THE QUESTION OF THE AUTHORITY OF THE RECENT MARIAN DOGMAS.

As noted in the present § 2 (of the document on Mary), *Authority in the Church* II (1981) raises a question about the dogmas of the Assumption and of the Immaculate Conception: *"'Anglicans would also ask whether, in any future union of our two Churches, they would be required to subscribe to such dogmatic statements' (para. 30)."* Obviously this question does not apply only to the dialogue of the Roman Catholics with the Anglicans. In all dogmas, two elements must be taken into consideration: the content and the authority which proclaims them. My object here will be only the second point: the authority of dogmas. A Roman Catholic is supposed to accept a dogma on the basis of its authority, even if he does not understand well the content (which he then must try to understand)[1].

To reply to this question requires some explanation on a sentence which is to be found in the definition of both dogmas. In 1854, Pope Pius IX commented on his definition of the Immaculate Conception in these terms:

> If, therefore, any person shall dare to think – which God forbid – otherwise than as has been defined by us, let them clearly know that they stay condemned by their own judgment; that they have made shipwreck in their faith and fallen from the unity of the Church.[2]

In 1950, Pope Pius XII similarly said about his definition of the Assumption:

> If anyone, which God forbid, should dare willfully to deny or to call into doubt that which we have defined, let him know that he has fallen away completely from the divine and Catholic Faith.[3]

To understand such sentences, some consideration of the thomistic theology which was more or less their background will be helpful.

I shall try:

1. To show what is the meaning of Pius IX's and Pius XII's assertions on the authority of the dogmas, within their theological framework;
2. To compare Pius IX's and Pius XII's sentences to Vatican II's statement about the hierarchy of truths;
3. To show how dogmas as such can even be useful to ecumenism;
4. To suggest what could be done by ARCIC about the two "recent" Marian dogmas in the text on Mary.

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[1] Cf. Karl RAHNER, "Scripture and Tradition", in: *Theological Investigations*, Volume 6 (Concerning Vatican II), Darton, Longman & Todd, The Seabury Press, London & New York, 1969, p.109: *"It does indeed go without saying for any Catholic theologian that, if the Church's actual consciousness of faith as it is today testifies and firmly holds to a truth as really believed with divine faith and as an apostolic tradition and declares it to be such by an infallible pronouncement by a pope or a Council, then in virtue of the indefectibility of the faith of the Church this conviction must be true even when the individual theologian or believer has not yet proved this truth historically and has not yet made it explicit. Yet even in the case of such a dogmatic evaluation of the present state of the Church's doctrinal proclamation and hence of oral tradition, the Catholic theologian obviously still retains the right and beyond this the duty to show historically how the Church's dogma as believed today has come down to us from the apostolic age in a genuine, historical tradition and development"*.

[2] PIUS IX, Bull *Ineffabilis Deus*, 8th Dec. 1854 (Denzinger 2804; *The Christian Faith* 709).

[3] PIUS XII, Apostolic Constitution *Munificentissimus Deus*, 1 Nov. 1950, § 45 (Denzinger 3904, cf. *The Christian Faith* 715).

1. The Theological Framework of Catholic Dogmas.

The word "dogma" has been used in Catholic theology in its present meaning more or less since the 19th century[4]. It has been understood on the basis of an older theology of faith, above all of the articles of faith (meant first of all as the articles of the Creed)[5].

In order to understand in their own perspective the Popes' statements on the authority of the dogmas proclaimed in 1854 and 1950, I shall explain shortly the theology of Thomas Aquinas and his school (which had also influenced the development which led to the proclamation of Papal infallibility at Vatican I[6]).

Aquinas studies systematically the conditions for faith, in a passage which summarizes the method of proclaiming the faith which is demonstrated in the New Testament:

> Two things are requisite for faith. First, that the things which are of faith should be proposed to man: this is necessary in order that man believe anything explicitly. The second thing requisite for faith is the assent of the believer to the things which are proposed to him.[7]

The same main elements are expressed by ARCIC in *The Gift of Authority* with other words:

> The Gospel comes to people in a variety of ways (…) Acceptance of the Gospel is also enacted in many ways. (11)

Thomas explains where these two elements come from:

> Accordingly, as regards the first of these, faith must be from God. Because those things which are of faith surpass human reason, hence they do not come to man's knowledge, unless God reveal them. To some, indeed, they are revealed by God immediately, as those things which were revealed to the apostles and prophets, while to some they are proposed by God in sending preachers of the faith.[8]

In the "normal" Christian economy, the proposal of faith arrives to individuals through some disciples of Christ, through the Church. The intervention of the disciples in the proposal of faith also comes from the fact that the Church must always explain faith with new words, throughout the centuries[9].

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[4] According to Walter Kasper, it appears first in 1792 in the *Regula fidei catholicae* by Philipp Neri Chrismann OFM (cf. Avery DULLES, SJ, "Dogma as an Ecumenical Problem", *Theological Studies* 29, 1968, 399). The period is certainly correct, even though one might by chance find a slightly older text. Cf. also Yves CONGAR, OP, art. "Fait dogmatique et foi ecclésiale", in : *Catholicisme*, t.IV, 1956, col.1064.

[5] Of course there is a difference between the articles of the Creed and more recent dogmas, and the fact itself of studying the dogmas with a theology developed for the Creed is an ecumenical question; I shall not try to solve that question here, but I just mention that this has happened because authoritative statements on faith have been perceived as a permanent necessity in the life of the Church.

[6] Cf. Ulrich HORST, OP, *Papst- Konzil - Unfehlbarkeit*, Die Ekklesiologie der Summenkommentare von Cajetan bis Billuart, "Walberberger Studien der Albertus-Magnus-Akademie", Theologische Reihe, Bd. 10, Matthias-Grünewald, Mainz, 1978

[7] THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae*, IIa IIae, q.6, a.1.

[8] THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae*, IIa IIae, q.6, a.1.

