

# THEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS

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LATER WRITINGS

*by*  
KARL RAHNER

*Translated by*  
KARL-H. KRUGER

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## WHAT IS A DOGMATIC STATEMENT?<sup>1</sup>

WHAT is a dogmatic statement? This is the question I have been posed and which I am expected to answer in the framework of what is laid down in Catholic theology. It is a difficult question to expose and answer even for the simple reason that, as far as I know, it is hardly ever explicitly posed in this way in the usual Catholic textbook theology. Of course, the ecclesiological part of Fundamental Theology always includes a treatise on the Church's magisterium, its bearers and the binding force of its declarations—showing clearly the various grades of obligation imposed—as well as a treatise on the *loci theologici* and the primacy of Holy Scripture, the inspired Word of God. Also, we are once again beginning to reflect more deeply and exactly, and making the various delicate distinctions required, on the relationship between the *magisterium* and Scripture; there are signs that at last, after too much mere denial of Protestant theology, we are slowly developing something like a theology of the Word. In this connection reflection on the difference between Kerygma and Dogma, between the word of the magisterium and the real proclamation of the joyous, saving message of the Lord is gradually beginning. Yet it cannot be said that one has only to open a textbook to find there a clearer answer to the question as to what is a dogmatic statement. To this extent it is also clear that this subject is not already known and directly elaborated as a controversial theological theme, however much one may suspect *a priori* that any attempt to answer this question will once more bring to the fore all the doctrinal differences between Protestant and Catholic theology concerning the *magis-*

<sup>1</sup> The present essay was originally a lecture given at a specialists' meeting of the Protestant-Catholic ecumenical movement. Consequently, the fact that it was originally given in the framework of a report (which it was not thought desirable to extend subsequently) will explain the fragmentary nature of the various parts of its exposition.

*terium*, its relationship to Scripture, etc. Consequently, all I can do is to try to collect the *membra disiecta* of such a doctrine about the nature of a dogmatic statement from all the corners of Catholic theology. And it remains to be seen how far this is successful or to what extent I overlook many subjects connected with this question.

I presume that this question is meant in such a way that its answer must also draw the dividing line between a dogmatic statement and an utterance of the proper, direct kerygma. In other words, I presume that it is meant to make it quite clear whether, how and why there are intrinsically different forms of expression and speech in the realm of ecclesiastical Christianity, *one* of which is then called a dogmatic statement in the strict specific sense. But evidently, therefore, this distinction to be made within the language of faith of the Christian in the Church, and of the Church herself in her official representatives, cannot be the sole subject of the reflections required here. It is expected (I presume) that a dogmatic statement will not be only definitively distinguished from the kerygma and from proclamation and preaching in the strictest theological sense of these words, but will also be compared with ordinary statements (even those concerned with religious matters, if there are and can be such statements); in other words, it is presumably expected that what is shared in common by Kerygma and Dogma (up to and including theological statements) will be contrasted in this respect with ordinary discourse. In so far as a dogmatic statement must be most strictly distinguished from a kerygmatic one, a sufficiently clear demarcation is thus given between a dogmatic statement and *that* sort of statement which is to be found in Scripture. Of course, in this connection we must not overlook the fact that even Scripture does not simply express the most original revelation (in such a way that this is the original happening of this revelation as an event), but that there certainly is also that kind of theological reflection in Scripture which is not directly kerygma but rather (one might say) typical theological reflection. For all this finds a place in the Catholic conception of the Inspiration of the Scriptures, since this conception does not exclude the possibility of essentially different literary forms within the one Word of God. Let this suffice as preliminary 'method' reflections on what exactly we are supposed to be talking about here. I will try to fulfil my task in a series of theses, adding a certain amount of explanation in each case.

1. A dogmatic statement is one which claims to be true even in that

equivocal, seductive, forward—can it not manoeuvre a person into a position where he must make a decision for which he is not fitted? If such and many similar questions which could be asked are not to be rejected from the outset, then it becomes clear that even within the truth of the Church and of dogmatically correct statements it is absolutely possible to speak sinfully, with a sinfulness which may be either individual, or of humanity in general or of a particular period. Once again, it would be impossible to say that Catholic theology has given a great deal of thought up till now to this question which is not really so unimportant in itself and is of great interest also in the theology of 'concrete' nature in the infralapsarian order. If I were to ask myself, therefore, as to what within Catholic theology are the essential *basic* structures of this infralapsarian order of nature which are to be found also in every dogmatic statement, I would have to confess my ignorance and could merely make a guess unsystematically at some of these particular characteristics. But all this is not meant to obscure the more fundamental insight which our first thesis is intended to express:—a dogmatic statement has (like a kerygmatic one) also a natural substratum which makes such a statement analogous to ordinary statements and which is the *potentia obediēntialis* even in a positive sense for the real nature and meaning of dogmatic statements as such. As has already been said, it is not possible to develop all these natural properties of a human statement precisely in so far as they are necessarily rediscovered in a dogmatic statement. All we want to do is to give a few more indications here.

