborated into “[a]nd in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who together with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.”²⁰ The title “Lord” leaves no doubt on the divine nature of the Holy Spirit.

The council also included other articles in this profession of faith, namely about the “notes” of the Church as being one, holy, Catholic and apostolic, about baptism as an instrument to forgive sins and about life everlasting. Notably, this creedal formula omitted the anathema found in the original Nicene Creed where anyone who said that the Son was of a different nature, or hypostasis, from the Father was declared a heretic.

16. Literally, “Combaters against the Spirit.”

17. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 259-260.

18. *Ibid.*, 260.

19. Hünemann, Hoping, Fastiggi, and Englund Nash, eds., *Compendium of creeds*, 125.

20. *Ibid.*

This marks an important evolution in the Church's Christological doctrine in terms of the differentiation between the concepts of "substance" and "persons". This doctrinal development also contributed significantly towards the victory over the Arians, since it was also seemed acceptable by the so called "semi-Arians".

This Constantinopolitan profession of faith was not the only variation to the Nicene Creed that took place over time; however, the context in which it was formulated (that of an ecumenical council) gave it a particular prominence over the others.

1.3 The Council of Ephesus and Nestorianism

As in the case of the two previous ecumenical councils, this Council of Ephesus was called by the (Eastern) Roman Emperor, who at the time was Theodosius II. The main cause for calling this council, planned to meet on Pentecost of 431, was due to the Christological controversy of what came to be known as "Nestorianism". This council was dominated by two very strong personalities, each of whom represented one of the two most influential theological schools of thought in the East at the time. Cyril, Bishop of Alexandria, represented the Alexandrian school of thought, while Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople, represented the Antiochene School. Whilst the Alexandrian school emphasised Christ's divinity, for the Antiochenes, the humanity of Jesus had a more prominent role than for the Alexandrians. For this council, the emperor invited all the Eastern metropolitans and some Western bishops, including the Pope who eventually sent his delegates.²¹ Around 200 bishops attended.

21. Manlio Simonetti, "Ephesus," in *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, Vol. 1, ed. Angelo Di Berardino, trans. Adrian Walford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 275.

Authors, however, do not agree who actually precipitated the convocation of this council. Certain authors say that the initiative was taken by the emperor himself to oppose the heresy of Nestorius²² while others are of the opinion that the emperor called the council at the request of Nestorius himself.²³

Like other Christological controversies, this controversy was seriously threatening the Church's union in the East since it did not appear to have affected much of the Western Church, even though in this controversy Pope Celestine sided with Cyril. It concerned what came to be known as the "hypostatic union" of Christ. Nestorius' point of departure was as a reaction against two Christological heresies, which although previously condemned, were still very much active in the Church. These were the Arian heresy (which denied Christ's divinity) and that known as Apollinarism (which denied the full humanity of Christ). According to the Church's orthodox teaching, Nestorius held that Christ had both a divine nature and a human nature. However, he emphasised that these two natures had their separate properties and rather than existing in union in the person of Christ, they were conjoined and shared one "*prosopon*". This meant that the Virgin Mary was the mother of the man Jesus in his union with the Logos, or "*Christotokos*" (Christ-bearer), rather than as she has been traditionally called "*Theotokos*" (God-bearer). A reason for Nestorius' emphasis in changing the Virgin's title should not necessarily be understood as a derogatory act on his behalf. Some authors argue that Nestorius noted both the Arians and the Apollinarians made use of the title "*Theotokos*" to promote their respective heresies and therefore he wanted to

22. Hünemann, Hoping, Fastiggi, and Englund Nash, eds., *Compendium of creeds*, 250-268.

23. Simonetti, "Ephesus", 275.

eliminate this erroneous teaching.²⁴ Nestorius also concluded that during the Passion it was only the human nature of Christ who suffered and not his entire person. Such statements did present serious problems of a soteriological nature, since it reduced the acts of salvation of Jesus (the Incarnation and the Passion of Christ) exclusively to His human nature.

The Nestorian position, which essentially represented the Antiochene position, was vehemently contested by Cyril, who did not only enjoy the support of those who sided with the Alexandrian school but also of the bishop of Rome. In short, his position was that whilst Christ is both fully divine and fully human, these two natures were intrinsic constituents of the same person of Christ. This meant that by the virtue of the hypostatic union of the two natures, the predicates attributed to one of the natures of Christ belonged also to the other nature. This principle later became known as "*communicatio idiomatum*."²⁵ Doctrinally this meant that since Christ is God, then the Virgin Mary is the Mother of God (*Theotokos*). Also during Passion, it was Christ in his entire person who suffered and not just His human nature. Cyril and Nestorius were already engaged into a correspondence prior to the Council of Ephesus of 431. Two letters written by Cyril and addressed to Nestorius, dated February²⁶ and November²⁷ of 430 respectively, and a letter written by Nestorius in June of the same year²⁸ and

24. Ben Green, "Nestorius and Cyril: 5th Century Christological Division and Recent Progress in Reconciliation," accessed February 19, 2020, https://www.academia.edu/18376858/Nestorius_and_Cyril_5th_Century_Christological_Division_and_Re.

25. Manlio Simonetti, "Nestorius-Nestorianism," in *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, Vol. 2, ed. Angelo Di Berardino, trans. Adrian Walford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 594.

26. Hünemann, Hoping, Fastiggi, and Englund Nash, eds., *Compendium of creeds*, 250-251.

27. *Ibid.*, 251a-251e.

28. *Ibid.*, 252-263.

addressed to Cyril (as a reply to his February letter) eventually constituted the basis of the discussions taking place during the council. Actually, Cyril had written three letters to Nestorius, however the first one was only as a way of enquiring the latter's position and did not contain any doctrinal statements. Hence, the two letters discussed were his second and third letters to Nestorius.

Unfortunately, for various reasons, this Council of Ephesus proved to be a very messy affair, descending into chaos. Since the choice of the council's venue was in Asia Minor, this eventually meant that the Oriental bishops supporting Nestorius took longer than expected to arrive. Cyril and his allies took the unilateral decision, despite the protests of the emperor's delegate, to hold a session on June 22, during which they condemned Nestorian and called for his deposition from Patriarch of Constantinople. On their arrival, two days later, the Oriental bishops under the presidency of the Patriarch John of Antioch held a parallel (anti-) synod, where they underlined the dangers of Arianism and Apollinarianism and called for the deposition of Cyril and Memnon, a fellow bishop. Nestorius himself chose not to attend this Council. As expected, following their very late arrival, the pope's delegates sided with Cyril's position.²⁹

From a doctrinal point of view, it is clear that Cyril's position won the day. This Council endorsed in a general manner the doctrinal statements contained in Cyril's (second) letter of February 430 to Nestorius, and likewise reputed Nestorius' letter of reply to Cyril written in June of the same year. However, it appears that the Council did not approve the Anathemas attached to Cyril's (third) letter to Nestorius of November 430.³⁰

29. Simonetti, "Ephesus," 275.

30. Green, "Nestorius and Cyril."

Notwithstanding this, the Council formally condemned Nestorianism³¹ and Pelegianism.³² This condemnation of Nestorius, obtained primarily by Cyril of Alexandria, did not however brought to rest the dispute about the person of Christ between the Alexandrians and the Antiochenes, with the former emphasising the unified person of Christ, whilst the latter highlighting his two natures without perhaps adopting a precise articulation on His unitive dimension.³³

Another resolution of a doctrinal nature taken by the conciliar fathers was that of preserving the Nicene Creed: “The holy council decided that no one is allowed to profess or else compose or devise a faith other than that defined by the holy Fathers gathered together at Nicaea with the Holy Spirit ...”³⁴

Although the last formal session of this council took place on August 31, 431, due to the tumultuous circumstances in which it took place, a closure of sorts took place only two years later in 433 when the Patriarch John of Antioch, a former supporter of Nestorius, “agreed to the Formulary of Reunion with Cyril.”³⁵ Such agreement was however possible due to a shift in Cyril’s original doctrine about the nature of Christ. Cyril’s original contention was that the Logos became enfleshed in Mary’s womb and not that the Logos was united with a full human nature as derived from his mother’s body. Hence, Cyril’s original stand was that the Incarnate Divine Logos had one nature. It was only later, as a result of serious debate, which Cyril conceded to the duality of natures

31. Hünemann, Hoping, Fastiggi, and Englund Nash, eds., *Compendium of creeds*, 264.

32. *Ibid.*, 267-268.

33. Simonetti and Prinzivalli, *Storia della letteratura cristiana antica*,” 242.

34. Hünemann, Hoping, Fastiggi, and Englund Nash, eds., *Compendium of creeds*, 265.

35. Green, “Nestorius and Cyril.”

in Christ. As mentioned above, this doctrinal shift contributed greatly to the Formula of Reunion which brought the tumultuous Council of Ephesus to a closure.

1.4 The Council of Chalcedon and Monophysism

In different ways, the ecumenical Council of Chalcedon of 451 could be considered as a continuation of that of Ephesus of 431. This applies both to the common doctrinal issues prominent in both councils and to the political milieu in which it took place, since most of the protagonists of the Council of Ephesus – both ecclesiastical and civil – were also involved in the Council of Chalcedon, or at least in the build-up leading to it.

Despite the agreement to the “Formulary of Reunion” about Christ’s two natures reached in 433, this controversy persisted. An influential monk from a Constantinopolitan monastery, Eutyches, who belonged to the Alexandrian school of thought came to prominence soon after. Due to his teaching, he appeared in front of a group of bishops presided by Patriarch Flavian of Constantinople in 448. While he accepted the human nature of Christ, he “asserted that Christ is not *homoousios* (consubstantial) with us and that, from two natures before the union, there resulted a single nature after it.”³⁶ Essentially, Eutyches’s teaching was very similar to the original position of Cyril of Alexandria, which was declared as orthodox by the Council of Ephesus of 431, but lacked badly in its articulation. Eventually, his teaching was condemned by these bishops due to his apparent denial of Christ’s humanity. As a reaction of this condemnation, in 449 another council was called again in Ephesus by the Alexandrians in order to support Eutyches. This council, which had the approval of the emperor

36. Manlio Simonetti, “Monophysism - Monophysites,” in *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, Vol. 1, ed. Angelo Di Berardino, trans. Adrian Walford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 569.

Theodosius II (who has called the first Council of Ephesus), rehabilitated Eutyches and condemned Flavian and his associate Theodoret. Its presider and Cyril's successor, Dioscorus, "interpreted the formula "one incarnate nature of God the Word" in the manner of Cyril in such a way as not invalidate the reality of Christ's humanity and his consubstantiality with us."³⁷ Nonetheless his terminology was not understood neither by the Antiochenes who supported the two-nature (dyophysites) neither by the Westerners led by Pope Leo the Great. Due to the peculiar circumstances in which this council was set-up and the irregular proceedings how it was run, in letters to Flavian and Theodoret, Pope Leo excommunicated almost all the participants of this council and absolved all those it has condemned. Consequently, he called this council as *Latrocinium*, or the "Robber Council".³⁸

Following the death of Theodosius II, the new emperor Marcian and his wife Pulcheria, who supported the dyophysite (Antiochene) counter-reaction and aspired for Pope Leo's favour, called the Council of Chalcedon of 451. It was attended by more than 500 bishops and was presided by Paschasinus, the pope's delegate, a notable first to an ecumenical council held in the East. Following the usual introductory reading of the council's acts, the rehabilitation of Flavian and the deposition of Dioscorus and other bishops of a monophysite leaning, the emperors' representatives pressed for a debate on doctrinal issues which would consequently lead to a new confession of faith. This conflicted with both Pope Leo's orders and the (ecumenical) Council of Ephesus of 431 which had ruled that no other formula of faith, save that approved by the Council of

37 Simonetti, "Monophysism - Monophysites," 569.

38. John Chapman, "Robber Council of Ephesus," in *New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909), accessed February 25, 2020, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05495a.htm>.

Nicaea of 325, was to be used. Ultimately, the persistence of the emperors' representatives prevailed.³⁹

Various documents concerning the Christological controversy about Christ's natures were read, including those by Cyril of Alexandria and Pope Leo's letter to Flavian (known as *Tomus ad Flavianum*). The Nicene Creed, as completed with that of Constantinople, was solemnly confirmed, together with Cyril's second letter to Nestorius (already endorsed during the ecumenical Council of Ephesus of 431) and Leo's Tome (to Flavian). A discussion towards the formulation of a new formula of faith, which was to draw from these sources, then ensued.