[9] Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q.29, a.3, ad 1. This is also affirmed by The Gift of Authority, e.g. 16: *"Apostolic Tradition is a gift of God which must be constantly received anew. (…) The process of tradition entails the constant and perpetual reception and communication of the revealed Word of God in many varied circumstances and continually changing times."*

The fact that this "human" dimension can be deficient because of sin leads some people to reject it (*"the Christians are not better than the others"*). In quite the opposite way, Aquinas sees the human dimension as a consequence of sin, which makes a "direct" and "interior" link with God more difficult[10]. Still, human intervention in the process of faith can pose a problem, which is well described by one of the most important commentators of Thomas, Cardinal Cajetan[11]:

> Two things interact in faith… namely [first] the assent and [second] the proposition and explanation of the things which must be believed (…) on the point of view of the proposition of the things to be believed, it can depend on angels and human beings, through whom God proposes this or that to be believed; on this point of view, 'faith comes from hearing the word of God', as Rom. 10 says. And so that no error might appear in the proposal or explanation of things to believe, the Holy Spirit provided a created rule, which is the sense and the doctrine of the Church, so that the authority of the Church is the infallible rule of the proposition and explanation of things which must be believed by faith. Therefore, two infallible rules concur to faith, namely divine revelation and the authority of the Church; there is between them this difference: divine revelation is the formal reason of the object of faith, and the authority of the Church is the minister of the object of faith.[12]

Since the "normal" economy implies that faith is preached through the Church and not received by everyone immediately from God, the believers must receive the faith from the Church and not accept it on the basis of their personal opinion (it would make faith become philosophy). This is why Thomas says:

> whoever does not adhere, as to an infallible and Divine rule, to the teaching of the Church, which proceeds from the First Truth manifested in Holy Writ, has not the habit of faith, but holds that which is of faith otherwise than by faith. Even so, it is evident that a man whose mind holds a conclusion without knowing how it is proved, has not scientific knowledge, but merely an opinion about it. Now it is clear that he who adheres to the teaching of the Church, as to an infallible rule, assents to whatever the Church teaches; otherwise, if, of the things taught by the

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[10] Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, IIIa, q.60, a.5, ad 3: *"Just as under the state of the Law of nature man was moved by inward instinct and without any outward law, to worship God, so also the sensible things to be employed in the worship of God were determined by inward instinct. But later on it became necessary for a law to be given (to man) from without: both because the Law of nature had become obscured by man's sins; and in order to signify more expressly the grace of Christ, by which the human race is sanctified. And hence the need for those things to be determinate, of which men have to make use in the sacraments"*.

[11] Thomas De Vio, 1469-1534, Master of Order of Preachers (1508-1518), Cardinal in 1517, meets Luther in 1518. He wrote an extensive commentary on the Summa of Theology which is published with Thomas' text in the Leonine Edition (*Summa Theologiae*, in : Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Doctoris Angelici Opera Omnia iussu impensaque Leonis XIII P.M. edita, Typographia polyglotta, vol. IV-XII, Rome, 1898–1906).

[12] *"Constat autem quod, cum ad fidem concurrant duo, ut infra patet, scilicet assensus et propositio atque explicatio credendorum (...)Ex parte autem propositionis credendorum potest dependere ab angelis et hominibus, mediantibus quibus Deus proponit haec vel illa esse credenda : ex hac enim parte 'fides ex auditu est verbi Dei', ut dicitur ad Rom. X. Et propterea quoad proponendum et explicandum credenda, ne possit accidere error, providit Spiritus Sanctus de infallibili regula creata, sensu scilicet et doctrina Ecclesiae : ita quod auctoritas Ecclesiae est infallibilis regula proponendi et explicandi ea quae sunt fide tenenda. Unde, duabus concurrentibus ad fidem infallibilibus regulis, scilicet revelatione divina et auctoritate Ecclesiae, inter eas tanta est differentia quod revelatio divina est ratio formalis obiecti fidei, auctoritas autem Ecclesiae est ministra obiecti fidei"* (CAJETAN, *In Summ. Theol.*, IIa-IIae, q.1, a.1, no.X; my translation).

> Church, he holds what he chooses to hold, and rejects what he chooses to reject, he no longer adheres to the teaching of the Church as to an infallible rule, but to his own will. Hence it is evident that a heretic who obstinately disbelieves one article of faith, is not prepared to follow the teaching of the Church in all things; but if he is not obstinate, he is no longer in heresy but only in error. Therefore it is clear that such a heretic with regard to one article has no faith in the other articles, but only a kind of opinion in accordance with his own will.[13]

We have here the theological background of previously quoted sentences by Pius XI and Pius XII, which are very difficult ecumenically. Should a Roman Catholic theologian consider that anybody who does not accept the dogma of the Assumption, for instance, has no faith and is not a Christian? That would suppress the distinction between ecumenical dialogue and interreligious dialogue.

Still, Aquinas' and the Popes' principles are strong: faith has to be more than an individual "philosophical" opinion, and NT economy does not consider an immediate revelation to be the "normal" way[14]. The principles expressed by Aquinas are also present in *The Gift of Authority*:

> When a believer says 'Amen' to Christ individually, a further dimension is always involved: an 'Amen' to the faith of the Christian community. The person who receives baptism must come to know the full implication of participating in divine life within the Body of Christ. The believer's 'Amen' to Christ becomes yet more complete as that person receives all that the Church, in faithfulness to the Word of God, affirms to be the authentic content of divine revelation.[15]

Furthermore, *The Gift of Authority* affirms that, if faith is preached by the whole people of God[16], it is preached with authority in a specific way by the episcopal college within the people of God[17], and by the bishop of Rome within the episcopal college[18].

It is important to see that the basic principles which lead to an ecumenical difficulty are already the objects of an ecumenical agreement in ARCIC. The point would then be to the able to use on a more common way common accepted principles. On the Roman Catholic side, the principles expressed by Aquinas and used in 1854 and 1950 are now in a new context, and I shall try to show what this new context changes.

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[13] THOMAS AQUINAS, Summa Theologiae, IIa IIae, q.5, a.3.

