



34. Mary and the Church

In 1950 Pope Pius XII proclaimed the dogma that Mary was raised body and soul into heaven. Shortly before this happened Fr Kentenich held the 1950 October Week. It was to be expected that he would pay tribute to this event, but he typically went about it in his own original way. His chief concern was not just to promote devotion to Mary in the popular sense – as many Marian Movements probably reacted to this event – but rather to show the Blessed Mother’s objective position in the plan of salvation, and her special importance to our times and the Church today. The text at hand is taken from this October Week and focuses on the “Marian minimalists”. These are people in the Church and in Christianity that tend as far as possible to reduce Mary’s position and veneration to a minimum. Fr Kentenich used their arguments to illustrate two points. Firstly, how these tendencies are marked by “mechanistic thinking”, which interpret the Bible and the thinking in the Church in ways that were never meant. Secondly, he showed how much the Blessed Mother and the Church’s proclamation of these truths protect us against such false interpretations of revelation. The Blessed Mother not only protects the image of Christ, as happened in the great Christological controversies of the first centuries (centred dogmatically on the teaching of the Theotokos: Mary is the Mother of God). In the great controversies of our present times she also protects the image of human beings and, connected with that, also the image of the Church – as this text shows.

The Text can be found in the book “Oktoberwoche 1950”, pp 108-130.

Shall we now allow the other representatives of minimalism to pass before our mind’s eye?

1. The Retorquists.¹²² Let us, first of all, allow them to express their opinion, then we will characterise them, and finally offer a searching assessment by accepting what is useful and rejecting what is useless.

[1.1 The opinion of the Retorquists]

What are the Retorquists aiming at? They recognise as the truth only what they can prove was alive in the early Church, whether this concerns liturgical forms or dogmatic truths.

You probably know any number of such Retorquists. Please do not take it amiss if I again refer to a certain school of thought in the Liturgical Movement. I have deliberately called it a certain school of thought. I think we may courageously say that it is an extreme and erroneous school of thought. Its error consists in only recognising what can be proven to be truths and forms accepted by the early Church. At that time the Eucharist was seen mainly as a sacrifice and meal, while, for example, the early Church did not know Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament to the extent we are familiar with today. The Retorquists conclude from this: Away with Adoration! Away with Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament!

Further, at that time Marian devotion was not known to the extent and in the forms we know them today, so they conclude: Away with it!

It might almost seem that an ancient and well-known picture from nature applies here. Let us take a tree. It has been planted into the earth. It grows and develops slowly to its full beauty. That is the developed tree of Christianity as we have it today. Now people come along and say: What was the tree like in its initial stages? This leaf, for instance, did not belong to it at that time, nor did this twig, nor this branch, nor this trunk: Away with them!

In this way the Retorquists trace everything back to its original form, whether this concerns liturgical forms or religious truths. So they either acknowledge only the Bible, or only what they can prove belonged to the apostolic tradition. They are able to accept all this. Everything else, however, that the supernatural instinct of faith, the '*sensus fidei*',¹²³ has brought us is rejected. So the entire development of the Church, for example, in the Middle Ages, is not accepted. And since devotion to Mary or to the Sacred Heart did not exist in their present form in the early Church, that's the end of them! Everything has to be reduced to the beginnings, the original forms, the initial tendencies.

Please ask yourselves here where you have come to know such Retorquists. There are any number of them today. We even have to fear that here and there we ourselves have been infected by them, although for as long as we have existed we have always strongly opposed such opinions.

[1.2 Our answer to the opinion of the Retorquists]

If we now criticise this whole spiritual current briefly, we would have to stress that the approaching proclamation of the dogma sheds a great deal of light on the error of such tendencies. We know that the truth about the physical assumption of the Blessed Mother into heaven cannot be proven directly from the Bible. Not even the apostolic tradition gives us

¹²² This word appears in no dictionary or reference work, and was most probably coined by Fr Kentenich. The root of the word means "to go back" and its meaning is developed in what follows.

¹²³ The sense for the inner truth of revelation.

absolutely certain texts. Here and there we even find opposing opinions. I will later deal with how this can be explained.

