

## DOGMA AND AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH

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**I**n our evil age which “demythologises” every institution and every notion of established authority - under the pretext of course of democratic equality and “enlightenment”, which from the outset claims that rational thought has absolute power over all that can be known - the notions of “dogma” and “authority” are now considered by many to be not only inappropriate to our time and place, but also extremely provocative and even demeaning of the dignity of the human being emancipated long ago. Thus to speak today of dogma as a common and indeed regulatory point of reference for the entire people of God - especially in the strict sense of a certain supernatural authority - constitutes no doubt a great scandal, or at any rate a bold demand which continuously needs new justification before all who “ask for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15).

In responding to this need and the doubts of those who in any way may have a contrary opinion, an attempt will be made to present the main things that could possibly be said on this issue, from the viewpoint of Orthodox systematic theology, during these historic times, so as to facilitate a fruitful and sincere dialogue with any person of goodwill.

First of all, it can be said that dogma and authority are considered to be notions which of themselves relate to each other as cause and causality, since authority is understood as being the power which dogma produces and directs, while dogma expresses sufficiently the nature of the authority from which it is derived. This last observation, namely that dogma expresses “sufficiently” the nature of the authority from which it comes without completely exhausting its content, and therefore without being completely identified with it, constitutes the fundamental condition for a successful characterisation of the essence of dogma, as shall be seen below.

Within the area of the Church, matters of course become more complicated. For, therein, dogma is not a notion which has a unified and unchangeably single meaning. Nor is authority understood as a compulsive force or as blind oppression. For a precise and fair evaluation of these two basic concepts it is imperative that a more thorough analysis be made of each by every impartial and thinking person of today, even if that person is not one who believes in Christ. Let us not forget that many sociologists and historians have for some time spoken about a “post-christian” period in which Christians already live.

## The different notions of the term dogma

The term dogma (from the verb δοκέω meaning “I think”), is known to be of pre-Christian origin. It expressed a binding decision or clause which was ethico-philosophical or socio-political in character. Its validity depended directly upon the trustworthiness and competence of the authority which pronounced it, for which reason it was connected to it (e.g., a particular philosopher or lawgiver, a philosophical or religious community, a state government etc). With the introduction of the term into the vocabulary and life of the Christian Church, its meaning became richer, as we shall see, and this gradually developed significant differentiations<sup>1</sup>. These differentiations were sometimes so greatly influenced by others that the formation of a totally new term became justified, which in turn expressed something almost entirely different.

At least four clearly distinct shades of meaning and uses of the word dogma can be highlighted in Christianity. These were not of course parallel to each other, but for historical or psychological reasons they arose and developed over time. Today they are an unquestionable reality which can cause the unwary considerable confusion.

1. The first and most fundamental meaning of dogma is of course mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, in the description of the Apostolic Synod which was called to decree “the decisions (*dogmata*) that had been reached by the Apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem” (Acts 16:4). The vital designation “reached” is highly indicative of the essence of dogma, as the point of crystallisation where two things meet: on the one hand the will of God who is revealed and, on the other hand, even if its importance is secondary, the conscience of the person being saved in the context of “obedience to the faith” (Rom. 1:5). We shall see below that this “Divine-human” feature of the essence of dogma is a *conditio sine qua non* for the

Orthodox understanding of salvation which is expressed at length in the teaching of the Church concerning “synergy”.

Dogma signifies, then, a generally accepted teaching “decreed” by the leaders of the Christian community, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who, according to the Lord’s promise, abides forever in the Church, leading her “unto all truth” (John 16:13). This is evident in the constant conviction and direct reference made to the Divine factor by the presiding leaders, through the well known phrase “it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us”. When posed in the plural, dogma means the individual and axiomatic truths of the Christian faith, the so-called “articles of faith” which, when connected as a single organic whole, comprise the complete conscience of the Church. Yet, in saying the “conscience of the Church”, we must always keep in mind that this is the “memory of the Church”<sup>2</sup> which is not a product of time, unlike “ecclesiastical conscience” which is nothing other than the reflection of the teaching of the Church in the conscience of the individual faithful person<sup>3</sup>. The memory of the Church is a stable and constant spiritual dynamic which is unceasingly maintained by the divine Logos who “inseparably” and “without division” became human, and the Comforter who remains eternally within her.