[14] By "normal", I do not intend the way of the majority (although I do not exclude it either).

[15] *The Gift of Authority*, 12. Cf. also 23: *"Individualistic interpretation of the Scriptures is not attuned to the reading of the text within the life of the Church and is incompatible with the nature of the authority of the revealed Word of God (cf. 2 Pet 1.20-21). Word of God and Church of God cannot be put asunder."*

[16] Cf. *The Gift of Authority*, 28: *"The people of God as a whole is the bearer of the living Tradition"*.

[17] Cf. *The Gift of Authority*, 30: *"The charism and function of* episcope *are specifically connected to the* ministry of memory*, which constantly renews the Church in hope. (...) The bishops, the clergy and the other faithful must all recognise and receive what is mediated from God through each other"*.

[18] Cf. *The Gift of Authority*, 47: *"Within his wider ministry, the Bishop of Rome offers a specific ministry concerning the discernment of truth, as an expression of universal primacy. This particular service has been the source of difficulties and misunderstandings among the churches. Every solemn definition pronounced from the chair of Peter in the church of Peter and Paul may, however, express only the faith of the Church. Any such definition is pronounced* within *the college of those who exercise* episcope *and not outside that college. Such authoritative teaching is a particular exercise of the calling and responsibility of the body of bishops to teach and affirm the faith. When the faith is articulated in this way, the Bishop of Rome proclaims the faith of the local churches"*.

2. The ecumenical context and the "hierarchy of truths".

I shall distinguish here two questions:

1. Do contemporary non-Catholics who do not accept some dogma reduce faith to a personal opinion, as Aquinas said?
2. How is the hierarchy of truths to be applied to Roman Catholic dogmas?

The situation of Christians who do not accept some RC dogmas as binding their faith.

Quite obviously, when Aquinas spoke about the teaching of the Church in the 13th century, "Church" meant only one thing for him. My point is not to explain how pre-Reformation Western theologians considered the ecclesial status of the Eastern Churches. At least in the West "mainline theologians" would not have considered very highly the ecclesial status of such people as the Waldensians, and quite generally in their mind everybody would know how to identify "the Church". In this respect, the situation has obviously changed. The contemporary cultural context makes difficult to identify one religious body in which divine Revelation would be found with some kind of objective – or even subjective – certainty.

This new context changes significantly the understanding of the situation of persons who do not accept a dogma. Their refusal is not necessarily a refusal of divine revelation expressed through the clearly recognized (even if in faith) authority of the Church. In the contemporary situation, many Christians are in a situation in which even if they want to receive their faith from God through the means chosen by him, they do not identify these means with the Roman Catholic Church. Their intention is not to build for themselves a system of philosophical religion on the basis of their opinions or preferences, which is what Aquinas refuses.

For Aquinas, only a member of the Church could be heretical[19]. Contemporary disciples of Aquinas admit that his theology of heresy as destroying faith does not apply to persons who belong to Christian communities which have professing for a long time some doctrine considered heretical by the Roman Catholic Church[20]. There is a similar evolution in the doctrine and in the discipline of the Roman Catholic Church. According to the present Code of Canon Law of the Roman Catholic Church, in the Latin rite (CIC[21] 1983), as for the 1917 Code, only a baptized person can be heretical; it does not say whether this baptized person is Roman Catholic or not[22]. But a general norm has

[19] Cf. IV Sent. dist. 13, q.2, a.1, ad 7 (ed. Moos, vol. IV, p.566); IIa IIae, q.11, a.1.

[20] Cf. this text published at the beginning of Vatican II by a thomistic theologian who became a Cardinal in 1965 : Charles JOURNET, *Le dogme chemin de la foi*, Arthème Fayard, Paris, 1963, 94: *"Il importe souverainement de distinguer entre l'hérésie et ses conséquences. L'hérésie est le péché personnel de celui qui s'insurge contre la foi en rejetant délibérément quelqu'une des vérités révélées; un péché personnel ne s'hérite jamais. Les conséquences d'une hérésie, le patrimoine d'une hérésie, voilà ce qui s'hérite et qu'il faut appeler une dissidence. Ceux qui naissent dans une dissidence ne deviendraient hérétiques qu'en reprenant délibérément à leur compte la rupture originelle"*. The vocabulary is somehow outdated, but the content is clear : on the basis of Aquinas (a sin must be a personal conscious act), his disciple Journet – many will say the same – explains that the refusal of Church authority which leads to a complete loss of faith applies to the persons who belong to the Roman Catholic Church, or at least who understand it as willed by God.

[21] "CIC" is the abbreviation of *Codex Juris Canonici*.

[22] Cf. CIC 1983, canon 751: *"Heresy is the obstinate denial or doubt, after baptism, of a truth which must be believed by divine and catholic faith. Apostasy is the total repudiation of the christian faith. Schism is the withdrawal of submission to the Supreme Pontiff or from communion with the members of the Church subject to him"*. The 1917 Code said the same: *"Post receptum baptismum si quis, nomen retinens christianum, pertinaciter aliquam ex veritatibus fide divina et catholica credendis denegat aut de ea dubitat, haereticus; si a fide christiana totaliter recedit, apostata; si*

changed. In the 1917 Code, ecclesiastical laws[23] applied to all the baptized who could use reason[24]. The CIC 1983 applies that norm only to the baptized Catholics: *"Merely ecclesiastical laws bind those who were baptized in the catholic Church or received into it, and who have a sufficient use of reason and, unless the law expressly provides otherwise, who have completed their seventh year of age"*[25]. One may assume that this general norm applies to canon 751, and that the Catholic disciplinary rule about heresy applies only to Roman Catholics (that seems a reasonable interpretation, although there are some arguments against it[26]). The exception could be the case of persons who would not be Roman Catholics, but would believe that the Roman Catholic Church is the means chosen by God and would refuse it[27]. And of course if a non-Roman-Catholic baptized person believes that something is part of Revelation and refuses it, this person is still heretical.