As a result, on October 22, 451, during its fifth session, the council pronounced its new formula of faith. It confirmed all the Christological and Trinitarian doctrines promulgated by the previous ecumenical councils and condemned the corresponding erroneous teachings, including Apollinarianism, the Pneumatomachians, Nestorianism and Eutyches' monophysite teachings. This new creed essentially "represented a compromise between the dyophysism of Antioch and the monophysism of Alexandria."⁴⁰ *Inter alia*, it declared that:

"(We confess that) one and the same Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son, must be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion or change, without division or separation. The distinction between the natures was never abolished by their union but rather the character proper to each of the two natures was preserved as they came together as one Person and one hypostasis. He is not split or divided into two Persons, but he is one and the same begotten Son, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as formerly the prophets and later Jesus Christ himself have taught us about him and as has been handed down to us by the creed of the Fathers."⁴¹

39. Manlio Simonetti, "Chalcedon," in *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, Vol. 1, ed. Angelo Di Berardino, trans. Adrian Walford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 159.

40. Simonetti, "Monophysism – Monophysites," 569.

41. Hünemann, Hoping, Fastiggi, and Englund Nash, eds., *Compendium of creeds*, 302.

Nevertheless, this did not satisfy those favouring a monophysite doctrine, especially the Egyptians and Syrians. This discontent, mixed with a nascent nationalistic aversion against the Hellenistic rule and cultural influence, led to further doctrinal and ecclesial turmoil following the conclusion of the Council of Chalcedon.

1.5 Conclusion

This first chapter of this work has reviewed the first four ecumenical councils of the Church, that of Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451). While the historical and political circumstances surrounding each of these councils were acknowledged, the main focus was the doctrinal matters covered by them, mainly Christological and Trinitarian controversies. Notwithstanding the different positions concerning a particular aspect, the councils succeeded to formulate and declare a particular strand of teaching to be orthodox, hence condemning any other teachings which did not conform with the true faith as being heretical and heterodox. This did not always lead to the extinction of the controversy but it provided a strong point of reference to what was the Church's official position on a particular matter of faith.

The way this dissertation has presented the first four ecumenical councils, one might have been given the impression that these were separate autonomous events. In reality, they were four milestones within a continuum of a developing doctrine, sustained mainly by the faithful's life of prayer and popular devotion.⁴²

The second chapter of this dissertation intends to identify the sources and the factors that, along the years, appeared to contribute towards a particular teaching as being

⁴² Pelikan, "Between Ecumenical Councils," 100-101.

confirmed by the Church either as orthodox or as one that deviates from the word of Truth.

Chapter Two

Two Sources or Two Streams from the Same Source?

2.0 Introduction

This work will now shift its focus to identify and critically evaluate the factors that are at play in the Church's understanding and eventual transmission of its authentic teaching about its fundamental truths, that is those in which Divine Revelation subsists. As seen in the previous chapter, these truths were the main concern of the first four ecumenical councils, as the Church deliberated on its most fundamental tenets, namely its Christological, Trinitarian and soteriological aspects. This will be done particularly in the light of the Second Vatican Council's (1962-1965) Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*,¹ which is considered one of the Church's most recent definitive documents on the matter of Divine Revelation.

Michael Hayes has summarised the central importance of this conciliar Constitution as follows: "It articulated the personal nature of God's revelation, restored scripture as the soul of theology, liberated biblical studies and put a theological end to anti-Semitism."² Another author described this document as "an interesting point of reference from which to reflect on the relation between Revelation, Scripture and Tradition within a

1. Vatican Council II, *Dogmatic Constitution Dei Verbum*, The Holy See, November 18, 1965, accessed March 9, 2020, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html.

2. Michael Hayes as quoted by Anthony Towey, "Dei Verbum: Fit for Purpose?" *New Blackfriars*, Vol 90 (1026): 207, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2008.01268.x>.

Roman Catholic systematic-theological perspective.”³ The Dominican priest, theologian and consultor at the Second Vatican Council, Edward Schillebeeckx, described this document as one of the council’s “crown jewels.”⁴

What renders this document so noteworthy is particularly this articulation of God’s revelation in a personal manner. The outlook provided is one where “Revelation does not primarily concern content (*revelata*) but is *itself the salvific event of God’s self-revelation as Love in Jesus Christ and the Spirit.*”⁵ Revelation is essentially seen as “a living encounter which is articulated secondarily in propositions.”⁶ Hence, the formal cause of revelation is constituted of the Christological, pneumatological and the soteriological perspectives of the faith. It is essentially about the salutary personal encounter between God and humanity, which reached its culmination in the incarnation of the Word as the person of Jesus Christ. The peculiarity of *Dei Verbum* is therefore not in the essence of Revelation but in its emphasis on the encounter between the divinity and humanity rather than being a list of truths of faith that are found in Scriptures, developed by Tradition and taught by the Magisterium.

As the history of this conciliar document’s gestation shows, at the time such perspective was considered to be quite innovative in ecclesiastical circles and departed substantially from the Catholic traditional view of the “two-source theory”. This traditional approach, present in the first drafts of the document of 1962 prepared under the presidency of

3. Lieven Boeve, “Revelation, Scripture and Tradition: Lessons from Vatican II’s Constitution *Dei Verbum* for Contemporary Theology,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, Vol. 13 (2011): 416, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2400.2011.00598.x>.

4. John R. Donahue, “Biblical authority permeates council teaching,” *National Catholic Reporter*, October 11, 2012, 38.

5. Boeve, “Revelation, Scripture and Tradition,” 420-421.

6. Gerald O’Collins, St Mary’s University College, London, September 1, 2008 in Towey, “*Dei Verbum*: Fit for Purpose?” 214.

Cardinal Ottaviani from the Holy Office, “had been rejected because of its unjustified proposal of a mutual independence between Tradition and Scripture and its over-emphasis on the superiority of the former.”⁷ Until this time, the Church’s official doctrine on the sources of Revelation was that contained in the document promulgated by the Council of Trent (1545-1563), entitled the “Decree on the Reception of the Sacred Books and Traditions”.⁸

This Tridentine document clearly refers to the Gospel as “the source of all saving truth and norms of conduct.”⁹ However the Council of Trent assigns a very broad and dynamic understanding of what it means by “Gospel”. It says that it goes beyond the actual four canonical gospels.

“This council clearly perceives that this truth and rule are contained in the written books *and* [my emphasis] unwritten traditions that have come down to us, having been received by the apostles from the mouth of Christ himself or from the apostles by dictation of the Holy Spirit, and have been transmitted, as it were, from hand to hand.”¹⁰

It is therefore clear that for the Council of Trent, the only source leading to salvation was the Gospel, which clearly also incorporated Tradition in an intimate manner. Rather than saying that the salutary truth is contained partly in the Gospel and partly in Tradition (*partim/partim*), the document uses the conjunction “and” (*et/et*) to emphasise the indivisible unity of both. This position was notably highlighted by the theologian Joseph Geiselman just before the Second Vatican Council. He argued that,

7. Towey, “Dei Verbum: Fit for Purpose?” 208.

8. Peter Hünermann, Helmut Hoping, Robert L. Fastiggi, and Anne Englund Nash, eds., *Compendium of creeds, definitions, and declarations on matters of faith and morals* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 369.

9. Ibid, 370. In the Latin original text, “*tamquam fontem omnis et salutaris veritatis et morum disciplinae.*”

10. Ibid. In the Latin original text, “*perspicuensque, hanc veritatem et disciplinam contineri in libris scriptis et sine scripto traditionibus, quae ab ipsius Christi ore ab Apostolis acceptae, aut ab ipsis Apostolis Spiritu Sancto dictante quasi per manus traditae ad nos usque pervenerunt.*”

“since Trent dropped the “partly” language, two-source theology was not official Church teaching, as commonly assumed. Instead, he argued, there is only one source of revelation: the Gospel. ...There is only “one sacred deposit of the word of God” (as DV 10 would later put it), though it is handed down through two *modes*. Giselmann’s viewpoint was quickly adopted by the “New Theologians,” notably Yves Congar, who became the intellectual drivers of the Second Vatican Council.”¹¹

Whilst preserving the salutary significance of both Scriptures and Tradition, *Dei Verbum* adopts a more explicit stance from the Tridentine document. It opens by stating what is the ultimate purpose of God’s self-revelation. Through the incarnate Word of God and in the Holy Spirit, man could have “access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature.”¹² This statement, which sums up the *telos* of Revelation, is reminiscent of the words attributed to Irenaeus of Lyon who said that God had “become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself.”¹³ This sharing in the divine properties points to the doctrine of “θέωσις” (*theosis*) or “divinisation” which is very strong in the Eastern theological tradition but has only been recuperated lately in the West. The way God realises this revelatory plan is through “deeds and words having an inner unity.”¹⁴ It is evident that, as from its introductory paragraphs, *Dei Verbum* considers Revelation “as one encompassing historical-dynamic and dialogical event, resulting in a conception which succeeds in going beyond the distinctions mentioned [between Scripture and Tradition] while at the same time keeping them together.”¹⁵ It is a historical witness of the *Logos* made flesh.

11 Adam Rasmussen, “The unity of Scripture and Tradition: Dei Verbum, Chapter 2,” July 29, 2020, accessed October 13, 2020, <https://wherepeteris.com/the-unity-of-scripture-and-tradition-dei-verbum-chapter-2/>.

12. *Dei Verbum*, 2.

13. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against the Heretics*, Book IV, Chapter XXXVIII, accessed March 9, 2020, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.ix.vi.xxxix.html>.

14. *Dei Verbum*, 2.

15. Boeve, “Revelation, Scripture and Tradition,” 421.

The fullness of God's revelation comes in Christ who perfected it through his words and deeds. Being the fullness of Revelation, no further new revelation is possible after Christ until the time of His *Parousia*. Notwithstanding this, God continued to communicate Himself to humanity through created reality in virtue of reason; however, it is through His Revelation that religious truths could be known "with solid certitude and with no trace of error, even in this present state of the human race."¹⁶ This transmission of Revelation is essentially effected by Tradition and Sacred Scriptures, which "are like a mirror in which the pilgrim Church on earth looks at God, from whom she has received everything, until she is brought finally to see Him as He is, face to face (see 1 John 3:2)."¹⁷ The use of the singular quantifier in using the mirror typology when referring to both Tradition and Sacred Scripture should not be left unnoticed by the reader. Even though *Dei Verbum* seemingly continues to speak of "two sources", however "both of them, flowing from the same divine wellspring, in a certain way merge into a unity and tend towards the same end."¹⁸ Hence, they form part of an integral reality; so much so that further down, this conciliar Constitution reiterates that "Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God, committed to the Church."¹⁹ This "one sacred deposit" is communicated and interpreted as an integral reality to "the entire holy people"²⁰ by the bishops, who have been entrusted by Christ Himself with the living teaching office of the Church. The bishops have "the task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on."²¹ *Dei Verbum* emphasises

16. *Dei Verbum*, 6.

17. *Ibid.*, 7.

18. *Ibid.*, 9.

19. *Ibid.*, 10.

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*

again that Sacred Scriptures, Sacred Tradition and the bishops' teaching office (or Magisterium) "are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls."²²

Therefore, it is amply clear that in the understanding of the conciliar Fathers as expressed in *Dei Verbum*, there is only a single source of Divine Revelation: God's own self-communication that reached its fullness in the incarnation of His Word as the person of Jesus Christ. Such Revelation is communicated fundamentally in two ways, through the Sacred Scriptures and Sacred Tradition, both of which are mediated in an authentic manner through the Magisterium, or the living teaching office of the bishops. Both Scriptures and Tradition are intimately related to the kerygmatic activity of the apostles in transmitting Jesus' words and deeds to all of humanity. Such activity began in the form of preaching and witness by example but was then eventually conserved and handed on in writing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

It is the intention of this work that, whilst the three different elements of Scripture, Tradition and Magisterium shall be tackled separately, this is only done for conceptual purposes. From a theological perspective, and in full conformity with *Dei Verbum*, it seeks to conserve the dialogical dynamic that binds together Sacred Scripture and Tradition with the Magisterium acting as their custodian and interpreter with and to the whole Church.

22. *Dei Verbum*, 10.

2.1 Sacred Scriptures

When one looks at the formation of the canon of the Sacred Scriptures, one could argue that this canon knows its beginnings with the Apostles' oral preaching and therefore, as such, it should be considered to be part of this same Tradition. Conversely, if Tradition is to be understood as "the proclamation, explanation and diffusion of the Word of God as it has been written down under the inspiration of the divine Holy Spirit in Scripture,"²³ then the Sacred Scriptures could be seen as an autonomous actor from Tradition in this revelatory dialogical dynamic. "Biblical inspiration, (therefore), marks the influence of the Holy Spirit in the transition from the occurrence of Revelation itself to its transmission and preservation in manuscripts."²⁴ They are a permanent record of the foundational experience of the participatory encounter between divinity and humanity. So while the Scriptures transmit the divine self-communication, the way their contents were then interpreted, elaborated upon and handed over along the years, including in the form of doctrinal statements, constitutes part of Tradition. In this perspective, the inspired Scriptures are located within the broader context of Divine Revelation and not equated to it.