What follows from this? When we spoke about the expediency, the usefulness and the meaning of the definition of the dogma, we collected a great deal of material. We could have spent more time doing so, and then, for example, said: Even if the dogma has no value for life – supposing for a moment that this is so – it is sufficient if by it the image of the Blessed Mother is brought closer to us in its objective, God-willed form. Since we have brought our thinking into line with the law “*Ordo essendi est ordo agendi*”,¹²⁴ it is sufficient if we know that this is how God thought of it in the order of being.

If the Blessed Mother has a corresponding position in the objective order of redemption, I cannot say that here we have a feminine and there a masculine spirituality. Every spirituality has to be Marian, whether it is masculine or feminine. The character may be given a specific note by masculine or feminine thinking.

If we again take the climax of the proclamation of the dogma as our starting point, and allow light to fall from there on the way of thinking of the Retorquists, we will notice that we have to make a double protest against such an opinion.

The first protest is raised by the nature of Christianity itself. Christianity is bubbling life, which, like everything that is alive, develops richly, even overabundantly. We must even admit – and we shouldn't find it difficult if we have the correct concept of life – that at the beginning life is less perfect than it is later at its climax. The same applies here. This does not mean that in everything the early Church is not authoritative. It is possible, indeed it is probably certain, that forms that were present at the beginning later prove to be primitive, and are replaced according to the laws of the sound and organic development of life. You can feel that it would be worthwhile for those who want to understand Marian devotion more deeply to think themselves into the nature of the religion of Christianity itself. Christianity is primarily life, not primarily ideas, especially rigid ideas; it is overflowing life.

A second protest is made by the theory of the sources of the faith. What is the source of faith? It is the *depositum fidei*, the deposit of the great truths of our faith, which God revealed to us in Christ. The *depositum fidei* is considered to be complete after the death of the apostles. This includes not just the Sacred Scriptures, but also the apostolic tradition, and at the same time what Christ gave his Church, that is, a unique, supernatural appreciation of the faith.¹²⁵ This announces the following line of reasoning: there is a *sensus fidei communis*, a common appreciation of the faith.

You see, each intellectual-spiritual structure can speak of such a spirit, which is given at the moment life is given.

As far as Christianity is concerned, the spirit that gives life is Christ's spirit, the spirit of faith, the supernatural appreciation of the faith. It has also to be understood as a source of faith. This source of faith flows and bubbles over to an outstanding degree in the dogmatisation of the Assumption – that the Blessed Mother has been taken body and soul into heaven. The same applies to the proclamation of other dogmas, so that in purely theoretical terms we can and must say that even

¹²⁴ The order of being is the order of action.

¹²⁵ The Christian faithful's supernatural appreciation of the faith is a sign of genuine tradition. The apostolic tradition breaks through in this supernatural appreciation of the faith, this *sensus fidei*.

if nothing can be proven in the sources of the early Church¹²⁶ with regard to this or that truth, if it can be proven that the truth corresponds to the spirit of faith in the Church, we have the possibility to define it, if, under certain circumstances, indeed even necessarily and profitably so, it requires definition.

Of course, this raises a number of questions. Hasn't Christianity been surrendered to subjectivism as a result? Would it not be more practical if we maintained and said that a dogma must correspond *formaliter vel implicite vel explicite*¹²⁷ with the Sacred Scriptures? So, must whatever has to count as a dogma be found either in the Bible or written tradition; or must it at least be implicitly included in these sources? Of course, this would give us an intellectual basis for individual, human research. It could well be that in earlier centuries this spirit of faith, which was implanted into the Church with the divine life, with the life of Christ, was strongly and fully examined. Why? I think that the answer is this: Only since the infallibility of the Pope has been recognised as a dogma do we possess a secure regulatory authority, so that the development of the deposit of truth about the divine life will not so easily err.

2. In detail the proclamation of the dogma means:

[2.1 An effective corrective to certain liturgical groups.]

