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Catholicity and the Petrine Office

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In this article, I first point out the world-wide extensiveness of Christ's Church. Within this broad context I try to understand the meaning of catholicism, I raise the question whether the presence of a particular Church calling herself the 'Catholic Church' makes any sense. This question leads me to a consideration of the Petrine office and an inquiry into the meaning of this office. At this point I take Vatican I's definition of the 'infallibility of the Pope' and propose a way of understanding it which appears to me more meaningful than the 'traditional' way.

The Church as the Fellowship of All Believers

For several centuries faith was, among Catholics, considered primarily as an assent of the mind to a teaching. This teaching, no doubt, was first of all Christ's own teaching, but Christ's teaching was thought to be adequately contained in the teaching of the Pope and of the Catholic bishops united with the Pope. Thus faith was first of all an intellectual assent to the teaching imparted by the Catholic hierarchy headed by the Pope. In consonance with this notion of faith, the Church was purely and simply identified with the assembly of the catholic faithful. Anyone refusing adhesion to the doctrine taught by the Catholic *magisterium* was excluded from this assembly.

During the last decade, especially as a result of Vatican II, the Catholic understanding of faith has undergone a deep transformation. This is true, even though many Catholics are slow and reluctant to effect in their lives the thorough *metanoia* which this transformation calls for. In conformity with the scriptural message, faith is acknowledged to be a commitment of the whole man. Through faith man answers the call which Christ addresses to him, both in a direct, intimate manner and through the people among whom he lives, through the situation in which he finds himself. Through faith man puts himself at the service of others in order to build the human brotherhood—ultimately, in order to bring about the eschatological Kingdom. Faith is a personal attitude. It is existence personalizing and illuminating itself, growing in freedom and self-understanding, realizing itself in Christ. Faith is a communitarian reality. It arises and develops within a fellowship, as a participation in the life of this fellowship. In its exercise, it communicates itself; it builds the human brotherhood by promoting each one's personal growth. Faith is present most perfectly among those who, in Christ, put themselves in a most thorough and enlightened manner at the service of all; it is inchoatively present in every man who in his personal and social life tries to do what is true (Jn. 3:21).

Thus understood, faith cannot be considered as the appanage of Catholics, or even of those who openly declare themselves Christians. Whoever, among 'Christians', does not commit himself to the building of the Kingdom cannot be called an authentic believer. On the other hand, the 'non-Christians' who, day after day, try conscientiously to fulfil their personal, family and social duties are truly men of faith. As the fellowship of all believers, the Church of God is a reality broader than any particular ecclesiastical community or institution, it includes men of all nations, of all races and of all creeds, it is coextensive to the whole world.

In another article I have pointed out that this world-wide extensiveness of the Church does not in any way rob Christianity of its meaning. The New Testament message has for mankind a unique and decisive value. It is for the world a vital necessity that there should be an increasing number of men making of Christ's gospel the substance of their lives. The Church of Christ is *par excellence* the fellowship of those who, accepting and actualizing in an authentic way the New Testament message, build the human world in unity and love.

Catholicism

Catholicity is, within Christianity, the drive towards unity considered at its deepest level and in its broadest implications. In this perspective I have raised the question whether the existence of an institution whose claim is to embody this drive makes any sense. It appears to me more and more clearly that, ultimately, the only reason which justifies the existence in the world of a 'Catholic Church' is this: in order that the desire for unity which moves history—in spite of the presence in the world of countless disruptive forces—which is constitutive of Christianity—in spite of the divisions and oppositions affecting the Christian Church—may express and realize itself authentically, it is necessary that there should be in the world somebody who in a unique way incarnates that desire and stimulates it. In other words, the presence in the world of a 'catholic Church' can be justified only by the necessity of the existence in the human community, in the Christian Church, of a 'Petrine office'.

The Petrine Office

The form which this Petrine office assumes concretely must be determined first of all by its fundamental *raison d'être*.