First of all, a dogmatic statement is meant to be a true statement by the very fact that a human statement has this intention and makes this claim. It intends a definite objective content which has its own existence opposite the speaker—it is not merely the publication of a subjective state of the speaker; it does not ultimately wish to objectify the subjectivity of the speaker but rather to bring the objectivity of the matter referred to nearer to the listener and thus to subjectify in this sense. In as far as these dogmatic statements to a great extent do not refer simply to objects of direct sense experience and are also not concerned simply with one's own spiritual experience, such statements can only be analogous, i.e. they point to the meant object with the help of positive representations and point the way to surpassing those representations by transcendence and negation. They do this, however, in the consciousness that this transcendental way of surpassing the original data

does not lead simply to absolute darkness and the nameless. For even what is unexperienced still has an objective likeness to what is experienced, and the transcendental affirmation of a similarity of analogy, in spite of the greater dissimilarity which obtains between divine and finite reality, belongs to those original intellectual data which are implicitly reaffirmed in every affirmation and negation. Under these presuppositions a dogmatic statement involves also the fact that not all dogmatic statements can be equally true or false. In other words, it involves the recognition that it is completely possible to pose the question of truth in this objective sense with regard to such statements and that not all statements are equally true or false simply because they refer to what is beyond sense experience. This will probably seem quite self-evident to the normal Christian. But if one thinks along the lines of absolute modernism (as understood in Catholic theology) or of absolute existentialism, then one ought to see in the truth of a dogmatic statement the final success in representing the subjective and always unique religious experience aptly—which means then, however, representing it productively both in an inward and outward direction. One may indeed have varying degrees of success in this, but this success can never be opposed to non-success in the same way as is the case between a logical affirmation and negation and between truth and falsehood as such. Certainly, a dogmatic statement must be allowed to have all those possibilities of ordinary statements, possibilities which exist in its case on account of a difference between the truth which is grasped in a properly personal act and that truth (or error) which is present in the objective-conceptual statement of that unobjectified, pre-conceptual truth—implied transcendently or in some other way—and which is grasped in a personal, spiritual act. This pre-conceptual, pre-propositional knowledge, which may be true even though the conceptual-objective expression is false (the converse is of course also true), is, without detriment to its property of being non-propositional, an absolutely objective knowledge which refers to an object which stands quite independently of the exercise of this knowledge. The fact that this peculiar tension between what is meant and what is said (if we may put what we are trying to say in this, though perhaps misleading way) which is present in ordinary knowledge can be also present and indeed present above all in a theological statement, follows not only from the universal validity of our basic thesis but also from many other, specifically theological reasons. It follows from the possibility of being a person

who really believes in Christ even where, judging merely from the objective meaning of an objectified statement, there seems only non-belief. It follows finally from the impossibility of knowing reflexly with absolute certainty the reality of one's own or someone else's belief, even though one seems to hold fast absolutely—according to the testimony of one's reflection—to the statement of faith declared to be absolutely true. It is not possible to enter further into this problem which we have just indicated.

2. A dogmatic statement is a statement of faith. In our fifth thesis we will indeed have to separate and distinguish the dogmatic statement from a direct and original kerygmatic statement. This must not prevent us, however, from qualifying the dogmatic statement in the stricter sense as also a statement of faith. A dogmatic statement, whenever it is genuine and lives up to its true being, is thus not merely an ordinary statement about some theological object (about something to which the Christian faith itself referred originally) but is also even in its execution—in as much as it is the self-accomplishment of the subject—an exercise of faith. In other words, it is a statement of faith not only in as far as it is *fides quae creditur* but also in as far as it is *fides qua creditur*. Catholic theology usually expresses what is meant here by stating that theology is not in fact merely an exercise of the *habitus fidei* purely as such but an exercise of the *habitus scientiae* which is however permeated and supported by the *habitus fidei*, so that theology always is and must be '*fide illustrata*' (Denz 1796: 1st Vatican Council). Because, and in so far as, faith is always the listening by a concrete human being to the Word of God, the real fact of having heard, the success of the listening to the Word of God which is actually present only when it is heard and understood, can always happen solely in a simultaneous understanding of faith, i.e. in a confrontation (which naturally admits of many degrees) of God's message with what man already is, with man in so far as he is a spiritual being and with the man as he is listening to this message. Since the analysis by the hearer of what he is told is an inevitable moment in the process of hearing itself, and since utter non-understanding destroys even the hearing itself, a certain degree of theology belongs as an inner moment to hearing itself, and the mere hearing in faith is already a human activity in which man's own subjectivity, together with its logic, its experience, native concepts and perspectives, already enters into play. What we call theology and hence dogmatic statement in the strict sense is therefore merely a further

development, an unfolding, of that basic subjective reflection which already takes place in the mere obedient listening to the Word of God, i.e. in faith as such. From this it follows, however, that dogmatic reflection and its statement can and must never separate themselves completely from the source from which they spring, i.e. from faith itself. This refers always, as has been said, not merely to the object of faith but also to its exercise. The latter remains the basis and support of the dogmatic statement as such itself. Self-evident as what has just been said may seem to be, it must nevertheless be admitted that it is in fact not really self-evident in Catholic theology. For one may hold—in company with not a small part of post-tridentine theology—that grace, in so far as it is strictly supernatural, is something of which we cannot at all be conscious. And in this case one will be of the opinion that the 'light of faith', even where one retains this expression, really means either that purely non-experiential, supernatural elevation of the spiritual acts of man by which these acts become saving acts, or that empirically exterior instruction by historical revelation whose fact and content (since these two are inseparable) can be grasped also by purely natural, speculative and historical reasoning. In other words, if one denies that the supernatural saving acts have a formal object which cannot be grasped by any natural act, *then* the object of theology (as even that of faith) can in principle be grasped also by purely natural reason in exactly the same way as by believing reason. The unbeliever will not in general actually occupy himself with such propositions, since they do not interest him. But, presupposing the theory about the nature of the grace of faith just indicated, he can basically do so just as well as the believer, and he grasps exactly the same when he occupies himself with these statements as the believer. There could, therefore, be a dogmatic statement which would be a statement of faith in its object but not in its exercise. *Against* this conception, which in a nominalistic and rationalistic fashion removes the actual supernatural nature of faith (which, of course, it does not deny) into a dimension conceived purely objectively and conceived as a state beyond consciousness and situated outside the exercise of the spirit as such, we hold fast to the thomistic doctrine of the proper formal object of the act elevated by grace and adhere to the doctrine of the proper light of faith and the incommensurability of faith with an ordinary act referring to some religious matter. It must then, however, be truly said that even where it is a question of pure 'listening to' and stating God's