Of course, whoever wants to set up his own Church as a hobby, as happened in the early Church, may do so. However, he will have to be aware that if he rejects the development of Christianity in principle, as well as the development of its liturgical forms, he has in practice gone astray, so he actually cannot accept the dogma of the Assumption.

I think that we, who have always thought and acted organically, should accept all that is worthwhile in the spirit of faith, all that has grown on the tree of Christianity, as we have done until now, whether we find it in the early Church, the Middle Ages or our present times. If you reflect on this more deeply, you will find that in practice it doesn't matter whether a life form came into existence in the 20th, the 13th, or the first century. If we take the developmental laws of Christianity seriously, it is the same Holy Spirit who was at work in the early Church or the Middle Ages, who is now at work in the modern era. Can you realise how a certain dynamism enters the Church as a result?

So certain circles in the Liturgical Movement have to allow themselves to be corrected. And if we ourselves flirt with such ideas? Put an end to it! The great sign in the heavens is speaking clearly and requires an answer. We offer an answer by drawing on the sources of our faith and the spirit of faith that has had an impact in the course of the centuries through the infallibility of the Church.

Observe the strength a plant possesses in order to germinate. How little we notice about the plant when it is still germinating! Nevertheless the whole plant is already present in every cell. When it develops is secondary, whether it is today, tomorrow or the next day.

[2.2 Theologians have also to allow themselves to be corrected]

You must allow me to say this so frankly, especially to the German theologians who are often so historical in their orientation. Not just what is laid down in writing can be the object of our faith, or a dogma. Such a way of seeing things implies a revolution in thinking today, especially for the

¹²⁶ What is meant here are the written documents.

¹²⁷ Formally, both implicitly and explicitly.

older generation. So a corrective for our theologians! A theologian has in future to delve humbly into the supernatural appreciation of the faith. He or she has a twofold task: To bring order into and purify the supernatural appreciation of the faith, as well as to examine and study it, so as to increasingly discover God's Spirit out of the people's appreciation of the faith.

[2.3 *Exegetes must also allow themselves to be corrected*]

Of course, they have to remain in the field of their subject, they have to base themselves on what can be found in the Sacred Scriptures, but they may not presume to say that because this or that cannot be found there, it cannot be the object of our faith, the subject of a dogma.

We may also add that, on the other hand, the laity in the Church suddenly come more strongly into the foreground, also with regard to the supernatural appreciation of the faith. You know that last year the Holy Father asked the entire Episcopacy what the opinion of the people was [with reference to the Assumption]. Many laity were surprised by such a survey. What was at stake? The bishops were merely asked what the people's appreciation of the faith was with regard to the approaching proclamation of the dogma.

3. The third camp is that of **the idealists** or **extreme intellectuals**. First of all, what is their opinion? Then we want to ask: What is our answer?

[3.1 *The extreme intellectuals' understanding of revelation*]

The extreme intellectuals see faith and religion primarily as a single great structure of truths, that is, a summary of logical, conclusive truths. How do they interpret the concepts "revelation" and "truth"? Of course, revelation is also truth, but it is secondary, not primary. However, the extreme intellectual is of the opinion that whatever cannot be discovered with logical necessity from this or that truth, cannot exist before the forum of the intellect.

If we again pause to consider the truth of the Assumption, it is certain that we can prove a connection between it and fundamental truths. That is to say, there is no contradiction between this truth and the fundamental truths we have already recognised. Imagine to yourselves the following truths in this regard: *Immaculata, Intemerata, Virgo Virginum praeclara, Dei Genitrix*.¹²⁸

It is fitting that to round off these truths the dogma of the Assumption should be added to them, even if it is not a logical necessity.

[3.2 *Taking a stand to this understanding of revelation*]

What can we answer? Here we have to open up an understanding of the nature of the Catholic religion once more. Christianity is primarily a revelation of life, not of truths. We have to begin with this thesis. Please reflect, to start with, on the word "revelation". There can be a revelation of a truth, or of life. Revelation can mean unveiling truths and life. Christianity is primarily a revelation of life, and only secondarily a revelation of truth, so it is primarily an unveiling and passing on of life, and only secondarily the unveiling and passing on of truths.