Negatively, it can be said that whatever in its way of presenting itself at a given moment of history is not conducive to the furtherance of its aim—the authentic liberation of men, the building of the human brotherhood in love—cannot be considered as an element pertaining to its 'essence' (as something actually willed by Christ). For instance, if, in the changing conditions of the world, the link between Rome and the Papacy were to appear as an anachronism, an element no longer at the service of authentic catholicity, this link would have to be severed. In the new set up, the supreme pastor would be the authentic successor of Peter because he would carry out the Petrine office in spirit and in truth. If, on the contrary, in spite of the demand for a change arising

from the world situation, the link between Rome and the Papacy were to be kept, the Roman Pontiff would no longer be the one who, in the world, in the Church, carries out authentically the Petrine office.

Positively, the fundamental manner in which the Petrine office must be exercised is determined by the nature of truth and the nature of faith.

Primarily, truth is not an 'object of knowledge' existing as an impersonal reality, as a ready-made system, as a doctrine; primarily, truth is not something to be grasped by a subject who is essentially an intellect. Truth is first of all the transcendent mystery of God, the transcendent mystery of the incarnate Logos. As a subjective life existing bodily and 'worldily', man opens himself to Truth by letting the Transcendent Mystery take shape in him. He does so, not through a mere assent of the mind, but through faith-commitment. By answering the call which Christ addresses him both in a direct and intimate manner and through the people among whom he lives, through the situation in which he finds himself, man conforms himself to Truth and thereby comes out into the light (Jn. 3:21). Man knows the truth *by doing it*. Faith-knowledge is rooted in faith-commitment. Without the latter, all doctrine is a mere jumble of words—a letter without spirit.

Every individual faith-commitment takes place in a fellowship of faith as a relation to and a participation in the life of this fellowship. Faith is a personal—free and intelligent—involvement; it is simultaneously a communitarian reality. The Transcendent Mystery takes human shape not in individuals living in isolation but in fellowships of believers trying together to do what is true. It takes shape in individual believers living their faith in communion with other believers.

The various faith-communities need leaders. The task of these leaders is to witness and stimulate the commitment of each believer within the fellowship of all believers. It is to bring the believers together and relentlessly point out the end towards which their commitment is directed. It is to labour so that the fellowship which they represent may become really gospel—an embodiment of the Transcendent Mystery—so that by doing what is true the believers whom they serve may individually and communitarianly come into the light.

The various faith-communities have a common mission. The fulness of Christ is the end towards which they tend; their task is to build up Christ's body. There is need in the world of a supreme pastor who, in an explicit way, incarnates this finality. The primary function of this pastor is not to teach a doctrine, to be the representative of a particular ecclesiastical system or the custodian of a particular tradition, to impose uniformity in thought, worship and behaviour; it is to identify himself with the various Christian fellowships so that each of these fellowships, while keeping its individuality and carrying out the work of Christian service according to its particular charism, may identify itself with the whole Church, with the whole human family.

Thus the Petrine function is twofold. On the one hand, the supreme pastor must allow and enable each believer and each group of believers to fulfil in the Church, in the world, their appointed task. He must help the believers to discover themselves in Christ, he must encourage

them to be faithful to their commitment, he must promote the authentic growth of each individual and of each community. On the other hand, the supreme pastor must bring together the various fellowships, he must build the unity of the Church, the unity of mankind. For this purpose, he must inspire the individual believers and the various communities to go beyond the limits within which they are tempted to confine themselves, he must incite them to transcend their oppositions, incessantly to deepen and broaden their unity. For all, the supreme pastor must be a continual reminder of the end towards which their human and Christian existence is directed.

The supreme pastor and the other pastors form a collegium at the service of Truth. As such, they are not primarily a *magisterium* but a *ministerium*. As pointed out, the Truth which they have to serve exists not as a doctrine to be known but as a Mystery which the believers must realize in the places where they live through a concrete commitment to the building of the human world in Christ. The pastors serve Truth by witnessing and fostering the unity of the believers in the work of service.

The Pastoral Office as a Teaching Function

Does it mean that the pastoral office is in no way a teaching function?

As they involve themselves in the world in order to build the human brotherhood, the believers deepen their understanding of the Mystery which they live together and express verbally their experience. This formalization is an essential aspect of the life of faith. The believers' commitment cannot be authentic without being enlightened. Through speech, the believers bring to light the content of their faith and perfect their commitment. The language of faith is both an expression of the Mystery which constitutes the deeper life of the believers and an instrument for the building of the Church. It is both an expression of unity, of truth, and the act by which unity is created, by which the truth is done.

