

## De Ecclesia Tractatus Historico-Dogmatici, Tomus II (*Historical-Dogmatic Treatises on the Church, Volume II*)

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### Quaestio 2. De obiecto indirecto magisterii Ecclesiae. De factis dogmaticis

**834.** *Dogmatic facts* cohere with the deposit of faith in a different manner than philosophical truths do, namely not by a logical and internal connection, but by an external, contingent, historical, positive one. For they are historical truths, *historical facts*, which have a relationship to the Christian religion as positive and historical. These facts are called *dogmatic* or *doctrinal* because they regard revealed (Christian) doctrine and are intimately connected with the dogma of faith.

Therefore, we are not speaking of historical facts which constitute the deposit of faith itself and as such can be called dogmatic. Among these should be counted not only the mysteries of Christ's life but also other revealed truths, such as, for example, the inspiration of the sacred books, which in comparison with other truths can rightly be called auxiliary. But other historical facts indeed do not pertain to revelation, yet they must necessarily be established with certainty so that the deposit of faith and the Christian religion itself may be preserved intact; for example, the legitimacy of some Ecumenical Council or Roman Pontiff, so that the truth of the dogma defined by him may be established. Such facts, which indeed *are not revealed*, yet must be certain so that the dogma itself may be safeguarded, are called dogmatic facts *in the proper sense*.

**835.** However, in these matters two classes ought again to be distinguished. In a *more general* sense, any historical fact connected with dogma can be called dogmatic; but in the *technical* sense, a dogmatic fact is understood to mean the genuine sense of some human text (book).

Concerning the foregoing matters, there can be no controversy. For unless the Church could indicate authentically and also absolutely concerning the legitimacy of any council or Roman Pontiff, it would already be finished with the very doctrinal authority of the Church and with all its exercise, indeed with all ecclesiastical authority, which would be entirely deprived of its power. For the door would be opened to the greatest abuses, to which religious society, the

Church, would necessarily succumb. The Church itself has followed this norm, acknowledging the decrees of Ecumenical Councils (cf. D 164 173) as legitimate (cf. Questions to be proposed to Wycliffites and Hussites: “Whether he believes that the condemnations of John Wycliffe, John Hus, and Jerome of Prague, made concerning their persons, books, and documents by the sacred general Council of Constance, were rightly and justly done and are to be held as such by any Catholic and firmly asserted” [D 659]; “Likewise, whether he believes that the canonically elected Pope, whoever he may be at the time, his name being properly expressed, is the successor of blessed Peter, having supreme authority in the Church of God” [D 674]). This conviction appears excellently in the definition of the primacy and infallibility of the Roman Pontiff, made in the *Vatican Council*. The definition of the Council of Florence is renewed, “which is to be believed by all the faithful of Christ . . .” (D 1826). To prove the infallibility of the Roman Pontiff, those Ecumenical Councils are especially alleged “in which the East came together with the West in union of faith and charity . . .” (D 1832). Therefore, judgment concerning the legitimacy, universality, and supreme authority of these councils is rather presupposed as an undoubtedly admitted and to-be-admitted fact, than considered as something to be proven.

**836.** It will be necessary to treat more extensively the question of dogmatic facts in the *technical* sense. For this is a question that was vehemently debated in the *Jansenist* controversy and remains most serious even today; namely, whether the Church can authentically judge concerning the meaning of some proposition (sentence, statement, text) or book. Moreover, this judgment encompasses both the determination of the meaning that the author joined with his words, as they stand, and either the approval or disapproval of this meaning.

A dogmatic fact in the stricter sense is, clearly, *the genuine meaning of some determined human text or book*. A human text or book is understood; the interpretation of Sacred Scripture is not at issue here, because it is established that the sacred books were handed down by God to the Church, “whose it is to judge concerning the true meaning and interpretation of the holy Scriptures” (*Vatican Council*; D 1788), as must be properly proven in the treatise *On Scripture*. But in what manner the “genuine meaning” should be understood will be made clear from the description of the *Jansenist* controversy.