It is clear that the memory and conscience of the Church includes and maintains everything that God was pleased to reveal to humankind for its salvation. Whatever bears no relation to eternal life and salvation cannot be accurately described as an article of faith. The truths revealed by God to humanity are generally referred to in three categories: (a) concerning the uncreated God (theology); (b) concerning the created world (cosmology); (c) concerning the relationship of the created and the uncreated (soteriology).

The sum total of these salvific truths is described in the New Testament as the faith which is “entrusted” (1 Tim. 6:20), thereby clearly showing that what is involved is not just chance, conventional or temporary knowledge, but rather a unique, firm and invincible treasure. This is maintained by God in the Church as a deposit out of extreme love for humankind, for the salvation of all who believe. The fact that this invaluable and irreplaceable treasure cannot be defined and described in the form of a complete “codification” is quite obvious, especially since the Apostle Paul himself states that in this life “we know in part and prophesy in part” (1 Cor. 13:9).

The divinely inspired summary of this treasure is found in the Nicene Creed, so that the faithful may discern between “old wives’ tales” (1 Tim. 4:7), “philosophy and empty deceit” (Col. 2:8) and even between truths

which are useful in this world, but which are of no significance in terms of our salvation. The articles contained in the Creed present the major dogmas of the Church which, when studied properly by the theologising Church in their organic relationship and correct cohesion, can be further divided into axiomatic and individual truths. They are fixed articles of faith, whether they are presuppositions or consequences of the central dogmas<sup>4</sup>.

From what has already been said, a distinct differentiation between the notion of dogma becomes apparent. On the one hand, we have the self-evident truths which are seminal and given directly through Divine revelation, while on the other hand there are the inferred or derivative axiomatic positions. In spite of this, when we speak about the dogmas of the Church, we maintain the same indiscriminate perception of them, knowing that our orthodoxy and orthopraxy depend upon them, and that, together, they guarantee our spiritual salvation. For this reason, the Church which tends the flock teaches the general dogmas on a daily basis and edifies the people of God, not only with formal words of instruction and related sermons, but also through all homologous pastoral acts, which as a matter of course, infinitely surpass any oratorical capabilities.

That which may at first glance appear to be merely an abstract and theoretical truth under the term “dogma” is similarly embodied in a certain time and place among the people of God as a “shape” and “form” of expression in all aspects of life, whether as a “way of thinking”, “logos and praxis”, “custom and character” or as a “way of life” in general. It is clear then that, with such a spectrum of expressions in the Church, dogma is declared and confessed even through silence or through perseverance in martyrdom, whereupon it becomes the most eloquent witness to the faith. If dogma were not embodied each time, in the manner that the invisible God became incarnate, the treasure of faith would then appear to be a monophysitic phenomenon, a venerable relic in the archives of the Church, an empty shell, a sterile form and dead letter, rather than a useful and transforming breath of life. Yet such a stripping down would no doubt be a cheapening of that which one devoutly theologises and believes with St Paul, namely that the word of God remains forever “living and powerful, and sharper than a two edged sword” (Heb. 4.12).

2. There is another more specialised meaning of the term “dogma” which refers not to all the truths of the faith which are constantly preached and testified to with all available means in the Church, but only to the most central truths which were triumphantly and officially formulated by the Synods of the Church in well-known “definitions”, precisely because these were misunderstood or misconstrued by “other teachings”. These

dogmatic statements of the Church have, typically at least, greater authority as the direct and undisputed voice of the Synod which officially expresses the conscience of the Church. However, as the triumphant character of the formulations may impress us, we may at times unfortunately overlook - or not understand at all - another most important fact. Namely, that the formulations of the teachings of the Church made by the Synods may in some sense be "inferior" to the unofficial and daily teaching which, as has already been mentioned, is declared "in many and varied ways". For while the formulation of the Synod defines the "limits" - beyond which there is the implacable "anathema" - it is by its very nature polemical, antithetical and exclusive in terms of opposing views or explicit doubts. Conversely, daily pastoral teaching which is conducted unofficially and with "simplicity of heart" (Acts 2:46), so to speak, has apparently a more comprehensive and inclusive character. It is more philanthropic as it is directed towards all with loving care and attention, without excluding anybody, at least in the initial stages.