As ministers of unity and truth, the pastors have an essential role to play with regard to the verbalization of the Mystery. The pastors must express the experience of the believers in a truly unifying and edifying manner. Their speech must never be the mere exposition of an 'objective truth' existing in an impersonal world, it must always be the expression of the truth embodied in the faith-community and an effort to build the community in Truth. In other words, to be truthful, the 'teaching' of the pastors must always be related to the experience of the believers, to the experience of men.

The 'Infallibility' of the Pastors, especially of the Supreme Pastor¹

Let us, in this perspective, comment on Vatican I's definition of the 'infallibility of the Pope'.

¹ [It may interest the ecumenically-minded reader to know that the pages which follow received the *imprimi potest* of the Belgian Jesuit Provincial; and that after reading them Cardinal Suenens wrote to the author: 'I thank you . . . for that communion in depth which I discover through the pages of your manuscript'.—Editor']

Vatican I expresses itself as follows: 'When he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is to say when, exercising his function as pastor and doctor of all Christians, he defines, in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, a doctrine pertaining to faith or moral life to be held by the whole Church, the Pope enjoys . . . the very infallibility which the Redeemer wanted to be the appanage of his Church. . . . Therefore the definitions of the Roman Pontiff are irreformable—they are so by themselves, not from the consent of the Church'.

Let us analyse the implications of this text and see the concrete meaning to be given to it.

(1) There is question of the definition of a doctrine about faith or moral life.

The word 'doctrine' means a certain speech, a certain formulation. The term 'faith', to the extent that it means what the doctrine refers to, designates the revealed truth as an *object of knowledge*. The expression 'moral behaviour' means practical life as ruled by faith. The expression 'to hold a doctrine' means to adhere to it with the mind, to accept it as true.

In the 'traditional' perspective, the act by which the intellect adheres to the doctrine taught by the Church is faith. Therefore the term 'faith' would designate here both the *revealed truth* as an object of knowledge and the act by which the faithful makes his the language of the Church, the language of the Pope about the revealed truth, about moral life. In the last analysis, the revealed truth (the Mystery as revealing itself), moral life as ruled by the revealed truth, would be purely and simply identical to *language*: the formulae by which the Church or the Pope defines the Mystery, the law would really be the totality of the Mystery itself, the totality of moral life. In this perspective, the duty of the faithful would be to accept unconditionally the language of the Church, of the Pope, the letter of the doctrine (because this letter *contains* the revealed truth).

All this, indisputably, belongs to the mental universe of Aristotelian scholasticism. Reality is essentially an object of knowledge; man as man is essentially a knowing subject; the act of man is the act by which he identifies reality to his mind, by which he makes it know reality, language. This position leads necessarily to absolute idealism. This idealism is practically achieved in the identification of reality to the doctrine, of the doctrine to the 'magisterium', of the magisterium to the Pope speaking (to the Pope considered as the intellect, conscience, first principle of the Church). We understand on what ground lies the conception of an extremely centralized Church.

These philosophical presuppositions, it is clear, are not part of the New Testament message. There must be another way of understanding things.

The text of Vatican I speaks to us of the Pope defining a doctrine pertaining to 'faith' or moral life. This formulation implies the acknowledgement of two different 'things'. These two things are: on the one hand, a sphere of reality distinct from speech: faith (the revealed truth, the Mystery as revealing itself), moral life (human activity as directed towards an end); on the other hand, the Pope speaking: a doctrine,

a language. A relation is established between these two things: the word of the Pope refers essentially to the revealed truth. The latter is therefore prior to the former; it is the revealed truth which gives to the word of the Pope its meaning, its value.

In what does the revealed truth consist? As truth, as Mystery, the revealed reality is first of all the totality of the Transcendent Mystery the mystery of God, of the transcendent Christ. This Mystery does not reveal itself in itself; it reveals itself in the life and experience of the believers, in Scripture (not in Scripture considered as a thing, but in Scripture as read, lived, understood by the believers—that is, again, in the life and experience of the believers). The revealed truth is identical to the life and experience of the believers. Therefore the people of believers comes before the word of the Pope; this word has no meaning apart from this people. The Pope must express the experience of the Church (not only of the 'Catholic Church' but of the whole body of believers). He is by vocation the one who, while representing Christ, incarnates in the most universal way the bonds uniting the believers, the one who promotes the faith of the believers, the one who expresses and strengthens their unity. To the extent that the revealed truth is prior to him, the Pope cannot express it unless he makes his own the experience of the believers. Without this opening, he cannot make of his word an authentic expression of the transcendent truth, he cannot be in truth the doctor and pastor of the believers, the witness and promoter of their faith, of their hope.