message in Christ as such, and where it is a matter of a dogmatic statement in the sense of a self-justifying reflection (and in this sense a matter of theology), it is always still a question of a statement of faith, an exercise of faith. As soon as this is no longer the case, there may still indeed be science of religion, but not theology. It may be—indeed it is a fact—that this difference is not properly speaking subject to conscious *reflection* and that, therefore, the profane student of religion and the Christian theologian seemingly meet on exactly the same plane and hence are distinguished from each other merely by the existential acceptance and non-acceptance of that about which both of them speak to one another. But in actual fact this is merely apparent. In fact this existential acceptance or refusal opens up or shuts out the whole view of the reality, even though it seems that the profane theoretician of religion can know and say just as much or as little about Christianity as the believing theologian. It is not easy to make it reflectively clear *why* this is nevertheless not the case—*how*, in the case of apparently similar propositions formulated by both, the profane scientist really misses the whole point and does not really express it at all, although he reads the dogmatic statements of the theologian and thinks he understands them; and even though it is impossible to prove on the plane of objective concepts as such that he has not really understood at all. The truth of the matter is that this incomprehension goes deeper and is rooted at the point where knowledge is activated in the exercise of the person accepting grace, and before it is on reflection expressed in propositions. It must, of course, be noted also with regard to this conception that it is not as if the unbeliever were simply one without the grace for Christian understanding, 'pure nature' (in the Catholic theological sense). He, too, comes under the influence of the grace which seeks and enlightens every man; hence, in any case, he sees more than would be seen by someone without grace, even though he does not want to see what he sees and even though he 'represses the truth' and pushes it aside. He, too, stands therefore under the light of grace—although by self-closure from it. And to this extent there is after all a difference between the statement of the theologian and that of the profane, unbelieving theoretician of religion. (Of course, it must once more be noted in this connection that nobody can say absolutely in practice who among the speakers belongs to the one or the other category.) If it is correct to say that the dogmatic statement, even where it is already real theology, is and remains a statement of faith not merely

with regard to its object but also in the subjective act as such, then the dogmatic statement is determined by all the theological characteristics of the *fides qua creditur*. This would again provide the starting point for the development of a whole theology of the dogmatic statement. And again we must state that this is not possible here. At any rate it follows from this beginning that even a dogmatic statement still participates in its own way in the expressed profession and praise of the message Christ has given us about himself and which leads us to him—in the expression of that message listened to and accepted. The dogmatic statement leads towards the historical event of salvation, in spite of all its conceptual reflection. It renders this event present by confessing that it is brought about by it. It does not merely speak 'about' this event but tries to bring man into a real relationship with it. And despite all its abstractness and theoretical, reflective nature, it is essentially dependent on the fact that this not merely theoretical but also existential and supernatural relationship of the whole man to the historical event of salvation—and not merely to some proposition about it—is really preserved and that the theological statement, even in its theoretical-reflex character, is *ex fide ad fidem*. Since we cannot do more here than to indicate the *locus theologicus* of the question about the nature of a dogmatic statement—which is the same as the nature of the act of faith—we will now pass on to the further determination of dogmatic statements from a different angle. Before doing so, let us merely note that until quite recently the theological description of the act of faith itself regarded the latter far too much and almost exclusively from the point of view of the theological nature of the dogmatic proposition. If there is more concern in Catholic theology today with trying to bring out other moments of the act of faith than merely the holding fast to a proposition guaranteed by the authority of God, then it will no doubt be easier in future to clarify the proper characteristics of the theologically dogmatic statement by contrasting it with the act of faith as such. We will then have to avoid the danger, it is true, which might incline us to make a separation out of the distinction, to the detriment of both the act of faith itself (whose theoretical aspect might become obscured) and of the theological statement (whose property of referring back to the act of faith might disappear from view).

3. A dogmatic statement is in special measure an ecclesiological statement. Already the act of faith and the kerygma of Jesus Christ himself have an ecclesiological aspect which is essential to them.