To summarize this first step, what Aquinas and Pius XII say about the situation of who refuses any article of faith (Aquinas) or dogma (Pius XII) does not necessarily apply nowadays to persons baptized out of the Roman Catholic Church, as long as they want to accept divine Revelation. Therefore, if a non-Catholic does not accept a dogma, above all if this dogma has been proclaimed when his Church was not in full communion with Rome, a Roman Catholic does not have to say that this non-Catholic has totally left divine faith.

The next question is how the Roman Catholic Church would interpret the authority of dogmas in the ecumenical context after Vatican II.

In Vatican II, one sentence emerges as typical of the general intention (expressed by Pope John XXIII at the opening of the Council) to distinguish between basic content and forms of expression. This sentence of the Decree on Ecumenism speaks about a "hierarchy of truths"; I quote the whole paragraph 11, which provides the context:

> The way and method in which the Catholic faith is expressed should never become an obstacle to dialogue with our brethren. It is, of course, essential that the doctrine should be clearly presented in its entirety. Nothing is so foreign to the spirit of ecumenism as a false irenicism, in which the purity of Catholic doctrine suffers loss and its genuine and certain meaning is clouded. At the same time, the Catholic faith must be explained more profoundly and precisely, in such a way and in such terms as our separated brethren can also really understand. Moreover, in ecumenical dialogue, Catholic theologians standing fast by the teaching of the Church and investigating the divine mysteries with the separated brethren must proceed with love for the truth, with charity, and with humility. When comparing doctrines with one another, they should remember that in Catholic doctrine there exists a "hierarchy" of truths, since they vary in their relation to the fundamental

denique subesse renuit Summo Pontifici aut cum membris Ecclesiae ei subiectis communicare recusat, schismaticus est" (CIC 1917, can.1325, § 2 ; there was no official translation of the 1917 Code).

[23] To be distinguished from divine laws, as expressed in the Decalogue for instance.

[24] Cf. CIC 1917, can.12 : *"Legibus mere ecclesiasticis non tenentur qui baptismum non receperunt, nec baptizati qui sufficienti rationis usu non gaudent, nec qui, licet rationis usum assecuti, septimum aetatis annum nondum expleverunt nisi aliud iure expresse caveatur"*.

[25] CIC 1983, canon 11.

[26] It is possible to say that in the canonical tradition, when a particular law contradicts a general norm, the presupposed intention of the legislator is to make at this point an exception to the general norm.

[27] Cf. VATICAN II, Constitution Lumen Gentium, § 14: *"Whosoever, therefore, knowing that the Catholic Church was made necessary by Christ, would refuse to enter or to remain in it, could not be saved"*.

> Christian faith. Thus the way will be opened by which through fraternal rivalry all will be stirred to a deeper understanding and a clearer presentation of the unfathomable riches of Christ.[28]

The text was suggested by archbishop Andrea Pangrazio of Gorizia (Italy), in a speech at Vatican II, 25th Nov. 1963[29]. Some say that the idea had been suggested to archbishop Pangrazio by Lukas Vischer, who was a non-Catholic observer at the Council. Lukas Vischer told me that in fact it had been suggested to archbishop Pangrazio by Edmund Schlink[30].

The archbishop of Gorizia wanted this "hierarchy" to express a link between all elements of faith, in order to avoid a mere list; this link is expressed by different ways of being related to the centre of faith: Christ[31]. This organization is provided by an *"order of revealed truths"*[32]. The question is therefore about *"revealed"* truths, not about any kind of assertion. Aquinas said about "revealed" truths that all must be accepted because of their divine origin, and Pius XII applied that to the dogma of Assumption. Archbishop Pangrazio does not change this line: *"Although all revealed truths must be believed with the same divine faith, and all constitutive elements of the Church must be kept with the same faithfulness, still not all get and hold the same place"*[33]. He then adds a distinction between truths which belong to the end and to the means[34]. As it was the practice at the Council, a commission had to decide whether or not they would modify the previous text because of the new proposal. As the commission had accepted Pangrazio's proposal, they had to explain the change to the bishops, so that the plenary could accept or refuse the new draft. In our case, this was done by the Secretariate for Christian Unity, 11th Nov. 1964[35]. The explanation summarizes Pangrazio's speech[36], and concludes like him: *"Although without doubt all revealed truths must be hold with the same divine truth, their importance and 'weight' is different because of their link to*

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[28] VATICAN II, Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* on Ecumenism, § 11.

[29] Archbishop Pangrazio's speech can be found in the Acts of Council, out of which I quote them: *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II*, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, Rome, 1970-, vol. II.VI, p.32-34.

[30] Short private conversation in the Faculty of theology of Lausanne, 8th March 2003.

[31] Cf. archbishop Pangrazio's speech: *"Optime quidem multa illa elementa ecclesiastica, quae in illis communitatibus gratia Dei conservata sunt et effectus salutares sortiuntur, in schemate enumerantur. Ut autem sincere fateor: mihi tota haec enumeratio, optima intentione facta, nimis 'quantitativa', ut ita dicam, et tamquam mera iuxtapositio apparet. Deest, ut videtur,* vinculum *uniens illa singula elementa. Indicare deberet* Centrum*, ad quod omnia illa elementa referenda sunt et sine quibus ea explicari nequeunt. Hoc* vinculum *et centrum uniens est ipse* Christus*, quem omnes christiani ut Dominum Ecclesiae profitentur, cui sine dubio christiani omnium communitatum fideliter servire cupiunt et qui etiam in communitatibus seiunctis praesentia sua activa per Spiritum Sanctum mirabilia sua operari dignatur, non quidem meritis hominum, sed sola gratia misericordiae suae."*

[32] *"ut ita dicam hierarchicus veritatum revelatarum"*.

[33] *"Etiamsi omnes veritates revelatae eadem fide divina credendae et omnia elementa constitutiva Ecclesiae eadem fidelitate retinenda sint, tamen non omnia eundem locum obtinent et occupant"*.