The faith of the believers cannot be defined as being first of all an adhesion of the intellect to the word of the Pope. The Pope defines the 'doctrine to be held'. To hold the doctrine means first of all for the believers to answer the concrete call of Christ, to unite themselves to Christ in the situation in which they find themselves, to make of their existence, *through this union*, a luminous manifestation of the Transcendent Mystery. Indeed, it is from the revealed truth (from the life and experience of the believers as a relation to and participation in the Transcendent Mystery) that the words of the Pope, the language of faith, receive their meaning, their truth; it is from the sincere commitment and involvement of the believers—from their existential faith—that their acceptance of the doctrine receives its authenticity. Without this commitment and this involvement, the adhesion of the believers to the word of the Pope, to the doctrine, is but formalism, hypocrisy; cut from the revealed truth, the doctrinal language is nothing but empty speech.

(2) According to the text of Vatican I, the Pope is infallible *when he speaks ex cathedra, exercising his function as pastor and doctor of all the believers.*)

According to the intellectualistic conception which tends to identify the revealed truth to language, it is first of all the *terms* in which a papal declaration is formulated which determine whether this declaration is infallible or not. The Pope speaking *ex cathedra* is essentially the Pope making use of a certain hieratic language. In order that a pronouncement of the Pope should be declared infallible, it is enough that it should be accompanied by such or such stereotyped formula. Practically, the question of the manner in which the doctrinal authority

of the Pope must be exercised in order that it should be authentic does not arise.

Here also we must try to reach a better understanding of things. A papal declaration cannot be considered 'infallible' unless it pertains to faith (that is, to the revealed truth, to the Mystery as revealing itself) or to moral life (that is, to human activity as directed towards the Kingdom). Now, as has just been pointed out, the Mystery revealing itself is concretely identical to the life and experience of the believers (to this life and experience as related to the Transcendent Mystery). Therefore, the word of the Pope cannot be infallible unless it *expresses* the experience of the believers authentically. If, in a declaration, the Pope opposes himself to the Church, or cuts himself off from her, or bases himself purely on abstract consideration, his word cannot be infallible. (Likewise, if, in laying down a law, the Pope does not take into account the experience of the believers, this law, as not conducive to the believers' authentic growth in freedom and faith, cannot oblige them in conscience).

The text of Vatican I tells us that, to make a declaration about faith or moral life infallible, the Pope must bring into play *his supreme apostolic authority*; he must, in making this declaration, *exercise his function as pastor and doctor of all Christians*. The Pope does so not by raising his voice, by making use of a certain language, by 'lording it over them, and making his authority felt' (Mk 10:42); he does so by making himself truly 'the servant of all' (Mk 10:44). The Pope cannot exercise his supreme authority unless he accepts to lose himself in all, unless he identifies himself to all in Christ, unless he trusts the believers, respects and promotes their freedom, unless he helps each one to discover and realize the truth of himself—that is, to answer in his situation the concrete call of the Lord. Therefore the Pope speaks infallibly not first by giving to his language such or such definite form, but by making himself the witness and promoter of the faith and hope of all (doctor and pastor of all Christians), by making of his word an authentic expression of the realities *which he lives with and through the other pastors, the believers, all men*. Only on this condition can the Pope really speak *ex cathedra*.

(3) When the Pope speaks *ex cathedra*, Vatican I tells us, *he enjoys the very infallibility which the Redeemer wanted to be the appanage of his Church*.

According to the intellectualistic interpretation, this text must be understood as a real consecration of papal absolutism. It would mean that the infallible Church is *first of all* the Pope speaking; it would consecrate in a solemn way the role of the Pope as substance and intelligence, conscience and prime mover of the people of believers.