3.2.1 It is, therefore, primarily a communication of life!

Christianity is, first of all, a breakthrough of divine life in the Person of Christ into this earthly, temporal reality. What is revealed and given? Divine life in the Person of Jesus Christ.

¹²⁸ The Blessed Mother is conceived without original sin (immaculate), sinless, virginal, Mother of God.

However, this is insufficient. Let us take another step. This breakthrough of divine life into our temporal reality is at the same time the union, or, if you like, the espousal, of this divine life with the Bride of Christ, his Church here on earth.

That is still insufficient! The religious life, Christian life, is at the same time the constant unfolding, according to the laws of development, of Christ's action and his Bride the Church's co-operation, in order to free the world of the devil and sin, and to divinise and transfigure it. Once we have understood this thesis, we will understand a great deal.

If you want to go into details, you may not overlook that all genuine and true life is borne by the laws of development; so is the divine life brought to us by Jesus Christ. Where are the driving forces at work in this development alive and effective?

We will have to mention three main ones:

First of all, there is the immanent divine life itself. Christ himself, the God-Man, is a tremendously powerful force. It is obvious that this powerful force cannot unfold suddenly, even if only because the Church, as a vessel, is not capable of coping with it. The Church is made up of people [who have a limited capacity] to assimilate the driving force, which is Christ himself, or the tremendous fullness of divine life given us in Christ.

3.2.2 With that we have touched upon the second directional element:

The ability of the members of the Church to assimilate something. You see, the living God usually adapts himself to the comprehension of the human mind. Take, for example, the Germanic character as it has developed since the Middle Ages, and with the profound emotional life we see in the people as a whole. It contains the ability to accept from the fullness of the divine life in Christ those truths and seeds of life that are particularly easily taken up by the heart. This explains that practically throughout the history of the Church our people have been leaders in the field of Mariology. You see, the divine life in Jesus Christ has developed according to the capacity of the vessel. And since in Mariology we are dealing on the whole with truths, relationships and life forms that are embraced by the heart, the Germanic peoples have been leaders in Mariology. Our Catholic people have only partly allowed themselves to be "corrupted" by our theologians. Our people have remained sound, thanks be to God! So we have to borrow from our people. It is a crime to corrupt our genuine, Catholic people.

3.2.3 A third element that develops the driving forces is the needs of the time.

Our living God also wants to give us his divine life in Christ in order to overcome the circumstances of our times, and to satisfy the needs of our times.

3.2.3.1 It follows, therefore, that we see Christianity primarily as the revelation of life, a revelation and espousal of the divine life in Christ with his Bride, the Church. The divine life develops according to certain laws. What follows from this? Aren't we justified in saying that when Christ was here on earth, and gave himself to us in a mysterious way in Christianity, he was not only speculating that the whole torrent of life in his personality would gradually develop and spread in extent, but also in depth? All the bubbling life that Christ wanted to give to his Church has only developed bit by bit in the course of the centuries. The full unfolding of the pent up forces in Jesus Christ are not to be found in the early Church, they are only found in the centuries that followed. It doesn't matter when and how and where Christ wants to develop the vital and powerfully charged

forces living in him – whether in the 16th century or at the beginning [of Christianity]. What a comprehensive and universal understanding of the Church this gives us!

You will be justified in asking me whether there aren't dangers connected with such an understanding? Without doubt there are dangers in it. The *sensus fidei communis*, the common appreciation of the faith, the Spirit of Jesus Christ, tells us that here a vital divine force, Christ as a Person, is at work. "It is the Spirit that gives life"¹²⁹ and bears witness that Christ is at work.

The laity have the official magisterium to correct them. It has ultimately to explain whether something that is at work as the spirit of faith is really the work of the Holy Spirit, or whether it is someone's favourite, subjective propensity. With regard to our German academics, the whole ground beneath their feet is shaking. Suddenly one's own reasoning has receded into the background. How strongly the Church as a whole now depends on higher guidance! The Church is led by the faith that God's Spirit is alive and at work through the leadership of the Church.