[34] *"Sunt quaedam veritates, quae pertinent ad ordinem* finis*, v. g. mysterium Ss.mae Trinitatis, Incarnationis Verbi et Redemptionis, caritatis et gratiae divinae erga humanitatem peccatricem, vitae aeternae, etc. Aliae autem veritates sunt, quae pertinent ad ordinem* mediorum *salutis, ut v. g. veritates de numero septenario sacramentorum, de ipsa structura hierarchica Ecelesiae, de successione apostolica, etc."*

[35] Secretariate for Christian Unity, explanation of *modus* 49, 11 novembre 1964, *Acta Synodalia* III.VII, p.419. The text is usually attributed to Card. König, archbishop of Vienna.

[36] "49 Pag. 16, fin. 32*: "Post 'debent.' addatur nova phrasis: 'In comparandis doctrinis meminerint existere ordinem seu 'hierarchiam' veritatum doctrinae catholicae, cum diversus sit earum nexus cum fundamento fidei christianae'. Maximi momenti enim esse videtur pro dialogo oecumenico, ut tum veritates in quibus christiani conveniunt, tum illae, in quibus differunt, potius ponderentur quam numerentur"*.

Salvation history and to the mystery of Christ"[37]. The meaning given to this text in the Council is also expressed, I think, by Pope Paul VI in January 1965:

> That on the Catholic side there would be a desire to acknowledge how much good there is still in the patrimony of the Churches and Christian communities separated from our Church, this is good. That there would be a desire to present Catholic doctrine in its authentic and essential aspects, leaving aside more disputable and non-essential aspects, this is still good. That there would be some attempt to look at the elements of controversy in terms which would make them more exact and more understandable also in regard to the ones who do not share them, also that is still good. This is fraternal patience, this is good apology, this is charity serving truth. But to pretend to cancel doctrinal difficulty by diminishing, neglecting or hiding statements which the Magisterium of the Church considers essential and definitive, this is not a good service. This is not a good service for the sake of union, because it gives rise among the separated brethren to some diffidence, to some doubt of being mystified; or it instigates the opinion of fake possibilities.[38]

In 1965, the Encyclical *Mysterium Fidei* will repeat the same views in very strong terms[39]. In a 1964 ecumenical meeting, Cardinal Bea – first President of the Secretariate for Christian Unity – had

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[37] *"Quamvis procul dubio omnes veritates revelatae eadem fide divina tenendae sint, momentum et 'pondus' earum differt pro nexu earum cum historia salutis et mysterio Christi".* The mention of Salvation history refers to the first part of Pangrazio's speech, which I did not mention because its link to the text is not direct.

[38] *"Che da parte cattolica si voglia riconoscere quanto di bene si trova tuttora nel patrimonio delle Chiese e delle confessioni cristiane, staccate dalla Chiesa nostra, sta bene. Che si voglia presentare la dottrina cattolica nei suoi aspetti autentici ed essenziali, prescindendo dagli aspetti discutibili e non essenziali, sta bene. Che si cerchi di prospettare i punti controversi nei termini che li possano rendere più esatti e più comprensibili anche rispetto a chi non li condivide, ancora sta bene. Questa è pazienza fraterna, questa è apologia buona, questa è la carità al servizio della verità. Ma pretendere di togliere la difficoltà dottrinale cercando di esautorare, o di trascurare, o di celare affermazioni che il magistero della Chiesa dichiara impegnative e definitive, non è buon servizio. Non è buon servizio per la causa dell'unione perché crea nei Fratelli separati la diffidenza, il dubbio d'essere mistificati, ovvero genera l'opinione di possibilità fallaci"* (PAUL VI, General Audience, 20th Jan. 1965, *Osservatore Romano*, 21 gennaio 1965, p.1) [my translation].

[39] Cf. PAUL VI, Encyclical *Mysterium Fidei*, 3rd Sept. 1965, § 24-25: *"Who would ever tolerate that the dogmatic formulas used by the ecumenical councils for the mysteries of the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation be judged as no longer appropriate for men of our times, and let others be rashly substituted for them? In the same way, it cannot be tolerated that any individual should on his own authority take something away from the formulas which were used by the Council of Trent to propose the Eucharistic Mystery for our belief. These formulas – like the others that the Church used to propose the dogmas of faith – express concepts that are not tied to a certain specific form of human culture, or to a certain level of scientific progress, or to one or another theological school. Instead they set forth what the human mind grasps of reality through necessary and universal experience and what it expresses in apt and exact words, whether it be in ordinary or more refined language. For this reason, these formulas are adapted to all men of all times and all places. They can, it is true, be made clearer and more obvious; and doing this is of great benefit. But it must always be done in such a way that they retain the meaning in which they have been used, so that with the advance of an understanding of the faith, the truth of faith will remain unchanged. For it is the teaching of the First Vatican Council that 'the meaning that Holy Mother the Church has once declared, is to be retained forever, and no pretext of deeper understanding ever justifies any deviation from that meaning'".*

explicitly excluded that the Catholic Church could cancel some dogmas for the sake of ecumenism[40], although dogmas can be explained better[41] and other points of doctrine are opened to discussion[42].

In 1990, the Joint Working Group between the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church publishes a document on the hierarchy of truths, which also affirms – among other points – the necessity of believing what is revealed:

> First of all, the Council's sentence does not mean that there is only a more or less incidental relationship between theses truths and the foundation, so that a merely relative character stamps them, and one can consider them optional in the life of faith. Still less does the Decree's sentence consider truths of faith as more or less necessary for salvation, or suggest degrees in our obligation to believe in all that God has revealed. When one fully responds to God's self-revelation in faith, one accepts that revelation as a whole. There is no picking and choosing of what God has revealed, because there is no picking or choosing of what revelation is – our salvation. Hence, there are no degrees in the obligation to believe all that God has revealed.[43]

The same year, the International Theological Commission published a text (approved in 1989) on the interpretation of dogmas which holds the same interpretation of *Unitatis Redintegratio* 11[44].