This interpretation, we know, is based on a very debatable philosophy. It is not borne by the text. The text tells us that the infallibility enjoyed by the Pope is the very one which Christ grants to his Church. Therefore the primary fact is the existence of the Church as a people living by the truth. The Pope is constituted by Christ as possessing as his own what is the appanage of this people. Automatically? No. When he speaks *ex cathedra*, when he makes himself

in truth the doctor and pastor of this people, that is the witness and promoter of his faith, and of his hope (we know what this implies—it is possible for the Pope to alienate his infallibility instead of exercising it, to destroy his authority instead of affirming it, to deny himself as supreme pastor instead of realising himself—hence to destroy the Church instead of building it).

(4) *'The definitions of the Pope are unreformable—they are so by themselves, not in virtue of the consent of the Church.'*

In the mind of some theologians these words confirm the Pope and his Curia definitively in their transcendence with regard to the Church (and to history), in their role as absolute principle. Is there really question of that? Let us examine first the second half of this declaration.

It is not the consent of the Church which *constitutes* the Pope in his own truth, in his being and authority as supreme pastor, in his infallibility. Indeed, in his personal being, in his faith, the Pope is entirely *constituted* by the unique relation which binds him to God, by the call of Christ—not by the link which unites him to the other believers, to the other men. (Analogically, *each believer* is what he is by virtue of the unique relation which unites him to God, by virtue of the call of Christ—not by virtue of the link which binds him to the other believers, to the other men, *not by virtue of the link which binds him to the Pope*: the Pope is *not* the creative principle of the Church.) Therefore to realize himself as supreme pastor, the Pope must not reduce himself to his relation to the other believers, he must at every moment, in everything he does and in everything he says, actuate personally the unique relation which binds him to God, to Christ. It is only through this interiorization (which is a taking up, a re-creating by the Pope of the whole human world, of the whole of history, of the whole Church, in the movement of his existence towards its end) that the Pope can really attain and realize the truth of himself, that he can induce the other believers, the other men, to discover and realize their own truth. All this is implied in the assertion of Vatican I: the words of the Pope are infallible by themselves, not in virtue of the consent of the Church.

Does it mean that the Pope is a perfectly autonomous being, an absolute principle? Vatican I does not affirm that. If it must be maintained that, in his mission as supreme pastor, the Pope is what he is only by his relation to God's creative act, it must also be acknowledged that this act creates him *in this mission* as a relation to and a participation in the other pastors, in the whole people of believers, in the whole human community. (Analogically, if it must be maintained that in his particular mission, each believer is what he is by virtue of the unique relation which unites him to God's creative act, it must also be acknowledged that this act creates him *in this mission* as a relation to and participation in the other believers, in the other men.) Therefore the Pope cannot realize himself authentically as supreme pastor unless he accepts and actuates the link which unites him to all and to each in particular. To refuse this solidarity, this communion is for the Pope to refuse the very intention which constitutes him in his supreme pastorhood.

In *Lumen Gentium*, Vatican II reminds us that 'the Roman Pontiff has over the Church, in virtue of his office as Vicar of Christ and Pastor of the whole Church, supreme and universal plenary power which he can always exercise freely'. This text, of course, does not mean that the Pope can do whatever he pleases, that he can substitute himself for the conscience of the believers, for Christ, that he can demand from everybody a surrender of their freedom, of their faith. The supreme and universal plenary power of the Pope is a power 'to insure the common good of the universal Church and the good of every particular Church'. (Vatican II, Decree on the Bishop's Pastoral Office in the Church.) This power is by no means that of a potentate who can impose his views on all and demand from all definite behaviours; it is a power *for the good of persons*, a power which can be exercised legitimately only in the act by which the Pope helps the believers to grow in their faith, in freedom, in their own truth. This power is of an opposite kind to a centralizing power: the Pope exercises it not by making himself the absolute centre of the Church, by imposing uniformity, but by making of each believer his centre, by going to all, by losing himself in them in order to find himself again with them in Christ. This is in what consists the authentic supremacy of the Pope.

This supremacy, the Pope can always exercise *freely*. Not with a freedom which, in claiming to be absolute autonomy, alienates itself, becomes the negation of itself and the negation of the Church, but with a freedom which, in accepting to be dependence, relation, service, actuates itself, builds itself and builds the Church—because it identifies itself to the Creative Intention.