Proclamation and belief take place in the Church, since she is (in an indissoluble union with the personal uniqueness of the individual and his decision of faith) the object of the redeeming, saving act of God and of the faith itself. For the act of faith is by hearing and remains dependent on the testimony of the message of Christ and this testimony takes place in the assembly of believers, originates from it and is destined for it. The dogmatic statement, however, is ecclesiological in an ever more special manner and measure. For theology, in so far as it is distinguished from the original message and simple faith, arises precisely because there is and must be the Church. Since belief must take place in the Church, from the Church and towards the Church, there is theology. Presumably there would, of course, be theology even if the individual had an absolutely individualistic history of salvation and faith, i.e. if the latter were possible: the message which he has heard and always hears anew, would be in continuous dialogue with the rest of his experience of life and would always have to be heard anew in relation to the rest of this spiritual history. And since his experience of salvation has a *history* both in itself (naturally it has this too) and through the continual encounter with the rest of his *historical* reality, there would already be theology in this way. For theology is the historical permanence of a revelation existing in ever new encounters and transforming everything into itself, with a spatio-temporal position in time. Suppose there were no eph'hapax of the event of saving history, that there were always just revelation and never any theology related to a localized event of salvation but not identical with it. Then, if there were no theology, the saving history which takes place but once would not be capable of really reaching later humanity in a saving way. Or at least later humanity would not be reached by it in the whole breadth and extent of its existence—anyone living later on would have to strip himself of his own historical uniqueness and seek to enter into a relationship with this past event of salvation in the form of the abstract man-in-himself. This consideration shows by the way (to make this already explicit here) that theology and a non-binding opinion resulting from a merely subjective reflection on a saving event or a proposition of the original revelation are not the same. For, particularly if theology is to be the absolutely obedient confrontation of one's own existence with the kerygma of salvation found in the unique person of Jesus Christ, it must be able to carry the obligation of faith in itself. It must be possible to have a theology which is authoritatively binding. Wherever

it does not (yet) possess this character, this is not because theology *cannot* have this character but because it is itself still in the process of finding itself and of accomplishing what it means to accomplish, viz. of being the concrete form of faith in a new spiritual situation. But however much there is and must already be theology on account of the individual history of the faith of individual men, theology has still a particularly *ecclesiological* character. For in the Church men must believe in common, profess in common and praise God for his grace in a tongue which can be spoken by all. And this must always be done anew at each moment. Confronted with a common spiritual situation which, being common, must always be grasped and understood again in common, the traditional message must always be grasped anew in common. There must be theology in the Church for which the Church herself is responsible. It will, of course, always be due also to the initiative of individuals, since this is the only way in which there can be history and the life of a community. But even theology and theological statements by the individual always address themselves to the Church (explicitly or implicitly). Such a statement by the individual is always a question posed by the individual to the Church as to whether she can make this statement her own or at least can support it as being a possible statement in the one Church. Apart from this always ecclesiological theology of the individual, and superior to it, there is the theology of the Church in which the Church as a whole engages in theological activity through the bearers of her established *magisterium*. This means that here the Church reflects on the message—given by and received from Jesus Christ and transmitted in the belief of the primitive Church—in relation to each particular, historically conditioned situation and based on her consciousness of faith and its original source. She reflects on this message and proclaims the one permanent faith anew in the form of this new theological reflection, in such a way that this faith retains and acquires once more as inevitable a presence as possible for the one who hears the message of the Church to make a decision. This theological form of the proclamation of the Church is theology, for this proclamation always retains its reference to another *norma normans* to which it knows itself bound and which it wants merely to interpret, viz. the message of the first witnesses of the Lord, the faith of the primitive Church in the normative, concrete form in which it is found in Holy Scripture. And precisely this theology is a real proclamation of the faith which demands obedience, in so far as

the Church claims and can claim in her *magisterium* that this her message constituted in this way (i.e. become theology) *is* (and does not merely speak about) the here and now valid form of the Word in which God has spoken to us in our heart. In this connection, too, it must again be stated that all we can do here is to determine the *locus theologicus* which could be the starting point for an essential determination of the nature of the dogmatic statement. For nothing very precise is said about the dogmatic statement simply by calling it ecclesiological. It would still be necessary to develop what exactly is meant by this. This again is impossible here.

Only in one regard should we make at least an attempt to clarify our meaning. Since a dogmatic statement—this is the way I would formulate it—has an ecclesiological character, it always signifies inevitably a communal *linguistic* ruling on terminology which, on the one hand, can be obligatory and, on the other hand, must be taken into account in any interpretation of the declarations made by the Church, and which must not be mistaken for the thing itself or respectively must not be confused with a statement which can be made only by starting from the thing itself. Let me explain myself and the sub-thesis I have just formulated. I regard this thesis as important, particularly because it is not reflected on in the usual theology of the *magisterium* and its binding force, and because this oversight leads to unnecessary misunderstandings in the internal Catholic teaching practice and in controversial theology. The reality referred to by theological statements is of incalculable richness and infinite fullness. The terminological material available for characterizing this reality is extremely limited. It remains limited even when it grows in the course of the history of concepts and terms. It remains particularly limited when, and because, it is a question of that store of terminology which can be used for a theological statement for it ought to be brief, understandable by all and accommodated to the consciousness of faith of a wider audience. With this very limited material of communally usable concepts, we must keep open the view into the infinite fullness of what is meant by faith, and with it must be expressed the infinite fullness and differentiation of the matter under consideration. Such a limited terminology can never be adequate for what is meant. We do not, however, intend to think here about why and how one can be conscious of this inadequate relation between the statement and what is meant by it when the reality itself can be laid hold of only in the word itself and not side by side with it or beyond it.