In short, the hierarchy of truths as affirmed in Vatican II, in the text and in the expressed intentions, does not mean that any dogma could be cancelled. It only means that they must be understood in their relation to elements of faith which are more central. For instance, the recent

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[40] Cf. Augustine Cardinal BEA, "The Second Vatican Council and Non-Catholic Christians: Evaluation and Prognosis", in: Samuel H. MILLER and G. Ernest WRIGHT (eds.), *Ecumenical Dialogue at Harvard*, The Roman-Catholic-Protestant Colloquium, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachussetts, 1964, p.63-64: *"First and foremost the fundamental teaching of the Catholic Church will not be changed. Compromise on points of faith which have already been defined is impossible. It would be quite unfair to our non-Catholic brethren to stir up false hopes of this nature. Nor is there a possibility that the Church – even in its zeal for eventual union – will ever be content with a recognition only of 'essential dogmas,' or that she will reverse or withdraw the dogmatic decrees drawn up at the Council of Trent. Again it would be simply dishonest to suggest that there is any likelihood that the dogmas of the primacy or the infallibility of the Pope will be revised. The Church has solemnly proclaimed all these doctrines to be of faith, that is to say, truths revealed by God himself and necessary for salvation. Precisely because of these solemn declarations made under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the action of the Church in this field is severely limited. She must guard these truths, explain them, preach them, but she cannot compromise them. For the Church founded by Christ cannot tamper with the Word of God which he preached and entrusted to her care. She must humbly subject herself to him with whom she is inalterably united"*.

[41] Cf. *ibid.*, p.64 : *"Are the hands of the Catholic Church, therefore, completely tied? Not at all. First, the traditional formulas which express points of doctrine of interest to non-Catholic Christians have often been misunderstood. The Council, therefore, can restate them in a manner more intelligible to the modern mind. As the Pope explicitly stated in his opening speech to the Council …"*.

[42] Cf. *ibid.*, p.65 : *"But the points of doctrine which have been irrevocably fixed are far from exhausting the treasure-trove of divine revelation. Besides these there are many questions which have not yet been proclaimed as binding on all"*.

[43] JOINT WORKING GROUP BETWEEN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, *The Notion of "Hierarchy of Truths"*, An Ecumenical interpretation, "Faith and Order Paper" No.150, WCC Publications, Genève, 1990, no.25, p.20.

[44] Cf. INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, "On the Interpretation of Dogmas", *Origins* 20:1, 1990, B III.3, p.9: *"Dogmas are only intelligible through their mutual relationship to one another (*nexus mysteriorum*) (DS 3016) and in their overall structure. In this regard special attention should be given to the order or 'hierarchy of truths' in Catholic teaching; this order results from the different ways in which dogmas are related to the Christological foundation of Christian faith (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 11). Although all revealed truths are surely to be accepted with the same divine faith, their meaning and importance differ depending on their relation to the mystery of Christ"*.

Marian dogmas would have to be understood in relation to the "Theotokos", which must be understood in relation to the Incarnation.

The ecumenical status of dogmas proclaimed in a time of division.

After Vatican II, some well-known Roman Catholic theologians affirm that Christian unity does not imply that other Christians subscribe to the dogmas proclaimed during the time of separation. I take three important examples.

In 1968, Fr. Avery Dulles (now Cardinal), wrote that the precise wording of any dogma is linked to a particular cultural context[45] and that until the time of Constantine at least local Churches had local Creeds[46]. If different formulations of faith can be used at different times, they could also be used simultaneously[47] (provided in both cases that they do not contradict each other). He considers possible a new formulation which would at least deeply renew or even correct the previous content:

> It is an oversimplification, therefore, to say that dogmas are irreformable. In principle, every dogmatic statement is subject to reformulation. At times it may be sufficient to reclothe the old concepts in new words which, for all practical purposes, have the same meanings. But in other cases the consecrated formula will reflect an inadequate understanding (…) When men acquire new cultural conditioning and mental horizons, they have to reconceptualize their dogmas from their present point of view. There are signs that this process is now going on with respect to many Catholic dogmas, such as original sin, transubstantiation, and perhaps the virginal conception of Mary.[48]

I do not know what he would say nowadays about this topic.

Fr. Louis Bouyer, thinking about the Orthodox Church, writes that dogmas proclaimed in a situation of division should just be received "sympathetically" by the other side[49], and that e.g. the recent Marian dogmas could be understood by the Orthodox in their own traditional terminology[50].

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[45] Cf. Avery DULLES, SJ, "Dogma as an Ecumenical Problem", *Theological Studies* 29, 1968, p.402-406.

[46] Cf. Avery DULLES, SJ, "Dogma as an Ecumenical Problem", p.408.

[47] *"it should be clear that simultaneous dogmatic pluralism is sometimes admissible without prejudice to church unity. If one and the same faith can be differently formulated for different historical epochs, a similar variety may be tolerated for different cultures in a single chronological period"* (Avery DULLES, SJ, "Dogma as an Ecumenical Problem", p.412).

[48] Avery DULLES, SJ, "Dogma as an Ecumenical Problem", p.407-408.

[49] Cf. Louis BOUYER, "Réflexions sur le rétablissement possible de la communion entre les Eglises orthodoxe et catholique. Perspectives actuelles", *Istina* 20, 1975, p.113 : *"il devrait être reconnu de part et d'autre que seuls les sept grands Conciles de l'Eglise indivise ont pu formuler des définitions de la foi sur lesquelles on ne saurait revenir d'aucune manière. En même temps, l'une et l'autre Eglises devraient reconnaître que, sans jouir de la même autorité, des conciles locaux qui ont obtenu l'adhésion formelle de toute la partie, soit orientale, soit occidentale, de l'Eglise où ils ont été tenus doivent être reçus avec respect et interprétés sympathiquement par l'autre partie"*.