Moreover, *Dei Verbum* considers as Sacred Scriptures "both the Old and New Testaments in their entirety" because both have God as their author, they were both written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and were both handed in such a manner to the Church. To reinforce this unity, this document quotes St Augustine's well known quote found in his *Questions on the Heptateuch* that the New Testament is hidden in

23. Boeve, "Revelation, Scripture and Tradition," 422.

24. Philip Moller, "What should they be saying about Biblical Inspiration? A Note on the State of the Question," *Theological Studies* 74 (2013): 609.

the Old while the Old is revealed in the New.²⁵ The Divine Revelation is therefore an event immersed in history which started in Creation recorded in the first book of the Old Testament, was confirmed in a special manner with God's covenant with the Jewish people through their patriarchs and prophets "for salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:22b), and reached its culmination in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, the *Logos* and Son of God as found in the New Testament.

Whilst acknowledging the sacred character of the entire canon of the Scriptures, *Dei Verbum* asserts that "[t]he word of God, which is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe (see Rom. 1:16) is set forth and shows its power in a most excellent way in the writings of the New Testament."²⁶ Within the New Testament canon, the fourfold Gospel holds a place of pre-eminence since the Gospels are a unique source of the saving truth. They "are the principal witness"²⁷ of the salutary words and deeds of Jesus. This witness was adapted according to the needs of the respective community to which each Gospel was written, without in any way diluting from the entirety of the Divine Revelation as manifested in Christ.

Through the Sacred Scriptures as the Word of God, the Church has the responsibility of handing over the Sacred Revelation from one generation to the next. Since the sacred writers were inspired within the context of a particular social milieu, *Dei Verbum* acknowledges the importance of the historical-critical method of biblical exegesis. "For the correct understanding of what the sacred author wanted to assert, due attention must be paid to the customary and characteristic styles of feeling, speaking and

25. *Dei Verbum*, 16.

26. *Dei Verbum*, 17.

27. *Ibid.*

narrating which prevailed at the time of the sacred writer.”²⁸ At the same time, “no less serious attention must be given to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly worked out.”²⁹ This means that for the conciliar Fathers, the contextualisation of the Word of God within a particular point in history and location does not diminish in any way its divine nature and relevance across time and space. Rather, this two-pronged approach in scriptural studies introduces “a significant and critical ‘difference’ within the development and hermeneutics of tradition”³⁰ because it provides the biblical scholars with a wider spectrum of perspectives in the understanding of how the Scriptures were received by the Church.

It is for this reason that *Dei Verbum* gives particular attention to the dynamic between Divine inspiration and human action in the formulation of the Scriptures. As much as the whole Divine Revelation knows its efficient cause in the intimate encounter of God with humanity, Sacred Scriptures knows its own in the meeting between God’s ineffable Word and its expression in human language. In this context, it refers to St John’s Chrysostom’s words that such “condescension” of the Divine Word into a comprehensible language shows “how far He has gone in adapting His language with thoughtful concern for our weak human nature.”³¹

Dei Verbum also sought to articulate the way the Church seeks to appropriate the Word of God as found in the Sacred Scriptures. It venerates them similarly as it does the Eucharist and together with Tradition; it holds them as “the supreme rule of faith”³².

28. *Dei Verbum*, 12.

29. *Ibid.*

30. Boeve, “Revelation, Scripture and Tradition,” 424.

31. *Dei Verbum*, 13.

32. *Ibid.*, 21.

The Sacred Scriptures should always sustain and nourish the entire life of the Church, especially its preaching, catechesis and sacraments. *Dei Verbum* also acknowledges that such an appropriation is an ongoing process. Seeing the Sacred Scriptures as the living Word of God that makes “possible ongoing human experience of the divine self-communication,”³³ the Church should strive towards an ever-deeper understanding of the Sacred Scriptures through exegetical and patristic studies, “under the watchful care of the sacred teaching office of the Church.”³⁴ Furthermore, together with Tradition, Sacred Scripture is one of the two pillars upon which any theological utterance or speculation should rest. This call to base the study of theology on Sacred Scriptures was one of the main tenets of the dual approach of *aggiornamento* and *ressourcement* that characterised the Second Vatican Council on a wider scale.

This insightful look at the role of the Sacred Scriptures in the transmission of the Divine Revelation did not go unnoticed neither internally within the Catholic Church nor externally by other Christian Churches. Whilst Yves Congar hailed *Dei Verbum* as “[a] great document that provides theology with the means to become fully evangelical,”³⁵ the Lutheran theologian Kirsten Skydsgaard considered this conciliar Constitution “as the most important of all the Council decrees and would be of great significance for the continuation of the ecumenical dialogue.”³⁶

33. Moller, “What should they be saying about Biblical Inspiration?” 618.

34. *Dei Verbum*, 23.

35. Yves Congar quoted by Christophe Theobald, “The Church Under the Word of God,” in *History of Vatican II, Volume V: The Council and the Transition, The Fourth Period and the End of the Council, September 1965-December 1965*, eds. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis and Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 353.

36. Kirsten Skydsgaard, “News and Notes,” *The Tablet*, December 1965, 1396.

2.2 Sacred Tradition

The other dialogical element in the dynamic of Divine Revelation is Tradition. When not quoting in a different manner, this work assigns a capital “T” for Tradition to distinguish it from “the broad stream of traditions which also took form in other ways in the course of Church history”³⁷ and which are simply appropriated by one generation to the next in the form of dead matter.

The prominence given by *Dei Verbum* to Sacred Scriptures as a foundational element in the Divine Revelation of God’s self-communication to humanity, does not in any way eclipse the importance it gives to Tradition. *Dei Verbum* stresses that “it is not from Sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything that has been revealed. Therefore, both sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence.”³⁸ Since the deposit of Tradition, including the interpretation of Sacred Scriptures, is accumulated by time, Revelation “occurs within the dynamic progress of history, which is also the economy of God’s salvation of humanity.”³⁹

Due to different historical circumstances, particularly the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century and the Modernist controversy that followed some centuries later, the Catholic Church has often given particular precedence to Tradition over Scriptures. This was done because it perceived the interpretation of Tradition as its sole monopoly and therefore considered to be “safer” than the Bible whose study the Reformed theologians

37. Karl-Heinz Weger, “Tradition,” *Sacramentum Mundi*, vol. 6, ed. Karl Rahner (London: Burns and Oates, 1969), 273.

38. *Dei Verbum*, 9.

39. Moller, “What should they be saying about Biblical Inspiration?” 612.

had taken to their stride in earnest. This was also the reason why for a long time the Church's hierarchy also discouraged access of the Bible to the "unlearned" laity. The adage that the role of the laity is that to "pray, pay and obey" explains this state of affairs very eloquently.

By situating both Tradition and Scriptures as two equal and interdependent streams flowing from the unique source of Divine Revelation, the Second Vatican Council sought to overhaul this conservative perspective of Tradition. Through *Dei Verbum*, the conciliar Fathers sought to shift faith from being "considered merely as the obedient acceptance of revealed truths, but rather in the first instance as the trusting human response to God's salvific invitation".⁴⁰

Notwithstanding this interdependent view drawing from Revelation, Tradition does have its own content. This consists primarily in the handing over of the apostolic preaching, "as preserved by an unending succession of preachers until the end of time."⁴¹ However, within the historical-dynamic concept of Revelation presented by this conciliar Constitution these contents "can no longer be reduced to the transmission of static doctrinal contents or limited to the actions of the Church's Magisterium"⁴². In other words, this view is fundamentally different from viewing Tradition simply as a rigid formulation of immutable truths to which every Catholic should unarguably give his or her assent. Together with the Scriptures, it is the basis for any ecclesial discernment that takes place in the Church since it is actualisation and the guarantor of the preservation of the original *kerygma*. It is a dynamic view which, in non-religious jargon,

40. Boeve, "Revelation, Scripture and Tradition," 421.

41. *Dei Verbum*, 7.

42. Boeve, "Revelation, Scripture and Tradition," 422.

has been immortalised by Marshall McLuhan when he said, “the medium is the message”⁴³. In Karl Rahner’s words, “Tradition is both something transmitted and the action of transmitting it.”⁴⁴ Whereas the essence of the apostolic preaching being handed over remains unchanged, the way how this is expounded and articulated should be in a way to ensure that is understood by the contemporary generation and that it reflects the maturing theological thought in concordance with the Church’s teaching office.

Although this view of tradition appears to be diametrically different from that espoused by the Church for a long time prior to the Second Vatican Council, it is not new to it. As early as 434, Vincent of Lerins (+445), a Gallic monk and Christian writer, in his *Commonitorium* spoke about this ever-changing countenance of Tradition within the Church, with particular emphasis on the development of doctrine.⁴⁵ This excerpt opens with the affirmation that not only should there be development in the Church’s teaching, but it should be one “on the largest scale.”⁴⁶ Vincent of Lerins is so adamant about this development that he calls those who prevent such development as “so grudging to men” and “so full of hate for God.”⁴⁷ However, the author is very quick to establish what he means by “development”. In order to do this he uses as an allegory the physiological development of the human body. He says that just as development of the human body is understood as the change undertaken by the same body parts

43. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: Mentor, 1964).

44. Karl Rahner, “Magisterium,” in *Sacramentum Mundi*, Vol. 3, ed. Karl Rahner (London: Burns and Oates, 1969), 351.

45. “From the First Instruction by Saint Vincent of Lerins, priest,” Liturgy of the Hours, Office of the Readings, Friday of Week 27 in Ordinary Time, accessed March 15, 2020, <http://www.liturgies.net/Liturgies/Catholic/loh/week27fridayor.htm>.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.

throughout the span of one's life, so is it with the development of doctrine, and therefore what should be counted as true tradition: "the same doctrine, the same meaning and the same import."⁴⁸ Consequently, he distinguishes between "development" and "alteration". While true development involves "each thing expands to be itself,"⁴⁹ alteration implies that one thing changes into another. If this happens to the body, it "would necessarily perish or become grotesque or at least be enfeebled."⁵⁰ Keeping with the same allegory, as much as development of doctrine helps the Church to come to maturity, alteration of doctrine would only weaken it.

Therefore, whilst the expression "*ecclesia semper reformanda*" is within the line of Tradition, this is true as long as through change, the Church becomes more what it is supposed to be. Post-biblical developments within the Church that are considered as being part of Tradition must not necessarily be open to revision in order to come closer to Scriptures as the Reformed Churches assert. Whilst the Sacred Scriptures remain the inspired Word of God and that they contain all the necessary means for salvation, "it may be admitted without misgiving that the faith of the primitive Church was more extensive in a certain fashion, than what was committed to writing in the books of the NT."⁵¹ Indeed Joseph Ratzinger, in his 1965 publication on revelation and tradition, writes "the Christian tradition exists because of a constitutive *incongruence between revelation and Scripture*."⁵² In other words, he is affirming that Tradition contributes

48. "From the First Instruction by Saint Vincent of Lerins, priest."

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.

51. Weger, "Tradition", 271.

52. Joseph Ratzinger as quoted by Boeve, "Revelation, Scripture and Tradition," 422.

towards our fuller understanding of Divine Revelation where the Sacred Scriptures do not provide enough understanding.

An integral part of this Tradition that formed the faith of the primitive Church are the writings of the Fathers of the Church, or as *Dei Verbum* calls them “the holy fathers.”⁵³ Their writings still sustain the liturgical life of the Church and its theological heritage. This same post-biblical Tradition gave shape to the definitive canon of the Sacred Scriptures themselves and provided commentaries through which Sacred Scriptures “are more profoundly understood and unceasingly made active in her [the Church].”⁵⁴

Two other central concepts in the theological understanding of Tradition are the long-held “*sensus fidei fidelis*” and the “*sensus fidei fidelium*”. While these two concepts go beyond Scriptural evidence of what constitutes faith, they have always been regarded in high esteem regarding their certitude. The *sensus fidei fidelis* is described as “a sort of spiritual instinct that enables the believer to judge spontaneously whether a particular teaching or practice is or is not in conformity with the Gospel and with apostolic faith.”⁵⁵ Although it is considered an instinct, however it is supernatural in nature and flows from the theological virtue of faith that is received gratuitously from God and not simply based on one’s gut feeling. Unlike theology, the *sensus fidei fidelis* is not rational but “it is akin rather to a natural, immediate and spontaneous reaction”⁵⁶ which nevertheless gives the individual a sense of whether something is compatible to

53. *Dei Verbum*, 8.