What we are concerned with here is the following: the word which is inadequate for expressing the thing—always, solely, inevitably and most frequently indeed, in its communal use—brings out certain characteristics of the matter referred to and equally inevitably leaves other characteristics in the background. It creates new relations to certain other matters, and equally does not bring out certain existing relations with other realities of the faith. The historically conditioned, limited terminology lends historical finiteness, concreteness and contingency to the statement of faith itself, particularly in its theological form. Added to this there is the fact that it is basically impossible to furnish every time an absolutely unequivocal, reflectively expressed definition of associated terms, together with the terminology used. For theology cannot take its departure, like geometry, from a finite number of axioms which can be strictly defined in concepts used by them (quite apart from the fact that even these sciences are not absolutely successful in this). This is the reason why ecclesiastical declarations of doctrine, ecclesiastical statements of dogma, also contain implicitly a determined terminology about which one cannot pose the question of truth but at the most the question of aptness. Of course, those who teach and define are not always conscious of this; indeed, most of the time they are not conscious of it and *cannot* even be conscious of it in an adequately reflective way. Here and there, but only right at the fringes, this problem is recognized in some way in Catholic theology. This is the case, for instance, when it is said that the Church calls the event taking place at the Lord's supper '*aptissime*' transubstantiation, or when Pius XII defends the aptness of many of the scholastic concepts which we may not presume the Church will ever abandon again in the future, although we know that they are of historical origin (Denz 2312). But the problem we have referred to here is felt very much in the Church's teaching practice. When it is taught (to give at least a few examples) that man is already a sinner by descent from Adam, the word 'sinner' is used very much in an analogous sense which differs most essentially from the sinfulness brought about by one's own personal decision. This is dealt with at length by scholastic theology in the treatise on Original sin. But in the concise formulation given by the Church, which states that man is a sinner by reason of his origin from Adam, the merely analogous nature of this term is not made explicit. It is not treated by itself as a special theme and is not clearly present in the reflex consciousness of faith in the majority of Christians. Theologians

for the most part forget it since their theology too is very much reduced in normal practical life to the catechetical, undifferentiated elements of the usual statements made by the Church. Anyone who is really conscious of what analogy means in such a case understands also that one could equally well say in the nature of things and *in abstracto* that man is not a sinner through Adam—without necessarily teaching something thereby which is objectively contradictory to the Church's teaching on original sin, since such a statement in a different terminology would merely dispute that man is a sinner by his origin from Adam in the *same* sense as he is by his own decision. There are indeed some examples which show that the Church has not only gradually given different nuances to her terminology here and there, but has even changed that terminology in the strict sense (without making any change in what is meant by it). The augustinian terminology, for instance, which at one time was the terminology of the Church with regard to the sinfulness of every act done by someone in the state of original sin, was implicitly abandoned through the declarations of Pius V. St Augustine could and had to say—and the Church of his day also said so as part of her teaching—that every non-justified person in the state of original sin sins by every one of his acts; in the language of the post-tridentine Church we may no longer formulate the matter in this way, although it can be shown that these opposing formulations do not contradict each other in what they mean—even though this must not be allowed to obscure the fact that even such a change in terminology is extremely significant in the field of theology and the history of thought. There are many such determinations of terminology contained implicitly in definitions. For instance, the Church's teaching on the Trinity *as a whole* requires a conception of 'person' in *this* connection which (if one is honest) has relatively little to do with what one understands by this word in other connections. And yet this word says what is meant, and it is not permissible within the Church's teaching to express the matter intended by completely circumventing this concept and word, although a terminology such as would be proposed by Barth in this matter might not perhaps be liable in itself to more misunderstandings though perhaps different ones. When the Holy Office declared recently that only a consecrating priest can concelebrate, this was more a determination of terminology than a dogmatic statement clarifying the matter itself. This is at least true in so far as this declaration does not explain what is meant by con-

celebration. Thus, this particular statement practically came to this that one may only call that way of celebrating Mass a concelebration in which several priests pronounce the words of consecration together. This leaves it open, however, whether or not a priest who celebrates Mass together with other priests without co-consecrating in this way can nevertheless exercise his priestly function as such in some other way. Let us take another, better-known example: the question as to who according to Catholic teaching possesses membership of the Church is for the greater part a matter of linguistic determination of terminology. '*Mystici Corporis*' reserved the term of 'Church membership' to Catholics. Today those concerned with the teaching authority of the Church seem rather to be inclined once more to describe that reality as membership of the Church which is already given by baptism alone. The interesting thing about this is merely the fact that nowhere in these declarations of the Church's *magisterium* is this question seen explicitly as one of terminology but that this matter is taught with the impression and presupposition that one is speaking about the reality itself. It must moreover be noted in this connection that this terminology is inevitably exposed to continual historical change. This historical change has indeed itself been influenced by the *magisterium* of the Church which has to a certain extent helped in directing its course, has arrested it and to a certain extent has diverted it—and rightly so—into other paths. But it must also be remembered that this historical process of change in terminology cannot be completely steered by the authorities of the Church's *magisterium*, not even in the ecclesiastical field. This process therefore takes place independently, at least partly so, of the official Church and her conscious regulating power, and this fact implies in its turn the duty (and the right) of the Church to take account of this terminological process going on independently of her. This she can do in a great variety of ways into which I do not wish to enter here. But it can happen for these reasons that the Church does not take these changes in terminology clearly and decisively enough into account. As a result there may arise theological controversies both within the Church and with non-Catholic theology which do in fact rest basically on a mutual misunderstanding of terminology. Hence it may also happen—speaking from the Catholic viewpoint—that a Catholic theologian remains obliged to use an officially adopted terminology even though he cannot blind himself to the problematic nature of this terminology, its misleading nature, its lack perhaps of

perspectives which are of essential import and similar limitations of such, as of any, terminology. This again is not meant to say that the theologian takes up a passive attitude towards these regulations of the language of theological terminology undertaken by the Church. No, wherever he is engaged in a living theology by looking at the reality itself, the theologian contributes also actively (even though perhaps almost imperceptibly) towards the continual historical changes of the terminology of the Church. And conversely, by keeping in this process to the Church's rules of language in his statements, he enters into the communal, historical conditionality of the particular consciousness of faith existing at the time—a conditionality which at the same time (if it is accepted and endured) keeps the individual view open to the Church's consciousness of faith as it also expects that renunciation of the individual without which there can be no unity of truth and love in this world.