While the Synodical decrees contain selectively only that portion of the truth which must be promoted and imposed - by way of phrases which more or less have a logical coherence - in order to prevent deviation and encourage correction, everyday pastoral instruction is not confined or predetermined by such guidelines. Therefore, it is not pressured in terms of language or time, which enables it to come back to the same topic from a new angle and with more suitable terminology, thereby approaching more mystically, we could say, the truth of faith which is received in mystery and which is ineffable in essence<sup>5</sup>. Unless this most significant, but often hidden, parameter of the reception of the Divine word of revelation is properly appreciated, there is always the very serious danger that theology might become an undertaking of rational thought alone, a philosophical rather than a nyptic quest<sup>6</sup>. On the other hand, if we keep this important "difference" in mind, we will then be in a better position to successfully overcome temptations of "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" (Gen. 2:17), so that in this also the words of the greatest of theologians, the Apostle Paul, may be maintained in full honour and validity: "we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us" (2 Cor. 4:7).

The Orthodox theologian must remember the first and primary function which the "Decrees" of the Ecumenical Synods or Councils must have and retain for all time. This is so that their protective character does not become misunderstood and degenerate into an irreverent absolutism of that which is relative, in which case it would be the worst form of idolatry.

The "Decrees" signify a "setting of boundaries" or an intellectual "enclosure", so that the mind may not go beyond certain boundaries, but rather be guided on the true path where living waters are found. This directive arrow only possesses an inalienable sacredness and binding character for the faithful - whether individually or as a whole - if it does not become a restraint or an obstacle for a deeper insight into the sacred words of revelation which, day and night, constitute the first concern of the faithful, a search for divine mercy through a turning towards God, as is expressed most characteristically in the funeral service: "I am yours, save me, for I have searched out your righteous ways".

One could of course object that, in comparing the Synodical "Decrees" with the unofficial pastoral teaching, the former are the result of Synodical deliberations and decisions, and therefore have a collective character which guarantees the presence and guidance of the Paraclete (cf. Mat. 18:20). The latter, however, exercised normally by only one person - regardless of whether that person is a Bishop - does not offer the same guarantee of an infallible operation and correct teaching which is guided from above.

This objection at first sight appears indeed to be fair and strong. Yet, if we consider it more soberly and maturely, we shall see that here too great caution is required so that we do not make absolute what are essentially relative positions, which at any rate are only valid under certain conditions. It must not be forgotten that, if it is true that one person - even a Bishop - can easily go astray while teaching the truths of the faith, it is not impossible or improbable for an entire Synod to be similarly led astray in the same task, since it did not wish to leave itself unreservedly to the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, unaffected by ulterior motives and human weaknesses which historically led even to the so-called "Robbers Synods". Furthermore, it is impossible to say in advance what the quality and outcome of a certain Synod will be, since this is always evaluated with hindsight and with the same criterion used for evaluating the teaching of each pastor<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, in teaching the truths of the faith, the individual person is able to have the same assistance from above to believe correctly, if he or she in good conscience struggles to remain in undisturbed communion and spiritual accord with the body of the Church, and especially with the *phronema* of the Church Fathers (*consensus patrum*). In the final analysis, we must admit that, in this instance also, the motivating force is not the human factor, regardless of the number of people, but rather the assistance which comes from the Paraclete, which is in accordance with the purity and clarity of one's *phronema*. That is why it is said and believed in the Church that "the Spirit blows where it chooses" (John 3:8).

Just as the “Law” in the entire Divine Economy was “our tutor to bring us unto Christ” (Gal. 3:24), and is never destroyed, not even by the Lord Himself who stated that “I have not come to destroy but to fulfil” (Mat. 5:17), so it is that the “Decrees” of the Ecumenical Councils always remain in absolute honour and validity. This does not mean that they exhaust the truth, just as Law does not exhaust Grace, nor is it absolutely identified with it<sup>8</sup>.

Unless we accept this relationship between regular and constant teaching on the one hand, and the irregular formation of dogma in the Church on the other, we shall certainly do an injustice and seriously distort both these expressions of the gifts and illumination of the Paraclete. The fundamental notion of communion in the Holy Spirit, which we nonetheless never cease to request in the Divine Liturgy, would also be corrupted. It is a liturgical exhortation which recapitulates every other petition: “Having asked for the unity of the faith and the communion of the Holy Spirit, let us commend ourselves and one another and our whole life to Christ our God” (Litany of the Divine Liturgy).