Today it is all about these central truths, not whether something can be proven historically. What matters is to bring the Church to a new shore. Ultimately the point is to explain how we can describe the Church at the new shore, or what the old shore is like which we have to leave behind. Ultimately that's the name of the game.

Would you like me to express this truth differently? Take the divine life given to us in Christ Jesus. Compare it with a seed that possesses a tremendously powerful ability to germinate. When will this ability to germinate unfold? It doesn't matter when this ability to germinate will unfold, either today, tomorrow or the next day. Nothing will develop unless the ability to germinate is present. Again, this presupposes faith and dependence on the leadership of the Church. On the one hand, we have the science of theology, and, [on the other] the leadership of the Church in the background.

Can you feel that also in our Family the spirit of faith is at work everywhere and has grasped things correctly? We can and must be filled with great gratitude for this. We may say that in all that we have undertaken so far the Holy Spirit has led us. From this we may conclude that we may also expect the same Spirit to lead us in the time to come.

Christianity appears before our mind's eye as a living structure, as the breakthrough of the divine into the Church. Would you like to have this formulated differently? Christ has imprinted an image of himself and his Mystical Body on the Church. Although this image has been impressed on it, think of how long it will take the Church before it sees this image fully unfolded before its eyes. Think of how long the Church will have to develop before it is able to recognise the individual features [of this image].

Of course, even if I say all this so courageously, we theologians have to add humbly: Let's wait until the Holy Father has proclaimed the dogma in the Bull he is about to publish. Let us wait and see how the Holy Father justifies the dogma.

The same sources of the faith flowed also when the Immaculate Conception was proclaimed a dogma. When theologians refer to the Protogospel,¹³⁰ it is actually not a proof. It is a formal theological deduction: Enmity between Mary and the devil. This sort of proof is not compelling.

¹²⁹ Jn 6,63.

¹³⁰ Gen 3,15.

Also the truth of the Immaculate Conception has to be drawn from the Church's supernatural appreciation of the faith. So we have to discuss this source more vigorously and see to it that we are open to the influence of God's activity.

3.2.3.2 In the process let us not overlook that Christianity is also a revelation of truths, but only in a secondary sense. We may not fall prey to the mistake of explaining that it is absolutely necessarily a structure of philosophically founded truths. That is a fallacy, although it is true that no truth may contradict the others. All truths have to be meaningfully connected with the core truths.

4. We still have to deal with a remnant, a category, of Marian minimalists. We called them the Pauperists.¹³¹

[4.1 The direction of Pauperists' thinking]

What do we mean when we talk of Pauperists? These are Catholics who are always afraid the Blessed Mother could be honoured too greatly. They base themselves on the law of economy; God is economic in giving his gifts.

You will understand it when I add that in this instance the Protestants have to be mentioned in the first place, although they don't really belong here directly. However, we talk about them, because a great deal of what they think and teach has passed over to Catholic circles without their being really aware of it.

The law of economy! Protestants fear that the pure immanence of God could be set aside. God alone, Christ alone, has to be loved without any intermediaries, that is, without the Pope, without the saints, and also without the Blessed Mother.

Asmussen¹³² has just published a new book in which he takes a stand to the Blessed Mother from a Protestant point-of-view. It is entitled "*Mary, the Mother of God*". In it he explains that also Protestants have to take a stand to the Blessed Mother. Either Mary is the Mother of God, as the Protestant Church formerly taught, or she isn't. If she isn't, the Catholic Church has erred. If she is, we [the Evangelicals] have erred, since we reject her more and more. Just as our Lord Jesus Christ is ours, so Mary has also to be ours. And when is she ours? When she is on our level, when she is as we are, when she does not distinguish herself from other people; above all when she isn't seen as Catholics see her. She is ours, that is to say, she is the Mother of the Lord, just as a woman is the mother of her child, without as a result having to be particularly qualified inwardly, spiritually. Catholics, it is said, have a strange opinion about the Blessed Mother: They elevate her from the crowds of human beings and bring her close to God.

