

THE FUNCTION OF DOGMA

Fr. Tom Daly, S.J.

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Edited by Fr. Robin Koning, S.J. (April 2021)

Editor's Introduction:

This is an extract from a letter of Fr Daly to a Jesuit scholastic, Dinh Trung Hoà SJ, following up a conversation in which they had discussed, inter alia, the function of dogma in the Church. The section of the letter reproduced here, which forms the bulk of the letter and is the section which is relevant to Lonergan studies, addresses this question.

Footnotes in square brackets are editorial. The title "The Function of Dogma" is editorial and is drawn from the opening sentence of this part of the letter.

The function of dogma is made clear in the fifth chapter of *Method in Theology*, which was initially published in the journal *Gregorianum*, so it does not depend very much on Chapters 2 to 4. The eight functional specialties cover all that theologians are trying to do, and help each theologian whose focused on one specialty to recognise the value of the work of others in the other specialties, and so to avoid a sort of “imperialism”.

The four specialties in the first phase (see page 133 on phases) are concerned with “hearing the word” and can lead to a conversion, i.e. taking on board the messages that seem to be sound. The second phase requires all have been converted to the religious message to bear witness to it and to confront the problems of their own day.

Those who have been converted to a particular religious message will tend to come together and agree (with the help of work done in the historical specialization) on what are the essential facts within that message. And this leads to doctrine. Dogmatic theology is concerned with arriving at such facts (or truths), and this concern led to the early church councils. Systematic theology aims at understanding what these facts mean and how they can be reconciled with each other. Communications is concerned with presenting the results of such understanding to those who have not had the opportunity to do such theological study.

The second part of *MiT*¹ has a chapter or two on each of the functional specialties, mentioning some key issues, but not giving a thorough treatment. One important contribution is on the weakness of the two opposing tendencies of anachronism and archaism, (p. 312) and the solution to their opposition in a recognition of “development of doctrine”.² Newman published a book on this in 1845, but had given an excellent treatment of it much earlier in the 15th and last of his *Oxford University Sermons*.

¹ [*MiT* = *Method in Theology*]

² [Full stop missing in original, though clearly a new sentence starts here.]