In order to make the deep and organic relationship between these two ways of teaching and maintaining dogma in the Church even more lucid, we shall take a simple example from everyday life. Just as streetlights which are put in place by councils in order that the streets may be lit up and safe to walk in during the dark (streets which the councils themselves had already made for the benefit of local residents) cannot overshadow or degrade the value of those streets which were made before the streetlights, so it is that the dogmatic truths formulated in Synodical Decrees cannot and should not in any way overshadow the truths of the word of God which are sown in the daily teaching of the Church for the sanctification and salvation of the world.

3. We now come to the third meaning of the term dogma. Through regular and continuous study, teaching and experience of the word of God, it is obvious that, according to the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the needs of each moment in time, newer details or aspects of the unchanging and revealed Divine will are constantly placed before the faithful. They allow it to be recognisable, applicable and effective in every historical period of the Divine Economy.

For example, the Trinitarian dogma is first of all what the Church teaches about the Trinitarian God in Scripture, the Creed and the related Synodical Decrees. Yet this dogma is characterised by the entire corpus of theological works which, strictly speaking, is not completed or closed by the mentioned, and absolutely binding factors. On the contrary, it is nourished and

continuously enriched by them, such that the study of the Trinitarian dogma will not finish until the end of time, as more dissertations are added to the existing bibliography. In the broader context of the perpetual theological task of the Church, there are included also the so-called "*theologoumena*", namely theological opinions. These present nothing which is at first glance reprehensible, yet they do not have the maturity or attestation that would allow them to be considered, without any risk or hesitation, as being the official position of the Church on any particular issue.

This dynamic feature of the "knowledge of God" for the theologian was alluded to by the Lord when he requested from the Father "eternal life" for His disciples, not as a momentary conquest that occurs once, but as a continuously increasing process of initiation and sanctification: "This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3). The Greek form of the verb *know* in this passage does not indicate an automatic and momentary knowledge, but rather something that is continuous and progressive until we all reach "the knowledge of Your unapproachable glory" (Prayer of the Compline service).

In summarising the three meanings of the term dogma mentioned so far, the four following points may be stated. Firstly, dogmas are all the truths which are taught by the Church in "various times and in different ways" (Heb. 1:1) and which are necessary for the salvation of all people. These may include truths which were not officially declared as dogma in Synods, either because of their great number or because there was not sufficient reason to do this. Secondly, dogmas are the truths of the faith which are extraordinarily formed, being dependent upon relevant "Decrees" of Ecumenical Councils and which are safeguarded continuously. Having clashed in any way whatsoever with fallen human logic, they met with objections and animosity either inside or outside the Church, and their formulation had to therefore oppose or reprove contrary beliefs in order to safeguard the integrity of the faith and the salvation of souls. Thirdly, dogmas are the areas of specialisation within the theological task of the Church which, as special sections of Orthodox Dogmatics, present the theological issues of each of them. A fourth and entirely different meaning and use of the term dogma is used in modern Greek, particularly in the framework of the ecumenical movement, as a substitute for the word "denomination".



## **The sacred authority and theanthropic validity of dogma**

In an attempt to promote properly and constructively the sacredness and the inviolate character of dogma in the midst of the general instability and questioning of the world's values, we often speak of the authenticity and validity of dogma, unthinkingly using these two terms in the same sense, almost as if they were synonyms. Careful study shows that this is a grave error which testifies to an unacceptable confusion of meanings that leads in turn to a gross inaccuracy of expression. This verbal recklessness unfortunately goes beyond formal terminology. Greater damage is caused by the fact that such inaccuracy seriously obstructs the correct understanding of the deeper essence of dogma which - as has been already stated and as shall be shown below in more detail - lies in its theanthropic character.

To avoid fatal confusion, then, we must distinguish between the meanings of "authority" and "validity" by carefully examining the precise content of each. When speaking of "authority", we do not mean of course the moral force and binding character of dogma, but rather the "fatherhood" and "source" from where the truth which becomes dogma emanates. This is more easily understood if we consider the corresponding Latin term *auctoritas* which refers more directly to the notion of fatherhood. In these terms, it is clear why "authority" is identified only with the Divine factor<sup>9</sup>. On the one hand, because the truth of faith was given from above "once and for all to the saints" (Jude 1:3) and, on the other, because any subsequent development of these truths in the conscience of the faithful, expressed as a conscientious teaching and theology, continues to be accompanied always by the extraordinary attributes of faith. These prevent it from becoming assimilated, or even compared with, any form of merely rational knowledge.