[50] Cf. Louis BOUYER, "Réflexions…", p.114 : *"Une telle déclaration réciproque, de la part des autorités des deux Eglises, devrait s'accompagner de la reconnaissance du fait que les décisions passées doivent, dans chaque cas, être complétées et interprétées en fonction d'un nouvel examen des questions, à être opéré de concert, dans un esprit de mutuelle charité et de fidélité commune à toute la tradition des saints Pères. (…) Quant à ce qui concerne les définitions papales de 1854 et de 1950, touchant la Conception Immaculée de la bienheureuse Vierge Marie et son Assomption, il semble également que le même Siège apostolique devrait alors et pourrait sans difficulté déclarer que ces définitions elles-mêmes sont à entendre au sens simplement où l'Eglise orthodoxe elle-même n'a pas cessé de croire en la pureté parfaite de la Mère de Dieu et en son association étroite, dès sa Dormition, à la victoire de son Fils sur la mort elle-même"*.

Following explicitly these two theologians, Fr. Yves Congar (then Cardinal) wrote in 1984 that a full acceptance of Catholic dogmas would not be necessary to a restoration of full communion[51].

These three theologians suggest new formulations. This is not my topic here. They do not say much about the authority which proclaimed the dogmas – that would be my topic – except one important point: there is a specificity of these dogmas which have been proclaimed after the different divisions. That obviously applies to both the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption. The most significant statement in this context is expressed by Pope Paul VI in a letter sent 5 Oct. 1974 to Cardinal Willebrands, President of the Secretariate for Christian Unity. The Pope speaks about the 2nd Council of Lyons (usually called by the Roman Catholics *"14th Ecumenical Council"*[52]*) as "6th of the General Synods celebrated in the Western world"*[53]. Although expressed only in a letter (a Papal document of low authority), the text – given its content which was consciously very significant – opens some way to an ecumenical consideration of the Councils of the West posterior to 1054. That could apply to all acts by such Councils, and therefore also to some dogmatic acts of the Pope alone (who as such is not only a representative of the Western Church or of part of it, but the fact remains that he acted in a situation in which the Church was divided).

3. How can dogmas help ecumenical dialogue?

Can some expressions of authority at the level of faith help Christian unity? Are dogmas (with this name or with a less controversial one) just an ecumenical obstacle or are they also useful in some way?

To reply to this question, I first ask another question. How can Christian unity be restored after centuries of division, during which some have expressed the deep conviction that what other Christians proclaim is simply against faith? As the Lutheran theologian George Lindbeck points out, some questions will inevitably occur at the level of conscience, and a crisis at this level can only be appeased by some kind of divinely sanctioned authority:

> If this unity is in addition regarded as an ultimate value, an irrevocable gift of God whose loss is unthinkable, then, in a Christian context, the final adjudicator of controversies must be infallible, must be divinely protected against final error, even if not against preliminary falsity. This is necessary because otherwise believers would sometimes not be able in good conscience to remain in the Church when it decided against them.[54]

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[51] Cf. Yves M.-J. CONGAR, *Essais œcuméniques*, Les hommes, le mouvement, les problèmes, Le Centurion, Paris, 1984, p.109 : *"Ma conviction est qu'il faut reconnaître la coexistence de deux traditions dont chacune est complète et cohérente mais qui ne sont pas superposables. Il faudra reconnaître cela, l'accepter. Oui, s'accepter différents pour se reconnaître radicalement unanimes. Cela pose une grave question, car le 'Filioque' est pour nous un dogme, pas un simple theologoumenon. Mais le problème se posera aussi pour d'autres articles. Avant moi, des théologiens de la classe de Louis Bouyer (*Istina *14, 1969, 112-115) ou Avery Dulles (*Theological Studies *29, 1968, 393-416) ont répondu qu'une restauration de la pleine communion serait possible sans qu'une des deux Eglises impose à l'autre de tenir tout ce qu'elle a pu déterminer, et même dogmatiser, dans la situation d'une rupture de la communion qui, du reste, n'a jamais été totale"*.

[52] Cf. Denz. 850.

[53] *"Hoc Lugdunense Concilium, quod sextum recensetur inter Generales Synodos in Occidentali orbe celebratas"* (*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 66, 1974, p.620).

[54] George A. LINDBECK, "The Infallibility Debate", in : John J. KIRVAN ed. , *The Infallibility Debate*, Paulist Press, New York, 1971, p.149

When some are not convinced by the arguments (i.e. by the content of an agreement), or when some lose their previous conviction about these arguments, is Church unity going to be lost?

The Gift of Authority also mentions an obedience in conscience to the episcopal authority, which does not apply only to solemn definitions of faith:

> By their *sensus fidei* the faithful are able in conscience both to recognise God at work in the bishop's exercise of authority, and also to respond to it as believers. This is what motivates their obedience, an obedience of freedom and not slavery.[55]

Without any doubt, conscience must always be respected[56]. But in some cases individual conscience finds difficult to accept an expression of faith, which seems to go against a previous conviction. This fact must be respected, but it can also prevent Church unity. If a person in such a situation of uncertainty believes that God has given an infallible authority to the Church, unity could be easier.

In such a field, there is a conviction among many Catholics that the basic unity has been maintained in the Roman Catholic Church thanks to the communion with the Pope. That conviction was expressed by Pope Paul VI during the week of prayer for Christian unity in 1964 (although he would also show later a painful consciousness of the division around his office[57]):

> If you have an understanding of this great problem of the 'recomposition' of Christians within the unity wanted by Christ (…), you will feel rising from deep in your soul a wonderful and precise witnessing of this Catholic safety, which will tell you interiorly: I am already within the unity wanted by Christ, I am already within his flock, because I am Catholic, because I am with Peter.[58]

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[55] *The Gift of Authority*, 36.

[56] Cf. *The Gift of Authority*, 49: *"The exercise of authority in the Church is to be recognised and accepted as an instrument of the Spirit of God for the healing of humanity. The exercise of authority must always respect conscience, because the divine work of salvation affirms human freedom"*.