54. *Ibid.*

55. International Theological Commission, *Sensus fidei in the Life of the Church*, Holy See, 2014, accessed March 17, 2020, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20140610_sensus-fidei_en.html, 49.

56. *Ibid.*

orthodox faith or not. Whereas the *sensus fidei fidelis* has an individual character, the *sensus fidei fidelium* is communitarian in nature. It has also been referred to as “*sensus Ecclesiae*”. While the two are closely related, since the community of believers is made of individuals, the latter concept “constitutes a sure criterion for recognising a particular teaching or practice as in accord with the apostolic Tradition.”⁵⁷ This particular *sensus fidei* is both historical and future-oriented since the Church is both historical and eschatological in nature. Finally, it is achieved through a process of discernment which should involve the whole Church and consequently it acts as a guiding principle for the Church’s teaching office. This *sensus fidei fidelium* is probably best synthesised by Vincent of Lerins who provided three criteria in order to discern true doctrine from that which is not faithful to Revelation as handed over by the Church: *Quod Ubique, Semper, et Ab Omnibus*⁵⁸ (everywhere, always and by everyone). In spite of the fact that more than fifteen centuries have passed since Vincent of Lerins came out with these criteria, they are still regarded as the litmus test to determine whether a particular teaching is in concordance with the Church’s Tradition. True Tradition should therefore be catholic (universal), rooted in antiquity and enjoy a general consensus.

The dynamic nature of Tradition entails that, since the Church is immersed in history, new formulations and new expressions of faith might be manifest but the dogma, or that teaching revealed by God for our salvation, remains the same. This phenomenon has not always been understood in the Church. A clear example of this are the recent accusations levelled at Pope Francis following the publication of the post-synodal

57. *Sensus fidei in the Life of the Church*, 66.

58. Brian Kelly, “St. Vincent of Lerins: Quod Ubique, Semper, et Ab Omnibus,” *Catholicism.org*, April 14, 2016, accessed March 25, 2020, <https://catholicism.org/st-vincent-of-lerins-quod-ab-ubique-semper-et-ab-omnibus.html>.

exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*.⁵⁹ Pope Francis has been accused of changing the Church's teaching about the reception of Holy Communion by re-married divorcees and those who are co-habiting. The Pope denied this, arguing that what has changed was the pastoral approach but not the underlying doctrine.

If Vincent of Lerins' writings give us a rule about what should be regarded as true development of doctrine, the ancient maxim, attributed to Prosper of Aquitaine (+455), "*lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi*" contextualises doctrine within an integral model that also includes both prayer and the way we live our faith in action.⁶⁰ Hence, the handing over of the apostolic teaching, which is mostly evident in doctrine, would be seriously "enfeebled" (to use Vincent of Lerins' vocabulary) if it is not complemented in an active manner by the rule of prayer and the rule of daily living. Theodore Rebard comments on the traditional order of this maxim with "*lex orandi*" being put first. He says that this is so because it is the root of all the three rules.⁶¹ An essential element of the rule of prayer is the liturgy, or "the collection of rites and prayers through which we are able to have access to the mystery of Christ, given to us through the Church."⁶² This is especially expressed in the sacramental life of the Church, which is efficacious. This "mystery of Christ" to which we have access through the liturgy is fundamentally the mystery of Divine Revelation. It is through the liturgy that we encounter God through

59. Pope Francis, *Post-Synodal Exhortation Amoris Laetitia*, Holy See, March 19, 2016, accessed March 16, 2020, https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf.

60. Theodore Rebard, "Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi, Lex Vivendi," *Crisis Magazine*, November 27, 2018, accessed March 15, 2020, https://www.crisismagazine.com/2018/lex-orandi-lex-credendi-lex-vivendi_

61. Ibid.

62. Guido Marini, "To Enter into the Christian Mystery Through the Rites and Prayers," Office for the Liturgical Celebrations of the Supreme Pontiff, Mileto, 6-7 September 2010, accessed March 16, 2020, http://www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/2010/documents/ns_lit_doc_20100907_mistero-celebrato_en.html.

His Incarnate Son Jesus Christ, have a glimpse of heaven and of the life to come in union with the Triune God. In this context, the liturgical rites developed by the Church along the centuries are meant to “lift our souls to the Lord” to taste His goodness and beauty. However, this maxim also speaks about the “rule of living”. Going through the motions of a liturgical life and being faithful just to the letter of doctrinal precepts without applying them in one’s daily living means that one of the feet on which the tripod of Tradition stands is missing and therefore the whole edifice will crumble. “A (further) logical implication is that when any of these three is compromised, denied or neglected all three suffer. None may be deleted, lest all be deleted. Full stop.”⁶³ Works have always been regarded as important in the Catholic Tradition. This is based on Scriptural evidence, especially in the Letter of James, where he strikes an intimate link between faith and works: “Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith” (James 2:18b) and, “For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead” (James 2:26). This is perhaps the reason why moral issues are considered to be very important to the Catholic Church in its reflection of Revelation. While, as has been described above, the Catholic Church gives central importance to Sacred Scriptures, it has never subscribed to the Reformed adage of “*Sola Scriptura*”. From a Catholic perspective, the originating encountering act of God in Divine Revelation should be actively reciprocated both by human beings as individuals and by humanity as a whole. Such reciprocity is fundamentally manifested in the way how human beings behave towards each other and how humanity treats creation, of which it was entrusted as steward.

63. Rebard, “Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi, Lex Vivendi.”

From the above, one can therefore describe Tradition as the unbroken chain originating in the Apostolic Tradition as witnessed in the kerygma and the consequent generation of the Deposit of Faith. In turn, this gave rise to the Rule of Faith (*regula fidei* or *regula veritatis*) as embodied in the liturgy, especially in the baptismal creeds and which, eventually, found its way in the articulation of the Church's dogmatic teaching.

2.3 Magisterium

Having considered extensively the nature and role of both the Sacred Scriptures and Sacred Tradition as two interdependent streams pouring out of the unique wellspring of Divine Revelation, this work will now look at the Magisterium of the Church, whose role it is to mediate these two complementary means of salvation to all believers. With increasing temporal distance from the Jesus Event and the apostolic *kerygma*, the authority of these two foundational experiences was replaced with the legitimation of tradition based on ecclesial authority, or the Magisterium.

Dei Verbum considers the Magisterium, or the living teaching office of the Church, as that body being entrusted exclusively with the authentic interpretation of the word of God, both in the form of Scriptures or Tradition. It does so with the authority given to it in the name of Jesus Christ. However, this authority does not render it above such word but rather as its servant by "teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously and explaining it faithfully in accord with a divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit."⁶⁴

One might comment that this excerpt from *Dei Verbum* is reinforcing the age-old authoritative status of the Magisterium as the sole authentic interpreter of God's word.

64. *Dei Verbum*, 10.

Whilst this is true, however the excerpt emphasises that one of the fundamental roles of the Magisterium is to listen devoutly to the word of God. Earlier, the role of listening might have been more associated with the rest of the Church, whereas the Magisterium's typical role was that of teaching. By including both roles as belonging to the Magisterium, *Dei Verbum* "relativizes the old distinction between *ecclesia docens* and *ecclesia discens*, and makes room for the whole Church's discernment in this regard, and in particular that of the laity as well."⁶⁵ For the Second Vatican Council, the Magisterium would be truly a servant of God's word when, with the rest of the Church, it adopts a listening attitude towards it. It is only after listening to it faithfully that it can teach and interpret it authentically. The distinction between the teaching and the learning roles, which the Council wanted to reverse, might have been the result of the dual teaching and juridical roles the Magisterium assumed along history. For a long time the Magisterium saw itself as the body that both promulgates law (*potestas iurisdictionis*) and teaches doctrine that sanctified (*potestas ordinis*), whereas the faithful were expected to obediently accept these laws and doctrine indiscriminately. By time, these roles erroneously morphed into one, with the Magisterium eventually becoming unable to distinguish between the teaching of the word of God and the imposition of disciplinary precepts. Hence, "this renewed appreciation for the role of ecclesial reception also entailed a reassessment of the apostolic ministry of the bishops."⁶⁶ This re-assessment implies a model with two moments of reception. After receiving God's word through Scriptures and Tradition together with the other faithful,

65. Boeve, "Revelation, Scripture and Tradition," 425.

66. Richard R. Gaillardetz, "The Reception of Doctrine: New Perspectives," in *Authority in the Roman Catholic Church*, ed. Bernard Hoose (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2002), 96.

then the bishops will be able to appropriate it actively to be able to hand it authoritatively to those entrusted in their pastoral care. Consequently, “[t]he authority of the Church’s teaching and proclamation is an expression of the authenticity of its life as a *koinonia* in the triune life of God.”⁶⁷

Rahner couches the magisterium within the context of eschatology. The teaching office of the Church rests on the Christ-event that becomes historically present to all generations through the witness of its own words. These words are primarily uttered by the Church as a whole. However, the Church “is not just a meta-historical fellowship, but a historically structured society with a confession of faith and a doctrinal authority.”⁶⁸ It is only in the context of the eschatological nature of the Church that the magisterium’s teaching authority could be best understood. Furthermore, this means that the Magisterium’s authority is the guarantor that the salvific words of Christ are transmitted to every generation. This view reaffirms the Magisterium as being in service of the Word under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and not its replacement.

An important aspect related to the Magisterium is that of “synodality”. Throughout the Church’s history, episcopal synodality has been in the centre of many heated debates, especially when compared to the power of the papacy. One might say that the controversy peaked twice in a special manner. The first time was in the time of “Conciliarism” (14th-16th centuries) when the debate centred about who was juridically the stronger: whether it was the Pope or an ecumenical council of bishops. The second time was in the more recent past during the time of the First Vatican Council (1869-70).

67. Nicholas Sagovsky, “The ARCIC Statements,” in *Authority in the Roman Catholic Church*, ed. Bernard Hoose (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2002), 139.

68. Rahner, “Magisterium,” 352.

The central issue at this time was the concept of papal infallibility regarding articles of faith and morals, therefore to theological issues very closely related to Divine Revelation. The dogmatic Constitution *Pastor Aeternus* published by the First Vatican Council defined four doctrines of faith, all concerning the primacy of the papacy including its infallible teaching authority. This conciliar document has caused a havoc among the bishops attending the council since it was seen by some as departing substantially from the Church's Tradition which attests that "the episcopate as a whole possesses an 'infallible' doctrinal authority."⁶⁹ Respected Catholic theologians were critical of this constitution, seeing it as unnecessary. One of these was the English cardinal and intellectual John Henry Newman who earlier had already expressed similar opinions following the dogmatic definition of the Immaculate Conception by Pope Pius IX in 1854.⁷⁰

One of the things that the Second Vatican Council will be known for is the conciliar Fathers' request to Pope Paul VI to set up the Synod of Bishops as a permanent ecclesial institution to meet periodically and not just in extraordinary circumstances such as ecumenical councils. The pope acceded to this request through the *motu proprio* called *Apostolica Sollicitudo* dated 15th September 1965, while the Council was still in session. While acknowledging the need for stronger union between the papacy and the bishops who were placed by the Holy Spirit to rule the Church of God, the emphasis seems to be more about them assisting the pope rather than synodality in its fuller sense; "bishops chosen from various parts of the world are to offer more effective assistance to the

69. Rahner, "Magisterium," 351.

70. John Henry Newman, "On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine," *Rambler*, July 1859, accessed March 17, 2020, <http://www.newmanreader.org/works/rambler/consulting.html>.

supreme Shepherd.”⁷¹ The *motu proprio* continued to say that the synod’s function is that “of providing information and offering advice. It can also enjoy the power of making decisions when such power is conferred upon it by the Roman Pontiff; in this case, it belongs to him to ratify the decisions of the Synod.”⁷² In spite of preserving this structure during his long papacy, Pope John Paul II’s perspective of synodality appears to have been primarily that of assisting rather than participating with the successor of Peter in his magisterial authority. Archbishop John Quinn provides a rather bleak portrait of synods during the pontificate of Pope John Paul II:

“The tendency since the council would appear to be to restrict the synod as much as possible. For instance, the synod is called by the Pope, its agenda is determined by the Pope; preliminary documents of episcopal conferences are not permitted to be shared with other conferences or made public but must be sent directly to Rome; ... its [the synod’s] deliberations are secret, and its recommendations to the pope are secret; the Pope writes and issues the final document after the synod has concluded and the bishops have returned home.”⁷³

During the pontificate of Benedict XVI, the situation appeared to be one of greater mutual respect. However, a real signal of change in the importance given to synodality by Rome was witnessed upon the election of Pope Francis in 2013. In his first appearance as pope on the balcony of St Peter’s Basilica, he referred to himself as “the bishop of Rome” rather than as the pope. The agenda of synods started to be done in a more participative manner and the pope himself has encouraged the bishops to speak “freely” (using the Greek word “επιέκεια”) because only this would help in achieving true discernment under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The announcement that the next

71. Pope Paul VI, *Motu Proprio Apostolica Sollicitudo*, Holy See, September 15, 1965, accessed March 17, 2020, http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_p-vi_motu-proprio_19650915_apostolica-sollicitudo.html.