Having established from what has been said the main meaning of the "authority" of dogma, as its transcendent starting point and source, we can now recognise more easily and unhesitatingly that it is natural to infer the moral and religious power and binding character of dogma for the faithful, as a product and secondary notion of "authority" which is very close to the notion of "validity". If, however, this notion of "validity" stems from the transcendent origin and source of dogma - to which its strength and sacredness can be mainly attributed - then both the nature of the truths of faith as well as the nature of the human person nonetheless compel us to acknowledge the moral contribution of the human factor also in the manifestation and consolidation of the validity of dogma. Being in the salvific, theandric or Divine-human form, the human factor does not even

remain neutral in the extraordinary process of irregular revelation, nor in the subsequent task of sanctification and eternal salvation towards which this aims.

In analysing the theandric nature understood in the light of the nature of the truths of the faith, namely the “synergy” of the Divine and human factors in the original manifestation as well as the further formulation of dogma, we mean that the truths of Divine revelation are salvific principles of life, not simply neutral educational material. This is precisely because the human person is called in freedom to acknowledge and confess that such principles come from the God who speaks, and then to live responsibly according to them so that he or she may receive salvation in Christ. This is the main reason why the faithful must be ready at every moment to sacrifice if necessary even their God-given and unique gift of life for the sake of the truth of the faith (martyrs-new martyrs). This would otherwise rightfully be considered as the greatest sin in the world, equal to suicide for which the Church refuses to give a funeral service, despite pressure to the contrary from social movements of recent times, and despite the fact that such a ruling does not apply even to the hardest criminal.<sup>10</sup>

That this synergy between the human and the divine is implied by the nature of the human person is clearly obvious given the fact that only in freedom and in the related degree of responsibility is the human person realised and developed until the very last breath. For, the nature of the person is by definition “ec-static” which, according to the etymology of this term in Greek, means to “go out of one’s self”.<sup>11</sup>

From the viewpoint of the Divine and human factors alone, it is possible to evaluate correctly the importance of the following vital ecclesiological realities at least. It is on the basis of these realities that the human-Divine validity of dogma is based and, through these, it is uninterruptedly maintained from generation to generation, viz.:- (a) the Divine inspiration of Holy Scripture; (b) the infallibility of the Church; (c) Apostolic succession; (d) worship and popular piety in general; and (e) the blood of the martyrs shed for the faith.

Not one of these great ecclesiological realities could possibly be studied or correctly interpreted as a phenomenon which has an inspiration and inclination purely from on high, monophysitically. It has more to do with an essential synergy of the Divine and human factors in the full scope and depth of these functions in the life of the Church. It is therefore imperative that we develop these ideas here. The first two truths (a) and (b) require no further explanation, other than what Orthodoxy teaches today in its dogmatic manuals in response to other denominations, especially from the

middle of this century, when with God's blessing, a Patristic renewal commenced. Indeed, as a result, it is now possible for fundamental dogmatic truths to be sensitively reformulated in theological language which is more genuinely Orthodox. Previously the Orthodox themselves had used a language which belonged rather to scholastic theology or to irreverent rationalism, since most of their theologians had more or less been unconsciously influenced by western universities where postgraduate studies were undertaken.

At this point it should be said very briefly that those things which relate to the Divine inspiration of Holy Scripture in general, despite the honest efforts up until now to state the axiomatic Orthodox positions and the proper hermeneutical criteria of most Orthodox biblical scholars, have not yet been presented in such a dynamic theological synthesis that they can be counted rightfully and equally among the wonders of God's love which occur according to Divine economy in each historical period. We only hint at these, mainly in worship services, when we exclaim: "God is wonderful among His saints" (Ps. 68:35). Yet in such an anticipated panoramic synthesis, it is certain that the entire Orthodox theory on Divine inspiration shall not merely avoid the extremities of some heretical positions such as verbal or word for word inspiration on the one hand and the complete divesting of Holy Scripture's transcendent character on the other. It will also use ample proof to make clear that irregular Divine inspiration belongs organically to the Church, not only because it alone could define and recognise the canon of the authentic biblical texts, but more importantly because biblical revelation in itself was recorded by the Church and in the Church. Therefore only in the Church, and in the "communion of the Holy Spirit" unceasingly guaranteed therein, is it possible for Scripture to be interpreted properly, that is to say authentically, as the word of God.