4. A theological statement is a statement which leads into the *mysterium*. This, too, is meant to refer for a start to a characteristic which the theological and dogmatic statement has in common with the direct, kerygmatic statement. If the kerygmatic statement, with and in spite of all its determined and indispensable content—which belongs to it and rightly so, if only because it always refers also to a historical event within the human dimension—is already a statement which directs its hearer beyond himself into the mystery of God as it is in itself, then this is true also of the dogmatic statement since the latter must never abandon its original relation to the real kerygmatic statement of faith. The dogmatic statement—it is true—is a reflected statement in which man (if we may put it this way) is also explicitly alone with himself in his own process of knowledge and not only alone with the thing. And so the dogmatic statement can only be what it must be if it does not forget that the object to which it refers is only properly known when it is grasped as something infinite and incomprehensible—as a permanent mystery—in the very act of taking hold of its finite concept. The dogmatic statement must not forget, therefore, that for this very reason its object is given not only in a concept but also in the effect of God's touching man both by lifting him up and by his grace which goes beyond any conceptual procedure. The dogmatic statement—like the kerygmatic one—is basically possessed of an element which (in the case of intramundane categorical statements) is not identical with the represented conceptual content. Without injuring

its own meaning, the represented conceptual content is in this case merely the means of experiencing a being referred beyond itself and everything imaginable. That this reference is no mere empty, frustrated desire to transcend, that it is not simply the formal horizon for the possibility of objective conceptualization, but, the way in which man really moves towards the self-communication of God as he is in himself—is brought about by what we call grace, and is grasped and accepted in what we call faith. We do not refer here to the *concept* of transcendence or the *concept* of grace, but to these realities themselves. Naturally, these realities do not permit of any simple objective presentation in the dogmatic statement; it cannot be determined objectively whether they have come into play in the dogmatic statement itself. The theologian himself can only be told repeatedly that what enters into his conceptually composed statements as such is not everything that should be present in them. It can be indirectly tested by critical conjectures as to this or that indication, whether there is the spirit as well as the letter and—besides talking about the matter—also the matter itself. Seen in the totality of what is said, and taking a deeper view, certain signs offer themselves for a distinction of spirits, indicating whether someone merely mentions the fact that he is concerned with a mystery when in reality he manipulates his concepts and statements as if they were the reality itself and not merely signs which speak most clearly and perceptibly when they silently refer the believing man beyond themselves into the impenetrable light of God himself. These criteria have not yet been properly developed in Catholic theology. (We prescind here from the subject of analogy which is itself most frequently misunderstood inasmuch as the analogous concept is conceived as an odd hybrid between an univocal and an equivocal concept, i.e. as something derived, in contrast to which the univocal predication is the more original and proper—when in reality the radical openness of the movement of the spirit in analogy really makes the spirit a spirit.) The theories of paradox, of dialectic discourse and of the merely indirect discourse—and presumably not without some justification—have not found any real echo, and have certainly not established their right of being at home, in Catholic scholastic theology. As far as the doctrine of analogy is concerned, we will have to admit if we are honest that it was E. Przywara who first elevated it from being a modest study somewhere in logic or general ontology to being a really important nodal point of theological discourse. And it is still far from having

been developed to the point where one could say in this respect that its meaning has been generally understood. This is clear from the fact that it is not yet agreed as to whether this doctrine is what Barth used to describe as something specifically Catholic and absolutely to be denied, or whether this analogy is the name given by Catholic theology to something which is recognized by everyone as an essential characteristic of theological discourse (although perhaps under different names), and which for us signifies a first starting point for what is of importance here, viz. the fact that the theological discourse does not only speak about the mystery but that it only speaks properly if it is also a kind of instruction showing us how to come into the presence of the mystery itself. At any rate—to be more concise—one must not imagine that one has already arrived at the reality in theological dogmatic discourse when one possesses its conceptual term. This term is mystagogical quite apart from its function of substituting for the reality and of being its image. Over and above this, it invokes the experience granted by grace of the absolute mystery itself, to the extent in which this mystery communicates itself to us in that grace which is the grace of Christ. Yet once more it cannot here be more than a question of announcing a theme and of pointing out regretfully that it is not a subject found in scholastic theology—by which we naturally do not mean that it is found nowhere in our theological tradition.

5. A dogmatic statement is not identical with the original Word of revelation and the original statement of faith.

Perhaps I am only now coming to the subject I have been expected to treat of and so cannot deal adequately with it at the end of a long lecture. But in the Catholic understanding of theology and faith, of scriptural and dogmatic statements, this relationship is extremely many-sided, entangled and very difficult to express merely by a nice distinction. Hence, what we have said so far has also been a necessary preparation after all for the section on which we are about to embark, i.e. the section about the distinction between the original proclamation of revelation and the original statement of faith, on the one hand, and reflex dogmatic statements on the other. We find the prototype of the first kind of statement in Scripture, although we should perhaps note that even here there is once more the distinction between the original event of revelation with its direct testimony, on the one hand, and on the other hand the reflection on it found in Scripture. If we are to contrast the dogmatic statement with the statements of Scripture—