[57] Cf. his Allocution to the Secretariate for Christian Unity, 28th Apr. 1967, in: *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* LIX, 1967, p.498 : *"Le Pape, Nous le savons bien, est sans doute l'obstacle le plus grave sur la route de l'œcuménisme. Que dirons-Nous ?… Il ne Nous est pas facile de faire Notre apologie. C'est vous qui, avec des paroles empreintes de sincérité et de mansuétude, saurez la faire quand l'occasion et la possibilité s'en présenteront. Quant à Nous, en toute sincérité, Nous préférons maintenant Nous taire et prier"* (original in French). He goes back to a question to which he had already given an answer himself in 1964: *"it distresses us to see how we, the promoter of such reconciliation, are regarded by many of the separated brethren as being its stumbling - block, because of the primacy of honor and jurisdiction which Christ bestowed upon the Apostle Peter, and which we have inherited from him. Do not some of them say that if it were not for the primacy of the Pope, the reunion of the separated Churches with the Catholic Church would be easy? We beg the separated brethren to consider the inconsistency of this position (…) It would be vain to look for other principles of unity in place of the one established by Christ Himself"* (PAUL VI, Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*, 6th Sept. 1964, § 110).

[58] My partial translation. I give the fuller original Italian text: *"Se voi avete l'intelligenza di questo grande problema della ricomposizione dei cristiani nell'unità voluta da Cristo, se avete la percezione della sua importanza e della sua maturazione storica, sentirete salire dal fondo della vostra anima una meravigliosa e precisa testimonianza di quella sicurezza cattolica, che vi dirà interiormente: io sono già nell'unità voluta da Cristo, sono già dentro il suo ovile, perché sono cattolico, perché sono con Pietro. È una grande fortuna, è una grande consolazione; cattolici, sappiate goderla. Fedeli, abbiate coscienza di codesta privilegiate posizione, dovuta certamente, non al merito di alcuno, ma alla bontà di Dio, che a sorte tanto felice ci ha chiamati."* (PAUL VI, General Audience, 22nd Jan. 1964, *Osservatore Romano*, daily edition, 23rd Jan. 1964, p.1).

John Paul II shows a rather similar conviction in *Ut Unum Sint*[59], and he knows that this Catholic conviction itself of being in unity is and ecumenical problem[60].

Because of this Roman Catholic conviction that an authority able with divine help even to proclaim faith infallibly is a real treasure for the sake of Christian unity, the Roman Catholic Church will be very careful to show how this authority is treated in ecumenical agreements. The purpose is not to save some human power (although such factors can always play a role because of sin), but to maintain an idea of unity of faith. That unity requires an agreement on the content, of course, but also on the authority which expresses the content. Otherwise Church unity would be at the level of a theological consensus, which not only can be difficult to achieve, but is of another nature.

4. Some possibilities for ARCIC, about the Marian Dogmas.

To introduce some short proposals about how ARCIC could deal with the authority of the Marian Dogmas, I first summarize what I have said until now:

1. The authority which proclaims them is an essential part of dogmas, which have to be accepted by Catholics in reason of this authority. Such an authority is understood as a divine safeguard of Revelation in the Church.
2. Because they express such an authority, both Marian dogmas explicitly require faith as such, and those who do not accept them are warned that they have lost faith.
3. Vatican II's "hierarchy of truths" does not minimize dogmas: it only expresses their link to the most central elements of faith, first of all Christ himself.
4. The reason for Pius IX's and Pius XII's strong statements is that, in their thomistic framework, to refuse the authority of a dogma means to refuse divine revelation, and to make up a "philosophical" system based only on personal opinions. That presupposes that they recognize that God speaks to us through the Church, and that they identify the Church.
5. In the present situation, a non-Roman-Catholic baptized Christian who does not accept a dogma does not necessarily refuse divine revelation. Only a baptized person can be heretical, and only Roman Catholics are submitted to the disciplinary rules of the Code of Canon Law.
6. The main argument used by Catholic theologians about some dogmas as possibly not-binding in a reunified Church is that dogmas proclaimed during the period of divisions do not apply to the Christians who then were not in full communion with Rome.
7. An authority which can proclaim dogmas can be a way of making Christian unity possible, and there is some consciousness of this fact among Roman Catholics.

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[59] Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*, 25th May 1995, § 11: *"The Catholic Church thus affirms that during the two thousand years of her history she has been preserved in unity, with all the means with which God wishes to endow his Church, and this despite the often grave crises which have shaken her, the infidelity of some of her ministers, and the faults into which her members daily fall. (...) Speaking of the lack of unity among Christians, the Decree on Ecumenism does not ignore the fact that 'people of both sides were to blame', and acknowledges that responsibility cannot be attributed only to the 'other side'. By God's grace, however, neither what belongs to the structure of the Church of Christ nor that communion which still exists with the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities has been destroyed"*.

[60] Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*, 25th May 1995, § 88: *"as I acknowledged on the important occasion of a visit to the World Council of Churches in Geneva on 12 June 1984, the Catholic Church's conviction that in the ministry of the Bishop of Rome she has preserved, in fidelity to the Apostolic Tradition and the faith of the Fathers, the visible sign and guarantor of unity, constitutes a difficulty for most other Christians"*.

The main question remains: in a case of restoration of full unity, would all dogmas apply to all members of the "reunified" Church in the terms of Pius IX and Pius XII? Even if their content is expressed on a renewed way, accepted in common, the principle of a Church authority binding personal faith with some kind of divine authority is a question in itself.

If full unity, in a Roman Catholic perspective, implies that the whole episcopal body be in communion with the bishop of Rome, does this communion include some acts of the Pope during the period of separation? It would be difficult to reply simply "no" without weakening the renewed unity itself: if the Pope is to work as a present and future principle of unity, his past action should not be dismissed. On the other hand this renewed unity would put all into a new ecclesial dynamism, in which all elements of faith could be received anew by all.

It appears clearly that we cannot really solve the problems of dogmas in a document on Mary: it is not our topic. But we cannot either do as if an agreement on dogmas could be achieved only on the basis of content. We could therefore say that we are conscious of the question, and add – as it has been proposed already – that the solution will depend very much on the outcome of the dialogues on the Petrine ministry.