Similarly, one could say that the infallibility of the Church has been sufficiently articulated, at least as far as the major aspects of the related theological issues are concerned. There have been, however, - and there probably still are - individual Orthodox theologians who, while otherwise well meaning, have the strange belief that the term "infallibility" reeks of western influence and expresses a so-called institutionalised legalism<sup>12</sup>. However, it must be emphasised very strongly that much has yet to be said and published, mainly with regard to the remaining ecclesiological realities, points (c), (d) and (e), and their deeper contribution to the theanthropic validity of dogma which is continuously being verified anew.

Of course, this is not the appropriate place to present in broader terms the ecclesiological principles which have been mentioned in other more

popularised articles<sup>13</sup>. Nonetheless, several things about them must be presented in general terms in order to show their great importance in establishing the validity of dogma which is the issue at hand.

First of all, it is necessary to develop further the implications of Apostolic succession which one could justifiably call the "chromosomes" or the guarantee of the identity and continuity of the true Church in time and space. This is even more necessary today when, due mainly to the worldwide association of Christians through the ecumenical movement, there is the direct danger that the theological senses will become so carelessly blunted that they will be unable to diagnose or recognise the authentic features implied in such a central and neuralgic ecclesiological term<sup>14</sup>. In particular, one could consider the Bishop, the distinct and historical figure within the entire body of the Church, through whom all the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the other parts are, by the grace of God, communicated, activated and perpetuated, thereby manifesting the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church in the world. No misinterpretation or quick judgement is permitted concerning this God-given institution which responsibly and with full measure (*plenitudo potestatis*) embodies the authentic successor of the Apostles in the midst of the people of God, but which is sometimes unfortunately attacked by naive or malicious accusers as being a supposedly impious remnant of outdated despotism or medieval absolutism<sup>15</sup>.

The countless patristic testimonies to the purely Christocentric - or perhaps it would be more theologically accurate to say Christological - nature of the episcopal function in the Church, which describe the Bishop as being in the "place and form of Christ", the one who presides over the Lord's Supper and, by extension, over all of the eucharistic community of the faithful rather than just in strictly liturgical settings and worship, are a great scandal for the rational mind. For indeed, only the "foolishness of the cross" (1Cor.1:18) could possibly overlook the claims derived from so-called natural law concerning the absolute equality of all people. According to this, it would be impossible to acknowledge that one person has the right to be considered the regulatory factor for the authenticity and prosperity of institutions and functions of free persons gathered into the communion of the faithful, even if this is done in the name of the "mystical body" of Christ.

To refute these arguments, we must briefly remind ourselves of basic aspects of the teaching of the Church concerning the role of the Bishop. First and foremost, we need to underline certain astounding truths which can be easily derived from the liturgical practice surrounding the ordination

of the Bishop. Thus the general conviction and teaching that the Bishops in the Church are "by the grace of God" successors of the twelve Apostles themselves who placed them in various regions as the unmistakeable and visible head of the local Church, is eloquently commented upon and interpreted by the ordination service. This, moreover, is clearly distinct from the liturgical content of the corresponding services for the other two ranks of priesthood (Presbyter and Deacon). In the case of the ordination of a Presbyter or Deacon, no public statement and confession of faith is required apart from that which is given by all members of the Church during their baptism. The candidate is guaranteed to the Church by his Bishop following his own wish and request. On the other hand, although the candidate for the episcopal office in the initial stage does not have the right to submit a petition, since the Church alone - and only through the Holy Synod - can take such an initiative and make this decision, the entire responsibility is then transferred publicly to the elected candidate, who must make an official and lengthy confession of faith during the sacred moment of his ordination.

It is especially significant that, after the newly ordained Bishop recites the Creed, he is invited to "confess" and declare the faith "more broadly" in the midst of the Church, as if unreservedly accepting with an oath everything and everyone that the Church has ever accepted through its Ecumenical Councils, while rejecting and anathematising, with the same decisiveness, that which the Councils have condemned for all time. Taking into account the concluding verification that one who is ordained a Bishop shall keep all these things "until his last breath", it is obvious that he submits and even identifies his own conscience for a lifetime with the voice and conscience of the Church, infallibly spoken through the Ecumenical Councils. The Bishop is officially "offered" as the person who empties himself more than anybody else in faithful obedience to the Church militant, in accordance with the example of the incarnate and only begotten Son of God who, in obedience to the will of the Father, became "obedient unto death" (Phil. 2:8).