(5) Let us now examine the last point: *the definitions of the Pope speaking ex cathedra are unreformable*.

We must understand the meaning of this in an integral perspective.

The *act* by which the Pope defines a doctrine *ex cathedra* is first of all the act by which, making his own the life and experience of the believers, he actuates himself as a relation to and a participation in the Transcendent Mystery. Therefore it is the life and experience of the Pope as an expression of those of the believers and as a manifestation of the mystery of God, of the mystery of Christ, which constitute the *truth* of a doctrinal definition. The terms which the Pope uses in his definition have no meaning, no truth apart from this life and experience, apart from the Mystery (apart from the Word which is Life) which the latter humanizes, reveal. Therefore if, in the word of the Pope, there is something unreformable, this 'something' cannot be found simply in the form which this word assumes (in the letter of the definition); it must be found first of all in that which constitutes its *meaning*: the life and experience of the Church as a revelation of the Transcendent Mystery.

In what does the unreformability of this sense consist? The life and experience of the Church—her faith—are not something static; this life and experience are the people of believers committing itself today to the service of men in view of the Kingdom to be built; this life and experience are history, growth tension towards an end; *in being*

that, they are truth, meaning, spirit (they destroy themselves by reifying themselves, by reducing themselves to a letter). The unreformability of this life and experience consists in their fidelity to the *orientation* which constitutes them as movement towards the Kingdom, towards the fulness of Christ: their meaning; it is only in the believers' effort to *become* what they are called to be that this unreformability realizes itself. This effort is a self-transcending endeavour, a continual surpassing of the already-done, of the already-said, a continual recreating of the past in the present of faith, in the movement towards the future.

In this perspective, to respect the unreformability of a doctrinal definition is not to content oneself with repeating it textually, with reproducing its letter; it is to actualize *its meaning*, it is to modify its text in order to express in a renewed and recreated letter the life and experience of the Church, of the world of today (the way in which this human life and experience manifest the Transcendent Mystery), in order to express in this letter what the world of today represents as a moment of the ascent of men towards the fulness of Christ. In the name of the unreformability of a definition, to cling desperately to its letter is *to destroy its truth, its meaning*: it is to compromise what, in this definition, is authentically unreformable.

Indeed, the doctrinal definitions do not *contain* truth, they are not the object of the believers' faith. They are manners in which the Church expresses to herself, to the world, the realities by which she lives: the mystery of the Triune God, the mystery of the incarnate Word, the mystery of men's salvation in Christ. In living her own reality in a dynamic and reflective way, the Church becomes conscious of these mysteries because in herself she exists as a participation in the Act of the Father, in the Act of the Son, in the Act of the Spirit, as a relation to the incarnate Word in whom the Kingdom offers itself to us as a present reality. The dogmatic definitions never express the realities to which they point in an absolutely perfect, definitive manner. Indeed, human speech never contains what is lived in a fully adequate way (mainly if this 'lived' is in its own reality relation to a mystery which transcends man); moreover, all human speech is essentially related to history: it expresses what it points to in a manner determined by the experience of a certain epoch (a necessarily limited experience, which a further experience must complete, enrich, correct). The *truth* of a dogmatic definition resides first of all in the authenticity of the life and experience of the Church. This life and experience are authentic to the extent that the Church really believes—that is, to the extent that, uniting herself to Christ in the present, answering the demands of the present, she *lives* her own reality. Therefore the truth of a doctrinal definition is measured by the concrete commitment of the Church to the service of the world—that is, by her faith, her hope, her charity. Secondly, the truth of a definition resides in the fidelity with which the Church translates what she lives in the terms of the experience of her time. No language has any value in itself, outside all human context, outside history. As the truth of a certain language, the truth of a definition is not truth in itself, but truth for human persons living at a definite moment of history. As truth for definite persons, all dogmatic statement expresses

a certain *Erlebnis* which is the experience of an epoch. The Church opens herself to this experience, enriches it by the discovery she makes of herself through it, expresses in the terms of this experience the Mystery by which she lives. In this way, the Church teaches truth to the men of her time in a manner which is appropriate to them.