72. Ibid.

73. John Quinn, *The Reform of the Papacy: The Costly Call for Christian Unity* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1999), 111.

Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops due in 2022 will be discussing the theme of synodality⁷⁴ is in itself a witness to Pope Francis' determination of reinvesting in the synodal ministry its rightful authority and dignity.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter delved into the constituent elements that characterise orthodox doctrine and faith. This was done primarily by performing an in-depth analysis of the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*. Since this conciliar document is considered to be one of the most authoritative instruments to speak about the transmission of Divine Revelation, it was formally endorsed as the main source to identify those elements that contribute towards those truths the Church regards as fundamental to its existence and identity. These were identified as the Sacred Scriptures, Sacred Tradition and the Magisterium. Various themes related to these elements were explored in further detail.

The final chapter will identify various characteristics that are apparent of an orthodox doctrine, in the light of Divine Revelation and through Sacred Scriptures and Tradition as mediated by the Magisterium. These characteristics shall be illustrated, among others, by the various doctrines that originated in the first four ecumenical councils of the Church and which were reviewed in this dissertation's first chapter.

74. Christopher Wells, "Synod of Bishops to take up theme of synodality in 2022," *Vatican News*, March 7, 2020, accessed March 17, 2020, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-03/synod-of-bishops-to-take-up-theme-of-synodality-in-2022.html>.

Chapter Three

A Developing Orthodoxy in the First Four Ecumenical Councils and Beyond: Newman and Schillebeeckx

3.0 Introduction

The task that this dissertation has set out to accomplish is that of understanding what were the main criteria used by the early Church to discern which of the contemporary beliefs were to be held as true and faithful in the light of Divine Revelation. Consequently, the Church also had to identify those beliefs that were judged as not representing faithfully this salvific event, which constituted its fundamental identity and mission.

In the first chapter, an overview of the first four ecumenical councils was presented. Their main teachings vis-à-vis the main Christological and Trinitarian controversies prevalent at the time was outlined within their proper socio-political context. It was argued that such a backdrop had a critical influence not only on the strategic choice of venues where the councils were held, who attended and who presided them, but also on the dogmatic canons promulgated by these councils.

The second chapter took a closer look at the nature of Divine Revelation as it is portrayed in *Dei Verbum*, the Dogmatic Constitution of the Second Vatican Council. Revelation was primarily described as a personal encounter between God and humanity that reached its apex with the Incarnation of the Son of God and His Logos in the person of Jesus Christ with the power of the Holy Spirit. In the light of this conciliar document, it was posited that Divine Revelation is known primarily from two interdependent streams

flowing from the same source of Revelation: Sacred Scriptures and Tradition, both of which “form one sacred deposit of the word of God.”¹ The body within the Church who is entrusted with “rightly dividing the word of truth” is the episcopal college, *cum et sub Petro*. So essentially, the concept of orthodoxy in the Church’s teaching, especially that pertaining to Divine Revelation, draws from the streams of Sacred Scriptures and Tradition. *Dei Verbum* clearly asserts that through the ongoing exegetic study of the Sacred Scriptures and the theological reflection on Tradition, the orthodox teaching of the Church is not rendered a dead word but a dynamic reality.

This chapter shall now explore further the nature of this dynamic orthodoxy of the Church’s doctrine, both as it has manifested itself within the first four ecumenical councils and beyond. This will be done primarily with the help of two different conceptual frameworks provided by two notable theologians, namely John Henry Newman (1801-1890) and Edward Schillebeeckx (1914-2009). Both frameworks focus on the Development of Doctrine, albeit from a totally different perspective. Newman’s model is of a patristic and historical nature, whereas that of Schillebeeckx is essentially phenomenological. In spite of this different point of view both conceptual frameworks could be used in a complementary manner to provide a more holistic view of the subject matter.

1. Vatican Council II, *Dogmatic Constitution Dei Verbum, The Holy See, November 18, 1965*, accessed March 9, 2020, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html, 10.

3.1 Newman's Seven Notes of a Genuine Development of Doctrine as contrasted to Corruptions

These Seven Notes are found in Newman's book *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* which he wrote when he was still part of the Anglican Communion but published for the first time in 1845, the year he was received in the Catholic Church. Having described, in the first part of his book, the development of true doctrine viewed in itself through the historical argument, in the second part of the book he identifies seven characteristics of how true doctrine develops in contrast to its corruptions. He then goes on to apply these principles to various epochs within Church history, starting with the first centuries. Primarily, this work aimed to prove that, contrary to the Protestant claim, the way doctrine developed in the Catholic Church along the centuries was in continuation and faithful both to the Sacred Scriptures and to the Church Fathers as reflected in the first ecumenical councils.

3.1.1 Preservation of Type

This note makes use of the analogy of physical growth which Vincent of Lerins made earlier on and which featured in the previous chapter of this dissertation. This note therefore asserts that any development in a true doctrine should be seen as preserving the basic characteristics of the original doctrine since "every calling or office has its own type, which those who fill it are bound to maintain; and to deviate from the type in any material point is to relinquish the calling."² Newman however says that this does not mean that there is no room for variation. Using the same analogy of physical growth,

2. John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, Chapter V, Section I, para. 2, accessed April 3, 2020, <http://restorationchristianculture.org/wp-content/uploads/Essay-on-the-Development-of-Christian-Doctrine-An-John-Henry-Newman.pdf>.

he says that certain animals, such as birds and butterflies, begin their life in one form that is totally different from their anatomy; however, they remain the same animal throughout. The same is with doctrine. The Trinitarian doctrine is an authentic development of the doctrine of the Unity and Simplicity of God. While every Person within the Trinity has His own proper personhood, they share the same divine substance, with God the Father being the *αρχή* or the ontological principle. Such variations in the formulation of doctrine normally take place with the passage of time, as Tradition develops. Resistance to accept such variations outright constitutes corruption of the same doctrine. In making this argument, Newman draws a parallelism with the way the Gospel developed from Mosaic Law. “The Gospel is the development of the Law; yet what difference seems wider than which separates the unbending rule of Moses from the ‘grace and truth’ which ‘came by Jesus Christ?’”³ Such development has been confirmed by Jesus himself who said that he had not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets but to bring them to fulfilment (Mt 5:17).

3.1.2 Continuity of Principles

As much as doctrines should conserve their type, they should also conserve their principle. “The life of doctrines may be said to consist in the law or principle which they embody.”⁴ Whereas principles tend to be more of an ethical and practical nature, doctrine is more intellectual. Doctrine defines principles and therefore it is more amenable to change in order to explain in a more contemporary jargon what principles stand for. This might however present a challenge since different doctrinal articulations could develop from the same principle. Whilst Cyril of Alexandria in the Council of

3. Newman, *The Development of Christian Doctrine*, Chapter V, Section 1, para. 8.

4. Ibid., Section II, para. 1.

Ephesus, with his position on the divinity of Jesus against the Nestorian position was hailed as the champion of orthodox teaching, his disciple Eutyches was condemned as heretic in the Council of Chalcedon for holding essentially with Cyril's teachings. The fundamental difference between the two was in their articulation. Where Cyril emphasised the unity of both divine and human in the person of Christ, Eutyches' position was that "before the Incarnation there were two natures, after their union one."⁵ One could say that the terminology used by the latter was unfortunate but the principle behind the stand adopted by both was identical. In other words, although identical in principle, Eutyches took Cyril's formulation to an extreme and exaggerated it.

Newman elucidates the continuity of principles by observing that while heretics might have come out with diametrically opposing teachings, all of them adhered to the principle of removing the sense of mystery from theology. This element of mystery has always been a characteristic of true teaching. This sense of mystery is particularly strong in the Eastern tradition of the Church. A sense of awe and mystery is clearly expressed in the Eucharistic anaphora attributed to John Chrysostom: "for you are God, ineffable, incomprehensible, invisible, inconceivable, ever existing, eternally the same."⁶ What one heresy after another sought to do was to remove this sense of mystery and attempted to provide an intellectual explanation to what cannot be adequately

5. Newman, *The Development of Christian Doctrine*, Chapter VI, Section 3, §3 para. 1.

6. *The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, accessed April 3, 2020, <https://www.goarch.org/-/the-divine-liturgy-of-saint-john-chrysostom>.

explained except through prayer, “[f]or that mystery is not simply intellectual mystery; it is something much deeper.”⁷

3.1.3 Power of Assimilation

Keeping with the analogy of physical growth, Newman says that a living thing grows by “taking into its own substance external materials; and this absorption or assimilation is completed when the materials appropriated come to belong to it or enter into its unity.”⁸ Applying this to doctrine, the development of true doctrine entails that it evolves by adapting to the ever-changing realities. Doctrines are formulated as a response to a particular milieu in which the Church has to act and state its beliefs clearly and unequivocally. As shown in the first chapter of this dissertation the promulgation of orthodox doctrine by the first four ecumenical councils was the result of a combination of political, ecclesial and doctrinal factors. Whilst these councils were convened by the civil authorities, primarily with the aim of keeping political stability in their territory, these councils dealt with both ecclesiastical issues (both organisational and disciplinary) and also tackled doctrinal controversies prevalent at the time. When one looks at the first four ecumenical councils, there were instances where the bishops gathered had to “assimilate” the pressure exerted by emperor’s delegates; however, they did it in such a way that they kept the authenticity of doctrine intact. When it came to doctrinal controversies, when it was seen fit and consonant with Sacred Scriptures and Tradition, the *via media* was adopted. However, assimilation did not come at all costs; when “[t]he Semi-arians attempted a middle way between orthodoxy and heresy,

7. Andrew Louth, *Introducing Eastern Orthodox Theology* (London: SPCK, 2013), 7.

8. Newman, *The Development of Christian Doctrine*, Chapter V, Section III, para. 1.

but could not stand their ground; at length part fell into Macedonianism, and part joined the Church.”⁹

3.1.4 Logical Sequence

The articulation of doctrine necessarily entails the use of logic since this discipline is necessary for the organisation of thought and therefore provides a better possibility that the doctrinal development enjoys intellectual consistency. Undoubtedly, the use of philosophy as a vehicle to expound certain fundamental truths proved critical for the Church, both internally and for apologetic purposes. Although this method reached its apex during the time of Scholasticism, the Church has used philosophical concepts since its early centuries to structure its doctrine. A pioneer of this approach was Justin Martyr (+165) in the second century, especially with his work *First Apology* that he wrote to the Roman Emperor Antoninus Pius (138-161) in which he protested against the persecution of Christians. He also provided an explanation of Christian rituals and practices. The *Second Apology* is also attributed to Justin. Justin maximised his communication skills by writing both works in the style typically used by the Roman administration of the time. This style is also evident in the canons of the ecumenical councils under focus. Newman however qualifies what he means by “logic” in this context; “if by this is meant a conscious reasoning from premisses (sic) to conclusion, of course the answer must be in the negative.”¹⁰ This is an idea that grows gradually in a body of thought whose formation is not exclusively cerebral but influenced by various factors, including ethical considerations and circumstantial events. Even when it comes to logic, this should not be considered as a *sine qua non* condition for the true development of doctrine for “it

9. Newman, *The Development of Christian Doctrine*, Chapter V, Section III, para. 4.

10. Ibid., Section IV, para. 1.

may be granted that the spontaneous process which goes within the mind itself is higher and choicer than that which is logical.”¹¹ This “spontaneous process” has been described by the Church as *sensus fidei fidelis* which is “the adherence of the intellect, through love, to revealed truth.”¹² It “is infallible in itself with regard to its object: the true faith.”¹³ Rather than being diametrically opposed, logic and the *sensus fidei fidelis* are complementary since they help each other in a mutual manner towards the understanding, as much as is humanly possible, of the mystery of Revelation. Logic on its own can lead different thinkers to different conclusions even when they start from a common point of departure. As an example, Newman mentions Origen (+253) whose pupils included saints and church rulers and was praised by various Church Fathers, “yet, as time proceeded, a definite heterodoxy was the growing result of his theology, and at length, three hundred years after his death, he was condemned.”¹⁴ The same fate was allotted to Diodorus of Tarsus (+390), who although he was a strong supporter of the teaching of the Council of Nicaea, was accused by Cyril of Alexandria, as being the true author of Nestorianism together with Theodore of Mopsuestia (+428).¹⁵

3.1.5 Anticipation of its Future

This note sheds light on the evolutionary nature of doctrine. On the one hand, generally speaking, heretical teachings tend to be relatively short-lived because their scope and content is limited to a specific doctrinal point and alienated from the greater narrative

11. Newman, *The Development of Christian Doctrine*, Chapter V, Section IV, para. 2.

12. International Theological Commission, *Sensus fidei in the Life of the Church*, Holy See, 2014, accessed March 17, 2020, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20140610_sensus-fidei_en.html, 48.