The purely Christological character of the office of the Bishop is inferred from this mystic parallel, if not from the identity according to Grace. By analogy and by virtue of the mystical parallel that exists, all that Christ rightfully proclaimed about Himself by saying "he who has seen me has also seen the Father" (John 14:9), also applies to the Bishop. Thus "by the grace of God", the Son who has absolutely become a servant of the Church, somehow automatically becomes the Father of all the faithful. Only through such obedience and *kenosis* can one understand and accept thereafter the

supreme responsibility and authority recognised in him by the Church. Unfortunately, the legal vocabulary of canon law has not managed to express this in a more suitable or effective term than the scholastic *plenitudo potestatis* borrowed from the west. The entire spiritual force of the episcopal office is found in the evangelical law that "my power is made perfect in weakness" (2Cor. 12:9) and "when I am weak, then I am strong" (2Cor. 12:10). It could not have been otherwise, since the role of the Bishop is mainly described in the New Testament as a "ministry of conciliation".

If through the Divine inspiration of Scripture, the infallibility of the Church and Apostolic succession there has been a sufficiently broad recognition on the part of the faithful of their importance in directly and substantially contributing to the Divine-human validity of dogma, we are not able to say the same about worship, popular piety and martyrdom. On the contrary, the dominant impression is that the validity of dogma - which it has of itself - is in fact the chief cause and creative force in the development of worship and all facets of personal or collective piety, as well as of Christian martyrdom. Yet, without for a moment questioning the power and formative influence of dogma on all activities of the people of God, we must also emphasize the reverse effect. For one cannot overlook the witnessing which each generation of the faithful has given throughout the centuries to the truth and sacredness of the very dogma which they live out. Is this not the value of witnessing which is declared by God when He emphatically calls all people to this? Is this not the meaning of the exhortation: "be my witnesses and I too am a witness, says the Lord God" (Isaiah 43:10).

Matters relating to worship, and by extension all that relates to popular piety, are not determined by personal desires or according to prevailing secular fashions, but rather by strictly traditional guidelines so that all things sing together - as equal expressions of the one faith - in the confession and praise of the Trinitarian God. Given this fact, it is even clearer that worship, and the power of various traditions and customs, are a further affirmation of the Divine-human validity of dogma.

If all of this is true for the harmless and, so to speak, regular and collective witness of the host of faithful who are ecclesiastically gathered together, one can appreciate how much greater the moral force and witness the blood of the Martyrs and Confessors of the faith must be. Undeniable proof of this of course is the fact that, very early, the blood of martyrdom was considered by the Church as being an equally valid path of salvation as the sacrament of Baptism. The purifying and salvific power of martyrdom as a "font of rebirth" was apparently pointed out by God who said through

the prophet: "let them bring their witnesses to justify them, and let them say "It is true"" (Isaiah 43:9). Of course it is not without special significance that this statement highlights something more wonderful, namely that the blood of Martyrs is sufficient to "justify" not only themselves, but also all the faithful who are with and among them. However, we must immediately add that such a "justification" of the Old Testament should not be confused with the ultimate justification, sanctification and salvation which are through Christ, and His blood alone.

In summarising all that has been examined with regard to that which is officially consecrated, but also with less apparent mystical sources which perpetually "irrigate" Church dogma, so that the faith will always be alive and victorious over the world, it must be stated in conclusion that, only through a correct evaluation of all sacramental parameters made with the fear of God, is the Church of God indeed proven to be the "communion of the created with the Uncreated by grace, without confusion or division, for the salvation of the created and the glory of the Uncreated"<sup>16</sup>.