This opening to the life and experience of the world in which she lives is for the Church an essential duty. If she neglects it, she does not speak to man as he is concretely, she does not give *him* the message of Christ. In not presenting the mysteries by which she lives in the terms of the experience of her time, in clinging desperately to outdated formulae which do not *tell* anything to the man of today, far from proclaiming the truth, the Church betrays her mission, ridicules and denies herself.

Indeed, to the extent that it is a realization of their createdness (effected in the movement of their existence towards its end), the experience of the men of today is already a manner in which Christ reveals himself to them. Far from ignoring this experience, the Church must make it her own by living in close communion with the men of her time; discovering herself through this concrete involvement, she must proclaim to the world the Gospel in accordance with the way in which Christ reveals himself already to it, she must build the Kingdom according to the way in which the world is already built in Christ. In refusing to penetrate to the heart of the experience of men, in refusing to live intensely what they live, to adapt herself to their mentality, to their way of thinking, in being satisfied with herself, in contenting herself in order to proclaim the Gospel to repeat her previous sayings, in continuing to live and to build herself outside reality, the Church separates herself from Christ.

The fact that to fulfil her mission in the world the Church must express the mysteries by which she lives in the terms of the experience of her time does not imply that she must reject the whole of her past teaching, that this teaching is without any actual value. The life and experience of the Church of today is not a 'situation', a manner of being, which can be abstracted from the whole of history, which are self-sufficient; they are in their particular modalities a realization, a presence, of the whole past. The mystery of the Triune God is in its eternity, in its actuality, in its inexhaustible fulness absolutely transcendent to any human experience, to history. The mystery of Christ is beyond any human *Erlebnis* to the extent that it is the End of history. In some way, however, it is relative to history to the extent that, as Head of the Cosmos, Christ is continually fashioned by the whole body to which he gives life and growth. Each moment in the life of the Church is a certain manner in which the Church realizes herself as a participation in the mystery of the Transcendent God, in which she realizes in herself the mystery of Christ. Any past teaching of the Church, to the extent that it expresses a particular experience, represents a moment of the growth of the Church in Christ, of the growth of Christ in the Church (it is in this that the *truth* of this teaching lies). It has a meaning for the present of the Church to the extent that her present is really the actualization of the whole sacred history (to reject purely and simply the past teaching of

the Church would be to reject Christ himself, since the manner in which Christ realizes himself in the Church of today and in which he reveals himself to her is the fulfilment of all the manners in which he has realized and manifested himself to her in the past). However, to proclaim the Gospel, the Church can never content herself with repeating what she has said of herself in the past. Indeed, the past lives in the present not by reproducing itself unchanged, but by actualizing itself, by transforming itself, by renewing itself. To content oneself, in order to proclaim the Gospel, to repeat the past teaching of the Church is another manner of betraying Christ: (1) Christ lives in the present not in the form of a doctrine to be known and accepted in its literalness but as a personal mystery realizing and revealing itself in the structures of the present, in the life and experience of the men of today—to proclaim the truth is first of all to live it in concrete existence; (2) in the present, the historical Christ lives and reveals himself in a deeply new and original manner: he incarnates himself in the experience of the men of today.

That which in a definition is unreformable is a meaning which, to the extent that it is identical to the life and experience of the Church (to the manner in which the believers realize in their existence, in their faith, the Transcendent Mystery) *can remain itself only by transcending itself*: by being history, growth, tension towards the fulness of Christ. Therefore, in order to preserve the unreformableness of such or such doctrine defined in the past, I can only actualize it in a renewed letter which, while it expresses the manner in which the experience of yesterday realizes itself in the experience of today, manifests also the newness of the present as a 'humanization' or revelation of the mystery of God, as an expectation or prefiguration of the Kingdom. One never proclaims the truth by contenting oneself to reproduce past teachings; one proclaims it by realizing the meaning of these teachings through one's concrete involvement in the living community, through one's union to Christ revealing himself at the heart of this community, in the anxieties and aspirations of men; one teaches it by making of one's words the expression of that which in the life of men is deepest and most authentic—most human and most divine. The more the Pope, liberating himself from the tyranny of the letter (from the letter which kills), will open himself in Christ to the believers, to men, will accept to speak their language, will make his own and express all the riches of their experience, the more also he will proclaim the Gospel and, thereby, give to his words an authentically unreformable character.