13. *Ibid.*, 55.

14. Newman, *The Development of Christian Doctrine*, Chapter V, Section IV, para. 5.

15. *Ibid.*

of faith. Orthodox doctrines, on the other hand, have within themselves the possibility of future elaboration and their perspective forms part of the whole doctrinal body of the Church, “though a lapse of time be necessary to bring them to perfection.”¹⁶ Orthodox teaching that eventually evolves into a more elaborate and clearer exposition could know its origin either in the Sacred Scriptures or in Tradition, or both. For example, the Nicene doctrine about Jesus being of the same substance (*ομοούσιος*) with the Father and hence being truly God, is not found explicitly in the Sacred Scriptures but is a development of the ancient baptismal formulae of the Church, including that found in the *Traditio Apostolica*,¹⁷ which dates back to the first half of the third century.

3.1.6 Conservative Action upon its Past

If the fifth note was forward-looking, the sixth one could be described as its corollary since it is past-oriented. Whereas the fifth note perceived future development, the sixth characteristic determines that any orthodox teaching should itself be based on strong doctrinal foundations.

“A true development, then, may be described as one which is conservative of the course of antecedent developments being really those antecedents and something besides them: it is an addition which illustrates, not obscures, corroborates, not corrects, the body of thought from which it proceeds; and this is its characteristic as contrasted with a corruption.”¹⁸

So, while it is conceivable that a true doctrine could eventually develop into a heretical one if its development is thwarted by mistaken logic or unfaithfulness towards Tradition, every true doctrine should itself be necessarily rooted into true doctrine. Nevertheless, Newman says that since heretics typically disintegrated the unified orthodox doctrine

16. Newman, *The Development of Christian Doctrine*, Chapter V, Section V, para. 1.

17. Hippolytus of Rome, *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus of Rome*, accessed April 4, 2020, http://www.stjohnsarlingtonva.org/Customer-Content/saintjohnsarlington/CMS/files/EFM/Apostolic_Tradition_by_Hippolytus.pdf, 21: 12-18.

18. Newman, *The Development of Christian Doctrine*, Chapter V, Section VI, para. 1.

and skewed a particular aspect of it, it is still possible to retrieve an integral true doctrine out of the vestiges left by the heretics. A classical illustration of this characteristic is the credal formula which “is for the most part the combination of separate truths, which heretics have divided among themselves, and err in dividing”.¹⁹ Michael Fiedrowicz states the following on the formulation of the creed by the early councils:

“If the rule of faith was already an expression of the awareness of the normative truth and the baptismal profession of faith as the criterion of orthodoxy, in the synods of the fourth century they came to establish their own doctrinal professions of faith, which positively exposed faith in precise formulas (πίστις, εκθεσις πίστεως, σύμβολόν) taking into account its determinants, they condemned errors against it (ανάθεμα) and served to demonstrate orthodoxy, since they had to be approved by the bishops.”²⁰

The two most known credal formulations which are the product of an ecumenical council are those promulgated by Nicaea and Costantinople. While the Nicene Creed is considered as “the first certain example of a declaratory creed used as proof of orthodox doctrine,”²¹ it was the result of a long tradition of interrogatory baptismal formulae, kerygmatic Christological confessions and various Rules of Faith which had been already established in various Christian communities. Although it had not been adopted immediately by the Universal Church as the symbol of its orthodox faith, especially due to certain resistance in the West, it had nevertheless “shown a way to formulate creeds.”²² In fact, in the period between the councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople

19. Newman, *The Development of Christian Doctrine*, Chapter V, Section VI, para. 2.

20. Michael Fiedrowicz, *Teologia dei Padri della Chiesa: Fondamenti dell'antica riflessione Cristiana sulla fede* (Brescia: Editrice Queriniana, 2010), 229. My translation of the original Italian text: “Se già la regola di fede era espressione della coscienza della verità normattiva e la professione battesimale di fede criterio dell'ortodossia, nei sinodi del IV secolo si arrivò a stabilire proprie professioni dottrinali di fede, che esponevano positivamente la fede in formule precise (πίστις, εκθεσις πίστεως, σύμβολόν) tenendo conto di determinate sue messe in discussione, condannavano errori ad essa contrari (ανάθεμα) e servivano a dimostrare l'ortodossia, dal momento che dovevano essere sottoscritte dai vescovi.”

21. Richard P.C. Hanson, “Creeds and Confessions of Faith”, in *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, Vol. 1, ed. Angelo Di Berardino, trans. Adrian Walford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 207.

22. Ibid.

(381) a number of other creeds were formulated, primarily as an attempt to find alternative expressions to “*ομολούσιος*”. Such efforts were fiercely resisted by the opponents of Arianism, most notably by Athanasius of Alexandria and the Cappadocian Fathers. Eventually, the latter’s efforts paid off with the promulgation of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. This creed has not only confirmed the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father but also expounded the doctrine on the Holy Spirit as “the Lord and Giver of life”, on the Church as being “one, holy, catholic and apostolic”, on the resurrection of the dead and the life to come. Undoubtedly, the early Church had been holding these truths for a long time as part of its Tradition and celebrating them in its liturgy. Their confirmation by the Magisterium (in the form of a synodal gathering of bishops) signified their formal endorsement of such long-held beliefs. “As far as the doctrine of the faith was concerned, it was not so much a question of finding the truth, but rather of confessing or restoring unanimity in this truth.”²³

3.1.7 Chronic Vigour

This last characteristic relates to Newman’s theory that while heresies are essentially short-lived, true doctrine enjoys longevity; quoting the Latin proverb “*si gravis, brevis; si longus, levis*.”²⁴ Typically, heretical teaching does not only experience corruption but it eventually dissolves. Although initially they might be seen as dynamic, such erroneous teachings eventually die unless they take a different course of error and reinvent themselves as new heresies. “And in this way indeed, but in this way only, a heretical

23. Fiedrowicz, *Teologia dei Padri della Chiesa*, 321. My translation of the original Italian text: “*Per quanto riguardava la dottrina della fede non si trattava tanto di trovare la verità, quanto piuttosto di confessare or ristabilire l’unanimità in tale verità.*”

24. Newman, *The Development of Christian Doctrine*, Chapter V, Section VII, para. 1. Literally, “if severe, short; if long, light”.

principle will continue in life many years, first running one way, then another.”²⁵ One form of corruption is decay. This process entails that the corruption takes place slowly whilst superficially they appear to be enjoying popular support that, amongst others, could be due to dependence on political support. An example of this is the Arian heresy which although it experienced internal divisions, it thrived for a relatively long time in certain Western countries due to the support of the political masters. Newton states that “by the end of the fifth century the heresy has been established by the Visigoths in France and Spain, in Portugal by the Suevi, in Africa by the Vandals and by the Ostrogoths in Italy.”²⁶ Notwithstanding this apparent strength, even in its heyday, Arianism lacked one important element that marks true doctrine: communion with Rome. Even in these times, “intercommunion was the visible ecclesiastical distinction between [the Catholics] and their Arian rivals.”²⁷

It is fit at this stage to add a brief note on the methodology employed by Newman in discerning true doctrine from a corrupted one. The inductive method used by Newman is “a process of investigation which begins from the data relevant to the problem, and moves to a tentative solution of the problem which is variously named, as an ‘antecedent probability’, or, more generally, an ‘hypothesis’.”²⁸ This methodological process normally involves three stages: (i) defining the problem and its data, (ii) verification of hypothesis, and consequently (iii) certitude. Whilst, the “seven notes” of authentic growth served as seven tests and trials of the hypothesis,²⁹ Newman added

25. Newman, *The Development of Christian Doctrine*, Chapter V, Section VII, para. 2.

26. *Ibid.*, Chapter VI, Section III, §1 para. 1.

27. *Ibid.*, para. 7.

28. Thomas J. Norris, *Newman and His Theological Method: A guide for the Theologian Today*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977), 75.

29. *Ibid.*, 76.

a fourth stage to his method, decision. He has not only employed his method to reach an intellectual and rational conclusion about what constitutes true doctrine but also to act existentially upon such a conclusion. "It is the call to be authentic. In this instance of doctrinal growth, it demanded that he 'resolve to be received' into the Roman Church"³⁰ and his assent to its claim for apostolic Tradition. Various authors criticised Newman's method, primarily to the fact that he attempted to equate his certitude elicited from the theological method to the status of scientific positive certitude. This accusation levelled at Newman could be contested on two points. Firstly that this method led "to the certitude of mind and to certainty of proposition. Secondly, this certitude resulted from the mind's own power of judgement"³¹ after analysing a number of arguments. This leads to a state of moral certitude enlightened by the truths of Revelation.

3.2 Schillebeeckx's Perspective about the Development of Doctrine

Schillebeeckx's own theological thought on the development of doctrine went through a significant evolution although it has always been rooted in "a more fundamental concern of his thought: explaining the significance and abiding validity of belief in Jesus Christ in the complex, pluralistic, and secularised modern world."³² His central concern was that of rendering Christian doctrine and dogma found in Tradition "a living reality

30. Norris, *Newman and His Theological Method*, 76.

31. *Ibid.*, 80.

32. Daniel P. Thompson, "Schillebeeckx on the Development of Doctrine," *Theological Studies* 62 (2001): 303.

for the faithful today.”³³ Throughout his career, he was primarily and fundamentally interested to understand how the Church relates to the world.³⁴

This quest was however deeply entrenched in the teachings of one of the oldest ecumenical councils of the Church, that of Chalcedon, namely on the two natures of Christ. This doctrine has asserted that in the person of Christ there is both the human and the divine natures, which means that *עִמָּנוּאֵל* (“God is with us”) was not only a human prophet but also the divine Son of God who will remain always with us. From this follows that the development of doctrine should not only be approached from a historical perspective but also from an existential one. This line of thought is very much close to *Dei Verbum’s* articulation of Revelation as already discussed in the previous chapter of this dissertation. According to this perspective, the Creed desists from being a simple list of dogmatic statements formulated more than sixteen centuries ago and becomes truly a symbol of our salvation through our encounter with God in the here-and-now, “it is the culmination of a process of learning about the faith.”³⁵

In reviewing Schillebeeckx’s general theory of the development of doctrine, this work shall be focusing on three aspects: his epistemological and theological framework, the criteria he sets in defining orthodoxy and apostolicity, and consequently his understanding of doctrinal language.³⁶

33. Thompson, “Schillebeeckx on the Development of Doctrine,” 303.

34. Robert J. Schreiter, “Edward Schillebeeckx,” in *The Modern Theologians*, Vol. 1, ed. David F. Ford, (Oxford and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1990), 154.

35. Louth, *Introducing Eastern Orthodox Theology*, 2.

36. In its analysis, this dissertation shall adopt a schema similar to that employed by Thompson in the article already cited in footnote 32 of this chapter.

3.2.1 Schillebeeckx's epistemological and theological framework

Schillebeeckx's epistemological framework is one where "all objects, subjects, events, ideas, and experiences exist only within a network of irreducible, continually dynamic, and mutually informing relationships."³⁷ It is therefore an epistemology that is aversive to dualism, where one thing is contrasted to another. Although different elements may be analysed separately, however they form part of one unified reality. This perspective is very much similar to that adopted by the Second Vatican Council, where it envisaged Sacred Scriptures and Tradition as two interdependent streams drawing from the unique source of Revelation. Fundamentally, this means that the sole source of orthodox doctrine is Revelation. Furthermore, "Schillebeeckx exhorts his readers not to accept an easy dualism between the 'Church' and the 'world', and not to slip back into a ghettoized mentality where the Church treats the 'world' as something unholy and entirely separate."³⁸

Human experience and knowledge happens within three "epistemological circles" which in turn overlap each other: one where knowledge is mediated with concepts, another where knowledge is mediated by historical tradition - the present and the expectation of the future, and finally a circle of theory and praxis, where experience is contrasted with ideology and consequently human action is adapted accordingly. Whereas in his early theological thought his epistemology consisted only of the "first circle", the other two developed at later stages. Therefore, even though Revelation, "the explicit naming

37. Thompson, "Schillebeeckx on the Development of Doctrine," 305.

38. Daniel Minch, "Eschatology and Theology of Hope: The Impact of *Gaudium et Spes* on the Thought of Edward Schillebeeckx," *The Heythrop Journal*, 59 (2018): 273-285, accessed April 14, 2020, <https://doi-org.ejournals.um.edu.mt/10.1111/heyj.12352>.

of (this) salvation coming from God”³⁹, and its dependant theological terminology, do not have their origin in the human experience, they should nevertheless be comprehensible within such an experience. Framing doctrine in this epistemology, true doctrine is that which not only articulates the salvific relationship between God and humanity in terms of intellectual concepts but also is able to contextualise it within a historical perspective of an eschatological nature and which could ultimately be re-interpreted in a language that is relevant in the daily life of the contemporary Christian. Hence, true understanding of the doctrine about Christ’s divinity, about his dual divine and human natures and the nature of the Trinity is not simply obtained through the reading of a conciliar tract or canon but through “the salvific encounter with Jesus [which] is the basis for the explicit language of revelation, Scripture, and confession in the Church.”⁴⁰ Such an encounter needs to take place within a communal (ecclesial) context.