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## NOTES:

1. For a more or less lexicographical study of the development of the term "dogma", see N. Xexakis, *Foreword to Orthodox Dogmatics*, Athens 1993, p. 167 onwards.
2. Mainly through the ecclesiological studies in our century, the mystical parallelism between *Theomitor* (Mother of God) and *Ecclesia* (Church) has been extensively drawn, as both happen to be called Mother and Virgin (expressed by the Orthodox in worship as "Mitroparthenon cleos", namely, "glory of the Virgin Mother"). As the Theotokos therefore paid attention to the teaching of the Lord in that "she kept these words in her heart" (Luke 2:19), so in the same manner the Church, having received from the Lord and the Apostles the treasure of the faith entrusted to it, the ultimate truth of God, keeps this in the depths of its conscience and memory which is defined and steadily cleansed by the Paraclete. Thus, according to the needs of the faithful, "new and old" are derived from this inexhaustible and undiminished treasure, for the edification of the body of the faithful and for the equipping of the saints (cf. Eph. 4:12).
3. Concerning this extremely significant distinction, see further the study of the author, *The Infallibility of the Church in Orthodox Theology*, Athens, 1965, p.69 onwards.
4. *ibid.* p.78 onwards.
5. In Orthodox dogmatics textbooks, St. Basil's testimony always has a central position, according to which "we have the dogmas and preaching within the Church, the former through teachings in written form, while the latter is what we have received mystically from Apostolic Tradition. Both are of equal value for piety" (as pointed out in C. Androutsos, *Dogmatics*, 2nd ed., Athens 1956, pp. 6-8). The emphasis on the way in which the reception and confession of the truths of the faith by the faithful always occurs "in mystery" presents in fact the purest criterion by which we must approach the problem of the relationship between faith and knowledge in each period of history.

6. Precisely for this reason, we consider the title "Dogma and rational thought", in a section of C. Androutsos' dogmatic work dealing with the relationship between the individual theologian and dogma, as totally inadequate. For, it is not only through rational thought that the theologian approaches dogma in the Church, but rather his or her entire conscience, in mystical solidarity with the other members of the body of the Church. It would therefore have been more accurate for that section to have had the title "Dogma and the conscience of the faithful".
7. Cf. *op. cit.*, *The Infallibility of the Church in Orthodox Theology*, p. 140 onwards.
8. Concerning the relationship between law and grace, see p. 51 onwards in the same work.
9. Cf. C. Androutsos, *Dogmatics*, p. 12
10. Even recently, Prof. John Konidaris who teaches ecclesiastical law in the School of Law at Athens University expressed the urgency of the issue of funerals for those who commit suicide (cf. *The Sunday Vema*, newspaper, in Greek, June 16, 1996).
11. Refer to paper by this author "The Mystery of Person and Human Adventure" in *Orthodox Globe*, Brookline, USA, v. 1, no. 4, June 1996.
12. Thus, for example, the ever-memorable and benevolent D. Moraitis, Dean of the School of Theology at the University of Athens, when examining the author's doctoral dissertation on "The Infallibility of the Church in Orthodox Theology", did not hesitate to state in all sincerity that he was totally unaware that "infallibility was an article of faith in our Church"! Other close friends and colleagues, namely Archimandrite Athan. Jevcic (now Metropolitan of Bosnia) and Prof. Christos Yannaras, immediately criticised this study, but of course without convincing arguments.
13. These articles, originally published in the *Voice of Orthodoxy*, the monthly periodical of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia, are to be reprinted by "Demos" publications in a series of books, the first of which will have the title "Incarnations of Dogma".
14. It was a very painful surprise for the Orthodox, as well as for eastern Christians generally, to witness the new outburst of audacity with which certain Christians in the World Council of Churches approached - or rather distanced themselves from - the issue of Apostolic succession in an international theological conference some four years ago. A group comprised entirely of women from America who were supposedly ordained as "pastors" attempted to convince the assembly in one meeting of the 5th World Conference on Faith and Order (held in 1993 in Santiago de Compostela and with the theme "Towards Koinonia in Faith, Life and Witness"), that "the place of the twelve Apostles in the Church and in history does not in any way deserve greater importance or distinction than that of any of us who believe in Christ, whether man or woman, educated or layman". Only when the author, as head of the Orthodox delegation at that conference, publicly asked the most intransigent of the furious women if she would dare to propose to the modern world any writing of her own as an equal authority to the sacred texts which constitute the canon of Holy Scripture, did that "batrachial battle" - which was not a discussion at all - end.
15. See article entitled 'The Bishop in the Church' in the *Voice of Orthodoxy*, v.5 (May 1984), p.49.
16. *ibid.*