Other Protestant groups add: Catholics almost integrate her even into the heart and centre of the Blessed Trinity, so that she seems to leave behind the ground of humankind completely.

We know this thinking well, and also know what we have to say to it. Since the Blessed Mother is the Mother of God, she is related to the Triune God. There is no doubt about that. As we see her, she is a world on her own. Although she is completely human and has been drawn into the midst

¹³¹ Once again Fr Kantenich has coined a concept. The root of the word means "poor", or even "stingy", and its meaning is given in what follows.

¹³² Hans Christian Asmussen, Evangelical theologian (1898-1968).

of Adam's torrent, she was pre-redeemed and fully redeemed, pre-transfigured and fully transfigured.

We may say that Protestant thinking has been totally permeated, and is totally borne, by the law of economy. So it has no *analogia entis*, that is, there is no relationship, no similarity between things and God, nor is there any similarity between the created and graced human being and God. The law of economy!

Such an opinion has also gained currency in Catholic circles. Essentially there are three circles that are always afraid that strong devotion to Mary could rob Christ or the Triune God of some honour. These are circles that have been gripped by an extreme intellectualism and philosophical idealism; they are circles that repeatedly fear that the distance between Christ and human beings, and also the distance between the Blessed Mother and Christ, cannot be too great. There has to be an infinite and visible distance between them. It has to be infinite in the sense that human beings, including the Blessed Mother, have to be kept as small as possible, so that Christ's and God's greatness can appear in all its magnitude. These are the people who know nothing about the law of organic transference and transmission; they do not take God's fullness sufficiently into account, so they also do not understand that the mighty stream of glory proceeding from Christ can be made accessible everywhere. No matter whether I immerse myself into this mighty stream through a person who bears Christ's features, or through the Blessed Mother, or directly through Christ, it is always the same stream of grace and glory. Mechanistic thinking tears everything out of its great context.

[4.2 Assessing the Pauperists' way of thinking]

What have we to say to this? It is not my intention to go into details, but to view the difficulty as a whole. We have diagnosed the battleground; we know our opponents; we know the friends with whom we are united and related. So what have we to say now about the attitude of the Pauperists?

4.2.1 The law of economy is an illusion.

It doesn't exist even in the natural order and in creation. Look at how plentifully the Lord God has allowed human beings to share in his glory. Let us recall two sayings:

"Deus caritas est."¹³³ God is Love. By nature God is infinite, an infinite ocean of love. So it is his nature that he wants to communicate himself infinitely. That is a Catholic opinion reaching back to the very beginning. It has been handed down to us and guaranteed by the Sacred Scriptures and the teaching of the Church.

Deus quaerit condiligentes se – God is looking for created beings who can love as he can, and together with him love what he loves. Put in human terms that means that God is not happy, as it were, unless he has created beings whom he can endow overabundantly; he would also not be happy if he had not created me. He needs me as an object of his love, otherwise he would not be infinite Love, Kindness and Mercy.

So if the law of economy does not exist in the natural order, why should it be active in the supernatural?

¹³³ 1 Jn 4,8.

4.2.2 If it existed, it would not be applicable in any way to the Blessed Mother, because we see her as a being whom the living God has created with creative intuition, as it were, with an unexampled creative force and power. Whatever he could give of his greatness – we are told by Catholic theologians and the Church – he has given to the blessed among women. This is how we can see the Blessed Mother. This is by no means detrimental to our image of God.

4.2.3 If we want to understand God, we can only do so by comparison. *Deus semper maior.*¹³⁴ So if I take a moleheap as a measure with which to measure the highest mountain, we would have to say that the mountain is endlessly greater than the moleheap. But if we take the highest mountain in the world – and that is the Blessed Mother, the climax of divine Wisdom, Omnipotence and Greatness – and notice from this endlessly lofty peak that we still have to bridge an infinite distance to reach God, we will notice that this does no disavour to God's greatness. On the contrary, the greater the measure, and the greater the gap from this measure, the greater is our vision of our infinite God.

¹³⁴ God is always greater.