Schillebeeckx’s epistemological framework also includes his philosophy of history, which also impacts on his understanding of the development of doctrine. His schema consists of a three-fold rhythm of cultural change. The first rhythm is that of history made of “facts”. This is in itself brief. The second one is made up of “conjunctural history”, or “epochal history” which goes beyond the historical fact *per se* and has a deeper cultural effect, although its rate of change eventually slows down. Finally, the “structural history” typically spans centuries and acts as the fulcrum between what remains unchanged and what changes.⁴¹ This three-fold philosophical approach could be applied

39. Thompson, “Schillebeeckx on the Development of Doctrine,” 306.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid., 307.

to three different moments in the life of a doctrine. The first moment is equivalent to the historical circumstances leading to the formulation of a particular doctrine. In itself this is only a short period which ends up with the articulation and promulgation of a particular doctrine. The second phase is about how such doctrine is integrated in the wider Tradition and is preserved by the Church along the centuries according to the spirit of a particular epoch. Finally, structural history takes place at the juncture between one historical epoch and another. At this point, when a re-interpretation of history takes place, a re-interpretation of doctrine becomes necessary. For Schillebeeckx this is an on-going enfolding dialectical process. "Just as there is a development of dogma in the Church's tradition, so too can the Church's attitude towards the world evolve recognisably in the course of history. The Church does not, after all, perceive all the implications of redemption from the very beginning."⁴²

3.2.2 Defining orthodoxy and apostolicity

In his pre-conciliar theology, Schillebeeckx used to locate orthodoxy within the conceptual confines of dogma itself without giving due consideration to the social milieu in which such dogma is being handed over to be believed. However, in his later theological thought, Schillebeeckx depicted a more dynamic image of orthodoxy and he placed it within "a hermeneutical, critical, and practical translation of Christian experience from one historical era to the next. Because this translation of experience in the Church is itself the line of apostolic continuity, it is also the bearer of 'orthodoxy'."⁴³ A radical shift from "concepts" to "experience" can be therefore noted.

42. Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx Volume 4: World and Church*, eds. Ted Mark Schoof, Carl Sterkens *et alii* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 85.

43. Thompson, "Schillebeeckx on the Development of Doctrine," 309.

Consequently, he identified three criteria to satisfy orthodoxy: that of the “proportional norm”, that of “orthopraxis” and that of “the reception by the whole people of God”.⁴⁴

The “proportional norm” starts with the principle that it is not possible to understand the concepts of faith outside the context of human historicity. Such understanding is the function of “the act or intentionality of faith itself in relationship to the various referential contexts in which that act occurs.”⁴⁵ It means that the resultant relationship between the elements of Tradition, where the original message has taken place, and the particular situation where such message is being interpreted (the *sitz im leben*) is the determinant factor to ensure an orthodox understanding of a particular dogma. In every epoch, the strength of the Church’s teachings depended on its ability of contextualising a message within its proper socio-historical setting. To use Pauline jargon, the word of Truth needs to be “rightly divided” between Tradition and situation.

Orthodoxy however needs to go beyond the hermeneutical dimension into orthopraxis. Orthopraxis is a key concept in Schillebeeckx’s theological thought. Robert Schreiter affirms that for Schillebeeckx, “rightness of belief must be expressed in a dialectic of theory and action and not just in theory alone.”⁴⁶ For him, “orthopraxis itself is part of the translation of the understanding of faith.”⁴⁷ This second criteria for orthodoxy is very much similar to the old maxim of “*lex orandi, lex credendi lex vivendi*” in the sense that, in order to be authentic, the orthodoxy which is found in the liturgy and in doctrine has to be lived in daily life. True belief in the saving grace brought by Christ through His

44. Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Understanding of Faith: Interpretation and Criticism*, (Atlanta: Seabury Press, 1974), 55-72, in Thompson, “Schillebeeckx on the Development of Doctrine,” 309.

45. Thompson, “Schillebeeckx on the Development of Doctrine,” 310.

46. Schreiter, “Edward Schillebeeckx,” 158.

47. Thompson, “Schillebeeckx on the Development of Doctrine,” 311.

Incarnation to all humanity needs to be translated into the Christian's resistance to anything that goes against the dignity of human life.

Finally, this interrelationship between conceptual language and praxis needs to be accepted by the people of God. Again, this criterion seems to recall Vincent of Lerin's own criteria for orthodoxy, "*Quod ubique, semper, et ab omnibus*". Seeing the entire Church as the people of God, orthodoxy goes beyond the dialectical relationship between the *ecclesia docens et ecclesia discens* where the Magisterium hands over teachings which the rest of the Church is expected to accept unquestionably.⁴⁸ Theologians have a critical role to play in helping to community to accept these teachings in a way that it "must continually translate and re-enact the previously accepted understanding of faith within its own era."⁴⁹ Notwithstanding the decree by the Council of Ephesus that no other Creed save that of Nicaea should be used by the universal Church, the people of God eventually felt that they needed a more expanded explanation of the Christian faith, which gave way to the wider use within the Church of the Creed as promulgated by the Council of Constantinople.

3.2.3 Schillebeeckx's understanding of doctrinal language

For Schillebeeckx, dogma is "the Christian teaching of faith in so far as that cannot be given up, because it goes back to the word of God."⁵⁰ These however does not make them timeless propositions about salvation. They have been formulated within a particular set of limiting circumstances and within a specific hermeneutical framework.

48. Annetto Depasquale, "The Learning Church," in *The Dove Homing in the Owl's Nest*, Aa. Vv., (Malta: Theology Students' Association, 1989), 139-145.

49. Thompson, "Schillebeeckx on the Development of Doctrine," 313.

50. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Theologisk Testament: Notarieel nog niet verleden* (Baarn, Netherlands: H. Nelissen, 1994): 73, in Thompson, "Schillebeeckx on the Development of Doctrine," 313.

The politico-historical milieu in which dogmas were pronounced by the first four councils have been amply described in the first chapter of this dissertation. This means that whilst the truth contained in dogmatic teaching remains, they need to be understood as a product of the “proportional norm” through which they emerged. Therefore, what is most important is not the continuity of the same language in which the dogma was formulated but a continuity of the same faith it seeks to reveal. This may therefore bring a “break” in the doctrinal language used; however, such a break may be critical in re-discovering the truth behind the dogma itself. Schillebeeckx touched upon the fact that due to the limitations of dogmatic language, new linguistic concepts might need to be identified. This is not a recent phenomenon in the Church. As early as the Council of Chalcedon, the concepts denoting “nature” and “person” were used interchangeably in different cultures in such a way that what probably determined the orthodox from the heterodox teachings was the terminology used rather than the content of the teachings of both respective sides.

With language being a human construct, a tension exists between the reality of Revelation and “our merely conceptual, expressive, even metaphorical and symbolic verbalization of the reality-of-revelation-as-known-by-us.”⁵¹ The way developed primarily by the Eastern tradition to address this verbal inadequacy to express divine realities is through the development of apophatic, or negative, theology. “Through such an approach, then, (Orthodox theology) affirms the absolute transcendence of God

51. Thompson, “Schillebeeckx on the Development of Doctrine,” 314.

while at the same time underlining the abiding immanence of God. For God is both beyond us and with us; God is both above us and within us.”⁵²

Another tension created through language in a doctrinal context is that between faith and the prevalent ideological and situational circumstances. As already explained earlier, the first Councils were convoked by the Roman emperors with a clear political agenda of settling a particular theological controversy in order to re-establish order within their empire. The doctrinal content was of secondary importance and any formulation was acceptable as far as order was restored. With this background in mind, one could understand better the way how certain dogmas were formulated and the terminology used.

An important point raised by Schillebeeckx is that of the “hierarchy of truths”. The Second Vatican Council itself has decreed that “[w]hen comparing doctrines with one another ... in Catholic doctrine there exists a ‘hierarchy’ of truths, since they vary in their relation to the fundamental Christian faith.”⁵³ This means that some beliefs are less central than others to the Christian faith and those who hold to a variation of these “secondary” teachings are not necessarily breaking from the orthodox lineage of the Church.

Schillebeeckx argues that one way how to revitalise certain dogmatic teaching of the Church is by reformulating it in a language that could be better understood by the contemporary Christian. What missionaries attempted to do hundreds of years ago in

52. Patriarch Bartholomew, *Encountering the Mystery* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 52.

53. Second Vatican Council, *Decree on Ecumenism Unitatis Redintegratio*, Holy See, November 21, 1964, accessed April 8, 2020, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html, 11.

countries like China, India, Paraguay and others in order to inculturate the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the respective cultures of these people, might need to be repeated, this time in order to re-evangelize the “Old World”.

If the Church is envisaged as an anticipatory sign of God’s kingdom that is to come, then the dogmas and the doctrine, which are in themselves expressions of this same Church, could also be seen as anticipatory signs of this kingdom. The Church has an inherent eschatological character since its ultimate aim is to be an instrument of God’s salvation to humanity that will reach its fulfilment in the *Parousia*. However, being “signs”, these doctrines in themselves do not contain the fullness of truth, but “they are pointers that delineate the guidelines and borders beyond which it is risky to proceed.”⁵⁴

3.3 Conclusion

This chapter treated the development of doctrine from two different perspectives: one represented by John Henry Newman and the other by Edward Schillebeeckx. A comparison of the two approaches shows both differences and similarities.

The methodology adopted by Schillebeeckx contrasts sharply with that used by Newman. This is due to a number of factors. Their respective objective was fundamentally different. On the one hand, Newman’s exposition was meant to prove there is continuity between the Patristic epoch and the Roman Catholic Church along the centuries against the accusations of some Protestant quarters. Newman’s style of argumentation was therefore fundamentally apologetic. On the other hand, Schillebeeckx’s objective was the development of the theological thought in an ecumenical context, and therefore his style was more speculative and existential.

54. Patriarch Bartholomew, *Encountering the Mystery*, 53.

Furthermore, Newman's thought reflects a typical British classical and empiricist intellectual formation. Schillebeeckx's formation was decisively more Continental and phenomenological in approach. His approach is decisively personalist and existentialist, yet he draws on a wide range of philosophical traditions to buttress his theology.⁵⁵

Notwithstanding these differences, both theologians advocated the centrality of the development of doctrine for the Church. Both Newman and Schillebeeckx reject the idea of a stale doctrine that remains conceptually and linguistically intact along the centuries, with Newman preferring the idiom of physical development, whilst Schillebeeckx's is essentially cultural. Another common factor between the two is that both view dogma as rooted in Tradition but it is also future-oriented. While doctrine essentially concerns an established truth, it points towards a promise of an eschatological nature and therefore needs to address the faithful in a language that can reveal such truth. This highlights the nature of doctrine as being fundamentally both dynamic and dialectical.

55. Shreiter, "Edward Schillebeeckx," 154.

Conclusion

Most of this dissertation has been written during the extraordinary circumstances of contemporary world history. A seemingly seasonal virus with its epicentre in a distant Chinese city, has not only caused the health services worldwide to stretch beyond all their imaginable limits but also brought to their knees many economies, political systems and societies as a whole. With many governments enforcing a months-long lockdown as a preventive manner, many businesses came to a halt with devastating effects on their dependents. The spectre of extreme poverty, hunger and homelessness suddenly became an immanent concern, even in countries that up until now were considered to be affluent. “Social distancing” measures forced whole societies to find alternative ways how to socialise other than through physical proximity. Due to the highly contagious nature of the virus, even standing in a queue has become a potential threat to one’s health. People became so suspicious of each other that physical signs of affection, or even of simple courtesy, have become almost a taboo. The effects are perceived to be so devastating that many are saying that the world as we knew it before the coronavirus struck will never return.