and we are absolutely justified in doing this—then we must now proceed to work out the differences between the two. This is not as easy as it might seem at first sight. After all, we have already said that even the dogmatic statement is supported objectively and subjectively by faith. We have already seen that it remains a statement and an act of faith and is therefore qualified in exactly the same way by the *magisterium* of the Church even though it is not always and in every case the statement of a binding explanation given by the *magisterium*, but may also be the statement of a *quaestio disputata*—for even then it still tries to look to the Church's consciousness of faith as a whole and even in this case knows itself to be dependent on the Church's *magisterium*. And conversely: there is no *proclaimed* revelation except in the form of a *believed* revelation. A *believed*, i.e. heard, revelation, always already includes also—in so far as it is a revelation understood, accepted and assimilated—a synthesis of the Word of God and the word of a particular man which *he* in particular can and indeed must speak in his historical situation and from his particular standpoint. Every Word of God which is spoken by men is already, therefore, to a certain extent a reflected word, and to that extent also already a beginning of theology. The difference between the original kerygma and a dogmatic statement, therefore, does not lie in the fact that in the former there is as it were the pure Word of God alone and in the latter only human reflection. If this were the case, then there could be indeed merely non-binding theological discourse talking round about this Word of God, but not a statement of faith which though different from the original Word of God is yet absolutely binding and through which the Word of God, as announced originally, receives its real binding presence in the course of history. There could only be a history of theology in this case and not a history of dogmas. The fact that the latter exists can be explained only because the original statement of faith already includes that moment of genuine human reflection which makes it legitimate and necessary and which continues to be effective and to unfold itself in later theology. What has just been said—it must be stressed once more—is valid also of Holy Scripture. Thus, even in the simplest kerygmatic statement there is already a beginning of theology; and this theology, understood as reflection and as derived from the most direct experience of revelation, is undoubtedly already given an extensive place in Scripture. It is regrettable that Catholic theology hardly reflects on this in fact. One practically never asks oneself about the source from

which the author of certain parts of Holy Scripture has received what he says. One does not reckon with the undoubtedly real possibility that even a scriptural statement can already be secondary in relation to another such statement—that it can be derived from this other statement. One puts every Scripture text on the same plane of meaning and treats it as an entirely original datum which has sprung absolutely directly from the revelation of God and cannot be derived from anything else. And yet no one can seriously deny this other possibility in principle; it is a real possibility, for we can already observe a development of dogma within the New Testament. And to take such possibilities into account in practice could contribute a great deal to the exact determination of the meaning of certain texts of Scripture.

And yet there is an essential difference between a theological statement (even in its binding form of a real testimony of faith and of actual proclamation) and the original testimony of faith to which *quoad nos* Scripture as a *whole* does after all belong. The reason for this lies in the peculiar and unique position of Holy Scripture. Revelation has a history. Christian understanding, however, means by this first and last that there are certain quite definite events fixed in place and time in which this revelation (which is determined for all later ages) takes place in such a way that later ages remain permanently bound by this historical event, and that they really attain this divine revelation only if and in so far as they refer back to this historical event of revelation. Hence there are certain events and statements for future ages (statements which in their turn belong to the constitutive elements of these events themselves) which form the enduring and unsurpassable *norma normans, non normata* for all later dogmatic statements, viz. none other than the original statements just mentioned. Even if and when these statements have *also* all those elements which we have elsewhere attributed to dogmatic statements, they nevertheless have one thing no other statement has—they belong to that unique historical event of salvation itself to which all later proclamation and theology are referred. They are in this very definite sense more than theology, and even more than absolutely binding theology. They are not merely any statement of faith but here that statement which remains the permanent ground of all other, future statements—they are what is handed down and not the unfolding tradition of what has been handed down. It is true, of course, that the latter statement of the already derived and standardized type is a form and aspect of the original statement, with-

out which later Christians could no longer hear and repeat that original statement obediently without becoming unhistorical and unecclesiastical. It is true, in other words, that the later Christian will always hear the original statement in terms of its later statement by the Church's *magisterium* and consciousness of faith. Yet he really hears that original statement of faith itself, not although but precisely because he hears it by means of the present Church. For the *ultimate* guarantee of being able to hear the original statement is not the historical skill of man, (i.e. his 'being able to understand' historically in matters of revelation and faith), but the exercise of faith in community with the present-day Church. But as has been said, it is *thus* that the *original* statement of faith is heard, and this statement remains a moment in the historical event of salvation to which all ages, past and future, remain constantly referred. It can therefore be merely a question of the form in which this original statement of faith, understood as the *norma normans, non normata*, is given to us today, both in binding and non-binding statements of faith. We do not intend to answer this question by a theological deduction, although this would presumably be possible. Our question can be answered by saying quite simply that the original statement of faith understood in this way is given to us in Holy Scripture. We are quite justified in making this assertion even though we do not commit ourselves regarding what has been and still is (today more than in preceding centuries) a controverted question in Catholic theology, viz. the question as to whether Tradition—which according to the Council of Trent is a norm of our Faith and of the Church's proclamation of doctrine—is basically and abstractly speaking a source of the material content of the faith in addition to Scripture, or whether it is only a formal criterion for the purity of the faith, after the material content of the apostolic proclamation had settled adequately and objectively in Scripture. The reason for our being justified in making the above assertion is quite simple. For, even if we suppose that there is another source *besides* Scripture which serves as testimony for us of certain material contents of the faith not found also in Holy Scripture, this other source known as Tradition would nevertheless be such in fact as to contain only the testimony (guaranteed by God as pure) of the actual apostolic traditions in accord with revelation and unmixed with human tradition. For it goes without saying: revelation, right from the very start of the historical movement of revelation, was accompanied by human, theological reflection, by non-binding