The Church was no exception to this global debacle. Furthermore, all this coincided with its highest liturgical season: Lent, Holy Week and Eastertide. Gradually, one diocese after another started taking heed of medical advice with respect to social distancing and public liturgies were suspended indefinitely, leaving many Christians distraught that they could not participate actively in the celebration of the definitive mysteries of their faith. Clearly, together with the rest of society in which it is immersed, the Church is

passing through a turning point of an epoch, or to use Schillebeeckx's terminology, a "conjuncture"¹ in its history. Like all critical moments in time, this is also a time of trial. The Church however is not a stranger to times of trial in its two thousand years of history. Among such times were its ecumenical councils. As has been illustrated earlier in this dissertation, the prevailing circumstances in which the first four ecumenical councils were convened were nothing less than critical, even at times violent. Some councils were part of a political strategy following a military victory by the emperor. Others were nothing less than a covert diplomatic effort to make inroads to exert foreign influence where other means failed. Councils were also a time of trial, above all, on the doctrinal level. The Christological and Trinitarian controversies debated so passionately during the early councils and the haggling that took place in the process were undoubtedly testing times that struck the Church in its most fundamental beliefs and the very foundations of its existence. They were times were the Church experienced both heresies and schisms. Notwithstanding this, such trying times ultimately proved to be a "kairotic" opportunity for the Church. In his study of the early Church, Newman showed how the Church "moved on to the perfect truth by various successive declarations, alternatively in contrary directions, and thus perfecting, completing, supplying each other".² Newman clarified that by "contrary" he does not mean that the Church promulgated contradictory teaching but different in nature. He added that

1. Benedict T. Viviano, "Schillebeeckx's *Jesus and Christ* — Contributions to Christian Life," *Opcentral.org*, accessed April 20, 2020, <https://opcentral.org/resources/2015/01/12/benedict-t-viviano-schillebeeckxs-jesus-and-christ-contributions-to-christian-life/>.

2. John Henry Newman, *Letters and Diaries*, vol. XXV, 310, in Ian Ker, "Newman: On the Council and their Aftermaths," December 4, 2018, accessed April 16, 2020, <http://www.humanitasreview.com/27-church/41-newman-on-the-council-and-their-aftermaths>.

Councils “generally acted as a lever, displacing and disordering portions of the existing theological system”³ which typically resulted in a period of internal acrimony.

Pope Francis referred to this dynamic in a recent interview he gave in the context of the current pandemic. One of the questions posed to Pope Francis by the interviewer was whether he sees, emerging from this pandemic, “a Church that is more missionary, more creative, less attached to institutions.”⁴ The pope’s answer was unequivocal that the Church is essentially an institution; however, it is not of the bureaucratic type. “It is the Holy Spirit who institutionalises the Church, in an alternative, complementary way, because the Holy Spirit provokes disorder through charisms, but then out of that disorder creates harmony.”⁵ As was discussed in the earlier parts of this dissertation, this harmony is not achieved instantaneously but comes as the result of a process of discernment, which may be lengthy and stormy. It is, after all, the experience of the disciples of Emmaus who, although had Jesus accompanying them all the way from Jerusalem to their home village explaining to them the Scriptures, it was only when it was dark and during the breaking of bread that they recognised Him (Lk 24: 13-35). This process has two main characteristics: it is creative and dialectic.

In the same interview, Pope Francis attempts to focus on the role of the Church in these challenging times. While doing so, certain themes keep appearing now and again in his conversation. One such theme is “creativity”. He says that “we need an apostolic creativity shorn of so many useless things but with a yearning to express our faith in

3. Newman, *Letters and Diaries*, vol. XXVI, 76, in Ker, “Newman: On the Council and their Aftermaths.”

4. Austen Ivereigh, “Pope Francis says Pandemic can be a ‘place of Conversion’,” *The Tablet*, April 8, 2020, accessed April 12, 2020, <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/features/2/17845/pope-francis-says-pandemic-can-be-a-place-of-conversion->.

5. Ibid.

community, as the people of God.”⁶ This sense of creativity in articulating Divine Revelation has been evident in the Church since the first centuries. The *sensus fidei* has been a strong guiding force within the Church in expressing in a creative mode its experience of Revelation. Sometimes this “instinct” has gone beyond any logic, but since it was firmly rooted in “apostolic creativity”, it was considered to be on the side of orthodoxy. Many years earlier, Newman has also acknowledged this creative impulse and has even compared it to that of the Magisterium’s infallibility in interpreting Revelation through doctrine. Whilst popes and councils exercised what he called “active infallibility”, the entire Church, as the gathering of all the faithful, possessed “the passive infallibility of the whole body of the Catholic people.”⁷ The formal teachings announced by the Magisterium eventually needed to be assimilated and harmonised by the faithful as an organic community through their instincts, ideas and the exercise of their practice. This entails an act of creativity that is in itself grounded in “memory”. Memory is a very central element in understanding the nature of the Church and the development of its doctrine. Its most sacred “memory” is the “do this in memory of me” through which Christ’s Paschal mystery is not only remembered as some kind of nostalgic gesture but is “re-presented” in the Eucharist. Tradition holds the same type of “memory”. The Church’s insight about its proper way of proceeding is not just a past historic fact but is continuously re-presented in the Church’s own being today. This holds also for doctrine. While there might be a breakage in the language used, there is a hermeneutic continuity

6. Austen Ivereigh, “Pope Francis says Pandemic can be a ‘place of Conversion’,”

7. Newman, *Letters and Diaries*, vol. XXVII, 338, in Ker, “Newman: On the Council and their Aftermaths.”

where the truths contained form the roots from which a better understanding creatively unfolds.

The second characteristic of this process represented by a “harmony-in-chaos” dynamic is that it is essentially dialectic. It takes place within a particular social, political and ecclesial context and finds its harmony through dialogue with its very own ever-changing context. If this dialogue does not take place, doctrine withers and eventually dies. In his well-known speech at the opening of the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*, Pope John XXIII referred to this double responsibility of the Church when he said that

“we must not only guard this precious treasure, as if we were concerned only with antiquity, but, without fear, we must continue in the work that our age demands, continuing the path that the Church has followed for almost twenty centuries.”⁸

Such path entails the continuous re-interpretation of the Divine Revelation to people of all ages and all times. Newman asserts that since doctrine is a living thing, it cannot be stripped of its dialogical characteristic of engagement with the rest of society. This engagement is essential “if a great idea is duly to be understood, and much more if it is to be fully exhibited.”⁹

Reflecting on this dialectical characteristic in the time of the coronavirus pandemic, Tomás Halik underlines the importance that in the midst of this we come to understand the language of God, and therefore we come to know His words. He says that we are at the end of an epoch and what is needed from the Christians is “not simply improvement

8. Pope John XXIII, Allocution at the Opening of the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*, Holy See, October 11, 1962, accessed April 17, 2020, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/it/speeches/1962/documents/hf_j-xxiii_spe_19621011_opening-council.html, 6.3.

9. John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, Chapter I, Section I, para. 7, accessed April 3, 2020, <http://restorationchristianculture.org/wp-content/uploads/Essay-on-the-Development-of-Christian-Doctrine-An-John-Henry-Newman.pdf>.

but a radical change from a static 'being Christians' to a dynamic 'becoming Christians'."¹⁰ The present situation, especially in the context of the Paschal Mystery, is an opportunity for the Church to do like Jesus, leave the empty tomb (represented by the empty churches) and go to "Galilee of today", where the seekers are. In this new milieu,

"we need to take new and old things from the treasure house of Tradition that we have been entrusted with, and make them part of a dialogue in which we can and should learn from each other. We must broaden radically the boundaries of our understanding of the Church."¹¹

The most valued part of the Church's treasures is its experience of the personal and ecclesial encounter with God, which reached its culmination in the Incarnation of His Son. The way the meaning of this encounter could be best interpreted in our times is by engaging in dialogue with other persons who are also seeking meaning in their lives. This therefore calls for a new way of doing theology, a new method of engaging with contemporary society and a new way of being a Church. The word of God in the Sacred Scriptures and Tradition becomes a spur for the Church to start looking for itself outside its own structures, wherever the intimate and universal encounter between the divine and the human is taking place today.

Doctrine, therefore essentially goes beyond the dry concepts in which it is formulated. It is more of a dynamic process that is the direct result of Pentecost experienced by the Twelve and the other first disciples at the moment of the nascent Church. In Pentecost, the Holy Spirit not only reminded them what Jesus has told them but also gave them the courage to overcome their own fears and apprehensions, slam the doors of the upper

10. Tomás Halik, "Christianity in a Time of Sickness," *America*, April 3, 2020, accessed April 5, 2020, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2020/04/03/christianity-time-sickness>.

11. *Ibid.*

room wide open and preach the Good News of Salvation in such a creative manner that they were understood by all who listened to them. “This is the freedom of the Spirit in the midst of a crisis, not a Church closed off in institutions.”¹²

This dissertation started off by providing a brief descriptive account of the first four ecumenical councils of the Church, that of Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451). Being its first four councils, they provided the foundational doctrine of the Christian Church that is still recognised as such by most churches in spite of a number of divisions experienced in the Church through the ages. These doctrines were essentially of a Christological or a Trinitarian nature. Reference was also made to the controversies that ensued during these councils and to some of the unorthodox ways how these controversies were handled and resolved.

In the second chapter, a theological exposition of the related terms, namely Divine Revelation, Sacred Scriptures, Tradition and Magisterium was provided, particularly as they feature in the dogmatic constitution *Dei Verbum* of the Second Vatican Council. Through this perspective, doctrine is seen as making part of one integrated deposit of faith whose unique source is Divine Revelation. Whilst it belongs primarily to Tradition, doctrine is imbued with the word of God as found in the Sacred Scriptures. This doctrinal *corpus* belongs to the whole Church but is mediated by the Magisterium who has been trusted with its teaching and pastoral role by Christ himself.

Finally, the third chapter’s main thrust was more of an analytic nature. It sought to elicit the main criteria the Church has developed along its history and integrated in its Tradition that would consider a particular doctrine as being faithful to the *corpus* of faith

12. Austen Ivereigh, “Pope Francis says Pandemic can be a ‘place of Conversion’.”

mentioned in the previous chapter. This was done by employing the conceptual frameworks provided by two well-known theologians, John Henry Newman and Edward Schillebeeckx. It was argued that these two theologians employed two, almost diametrically opposite, methodologies. While Newman employed an apologetic historical-empirical method, Schillebeeckx opted for a phenomenological-existential approach. Newman exposed his argument in terms of what he called the “seven notes” in the development of orthodox doctrine in contrast to corrupt teaching. Each of these characteristics was illustrated with specific historical events in the Church’s history, including the first four ecumenical councils that featured in the dissertation’s first chapter. Schillebeeckx’s approach was more dynamic in style and centred around the dialogical nature of doctrine. His hermeneutic of the Church’s doctrine is one that is continuously forming and being formed by the contemporary society. While continuity is ensured with the immutability of the core fundamental truths, the language in which these are expressed needs to change in order to reaffirm their relevance. The third chapter concluded by affirming that, in spite of employing two fundamentally different methodologies in two totally different contexts and within a span of almost a century from each other, there is a convergence in their conclusions. Both theologians agree that orthodox doctrine is organic in nature; while it holds to the eternal truths found in Divine Revelation, it needs to be delivered in a language contemporaneous to the historical and cultural milieu in which it is immersed. Although it is articulated in a logical terminology, logic is not doctrine’s primary concern. It is more concerned with being faithful to Revelation, and this sometime implies surpassing human logic and enter into the ineffable divine mystery of the crucified Christ who is “a stumbling block to Jews and nonsense to gentiles but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, the Messiah is

God's power and God's wisdom" (1 Cor 1: 23-24). Consequently, since doctrine is a living entity, one should not only affirm its orthodoxy but also its orthopraxis. The faithful have always expressed their doctrine not just through their catechism and prayers but also through their daily living.

Fundamentally this means that, from its own very nature, the whole doctrinal *corpus* of the Church is essentially both past-oriented, since it reveals a meta-historical event, with the Paschal Mystery as its climax, and also future-oriented, since it points towards the eschatological promise of the *Parousia*. At face value, certain developments may at first be interpreted as going against the Revealed Truth; however, time would eventually prove their veracity, primarily through their faithfulness towards the whole Mystical Body of Christ in its earthly pilgrimage towards its ultimate encounter with the Divine.

May the Holy Spirit continue to blow on the Church in its unfolding journey towards a fuller understanding of the salutary encounter between the Triune God and humanity!
May the Church continue to be always faithful to this message and bring it to all human beings with the fervour and audacity of the first disciples who were the witnesses of the Risen Christ, the Saviour of all creation!

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