*theologumena*, by purely human knowledge and opinions and by errors. It is not indeed necessary to dispute the fact that the Church can distinguish, within the mixed up mass of what is human and what is divine in Tradition, between that which really represents a handing on properly-so-called of the original tradition and the rest which cannot make any such claim. One will absolutely have to concede this instinct to her because of the assistance of the Holy Spirit promised to her. But this does not yet answer the question as to *how* the Church makes this necessary distinction, a distinction always necessary if the revealed truth is always to be recognized *anew* by the Church and she nevertheless knows herself always bound to the original revelation. Let us suppose that the Church is able to do this by the light of faith granted to her or by an instinct of faith alone, without any extrinsic criteria. Let us suppose, furthermore, that the Church simply adopts this critical distinction with regard to the literature passed on to her from the apostolic age—in other words, that she says where, in this literature, she recognizes the genuine objectification and the pure expression of her faith, and that she says in what other literature of this age she does not recognize this. Then, even under these pre-suppositions, she would delimit precisely *that* pure objectification of the original apostolic testimony which we call Holy Scripture. Yet, be this as it may, Christians are agreed (at least in essentials) about the fact that the pure (even though absolutely historical) written objectification of the apostolic kerygma *is* given to the Church in Holy Scripture—no matter what may be said about the just mentioned *a priori* considerations. Otherwise the Church would not possess any such objective norm when she wishes to determine by the gift of distinction what in the concrete totality of her actual Tradition is actually tradition of revelation and what is merely human tradition which has also existed from the beginning of the Church. There is, therefore, a *norma normans, non normata*, and this norm is identical with Scripture and it alone. This is primarily a norm for the consciousness of faith of the Church as a whole and for the Church's *magisterium*, but not for the individual (much less for his fight against the consciousness of faith of the whole Church attested authoritatively by the *magisterium*). And to this extent the original word of revelation and of faith in—and of—the Church is essentially distinct from every later, theological statement of—and in—the Church, even though the latter be a kerygmatic testimony of faith, something demanding the assent of faith,

and not merely a theological reflection. Hence, one could say that the theological word is *only* a theological word, in as much as it is not the word of Scripture. Naturally, even the statements of scriptural exegesis and biblical theology are merely theological statements, even when they deal *with* the words of Scripture. It would naturally be also still possible and necessary to make explicit, and to give reasons for and to estimate the significance of, a distinction within the theological word which we have up till now always only mentioned in passing and presupposed. We mean the distinction which is based on the fact that there is, *on the one hand*, a dogmatic statement made by the Church in her ordinary and extraordinary proclamation of doctrine, which demands obedience and faith—and this right up to the real, absolute assent of faith but also below this—even where such an absolute consent of faith is not demanded of him, or at least not demonstrably so—in the different degrees in which the individual Christian and theologian knows himself to be bound by the proclamation and teaching of the Church—and that there is, *on the other hand*, the merely private word of the individual theologian. The borderlines between these different kinds of theological statement are fluid. This is so even merely because the theologian, even in his private statements, if they are truly dogmatic, wants still to refer himself to the Church's consciousness of faith. For under certain circumstances he has the absolutely correct impression (based on sufficient grounds) that he does after all factually reproduce the teaching of the ordinary *magisterium*, i.e. of the normal proclamation of faith, and that he addresses himself by his statement to his hearer in such a way that he directs him to the faith of the Church and gives him sufficient certainty to respond on his part to the thus attained belief of the Church not only theologically but believingly. Even where in actual fact a statement is proposed as a *quaestio disputata*, or a *sententia libera*—and this fact is even explicitly stated—such a statement, if it is to remain theological at all, can only be meant in the sense that it wants to ensure or facilitate the grasping and assimilating of properly dogmatic statements of faith at least for the one who pronounces it and, in the form of an offer, for the one who hears it. For even free theological opinions cannot seriously find their sole meaning in being simply additional knowledge with regard to the real content of the faith. Whether there is in this sense a real deductive theology attaining absolutely new knowledge and declaring it not to be part of the content of the Faith and non-binding is certainly something doubtful

which should at any rate make one ask more earnestly the question whether, if there were such a thing, it could still be theology. The theologically decisive function of the theologically free statement is surely that of helping us to see better and to confess what we really believe—of being a help, in other words, for faith itself. It must not be overlooked, moreover, that it is quite impossible for the individual, here and now, to make everywhere an absolute and adequate distinction between the proper content of faith and a merely theological, free opinion. It must not be forgotten that even the definitions of the Church are understood by everyone especially when they do not reflect on it, *also* by means of their total consciousness and hence also by theologically free opinions. What has been said so far in connection with this fifth thesis of our lecture does not imply that everything has thereby been said concerning this distinction between a kerygmatic and a dogmatic statement of faith. Up till now we have reflected mostly (not only) on the difference between an original statement of faith and a theologico-dogmatic statement dependent on it and based on it. Naturally, within this category of derived, theologico-dogmatic statements, there is once more a distinction between the statement which professes and refers to the reality itself, entrusts itself to it and praises it—and the statement in which the first ray of reflection is directed onto one's own knowledge itself. And this distinction has its ultimate, ontological basis in the nature of human knowledge itself in as far as the latter is always *both* direct and reflex, in itself and in the other and in as far as we can never adequately overcome this dualism. Hence there are dogmatic statements which by first intention are directed to the reflex self-possession of knowledge about something—and dogmatic statements which regard the reality itself. And both these kinds of statement are never absolutely separable from each other, in spite of and with all their differences.