**837.** *Cornelius Jansen* (1585—1638), lecturer of theology at Louvain, later bishop of Ypres, composed a book which, out of veneration for the doctor of grace, he called “*Augustinus*.” After Jansen’s death, Fromondus arranged for the book’s publication (1640). Since certain opinions in this book, savoring of the Calvinist spirit, were being promoted as innovations, *Urban VIII* had already prohibited it (1642). But the supporters of the book, asserting that the Bull was spurious, did not submit themselves to it. Then, with a great controversy having arisen, the matter was again brought to Rome by the bishops, to the tribunal of *Innocent X*. After lengthy deliberations, drawn out over two years, judgment was finally rendered and published in the Constitution “*Cum occasione*” (of May 31, 1653), in which five propositions drawn from Jansen’s book are declared heretical (D 1092 sqq.).

The Jansenists, however — for by now a certain faction had arisen, led principally by *Antoine Arnauld* (1612—1694) and aided by the monastery of Port-Royal, over which *Angélique Arnauld* presided as abbess of the Cistercian Order — by no means acquiesced to this judgment. They took refuge, to be sure, in various meanings by which the words of Jansenius could be understood; they distinguished between the heretical sense (Lutheran and Calvinist), the Pelagian sense, and the true sense. Hence they said that the propositions had indeed been justly

condemned by Innocent, but that they had never been asserted by Jansenius. Later, however, when *Innocent* had decreed that the propositions were condemned in the sense in which they are read in the book “*Augustinus*,” Arnauld denied that the Church possessed the *right* to judge concerning such dogmatic facts; that the Church could indeed resolve questions of *law* (whether some doctrine conforms to revelation), but that questions of *fact* (whether some proposition is taught and contained in certain words) exceeded the power of the magisterium; therefore, such decrees should be accorded not internal submission, but at most respectful silence (1655).

*Alexander VII*, asked by very many bishops of France, established the following in the subsequent year (1656): “We declare and define that those five propositions excerpted from the book of Cornelius Jansenius, Bishop of Ypres, which is entitled *Augustinus*, have been condemned in the sense intended by the same Cornelius” (D 1098). The Jansenists did not accept this judgment of the Roman Pontiff; hence a formula of submission was prescribed to be signed by all, by which “the five propositions... excerpted and condemned in the sense intended by the same author (*Jansenius*), as the Apostolic See condemned them through the said Constitutions” are rejected and condemned (D 1099).

**838.** However, since at this time a question was being raised concerning the freedom of the Gallican church (cf. D 1322 ff.), and very many errors concerning moral matters, which indulged either in laxism or rigorism, were being condemned by the Church (cf. D 1101 ff.; 1151 ff.; 1291 ff.), certain loopholes remained open to the Jansenists, so that they paid no heed to Roman decrees, for example the error condemned by the Holy Office on December 7, 1690: “Where anyone finds doctrine clearly founded in Augustine, he can absolutely hold and teach it, paying no regard to any papal bull,” and “The bull of Urban VIII ‘*In eminenti*’ is surreptitious” (D 1320 f.), which assertions are openly Jansenistic.

After the death of Arnauld, *P. Quesnel* took over the leadership of the Jansenist faction or rather sect. When *Innocent XII* demanded that the condemned propositions be understood in their *natural and obvious sense* (in the year 1694), Quesnel responded that he entirely agreed, but denied that this sense was present in the words of Jansenius. Nor did the confirmation of the constitution of Alexander VII, made by the same Innocent XII, accomplish anything (cf. D 1099, note 3). Finally, *Clement XI*, in the Constitution “*Vineam Domini Sabaoth*” of July 16, 1705, at the request of the King of France, confirmed the decrees of his predecessors and declared that respectful silence by no means satisfies “the obedience which is owed to the aforementioned apostolic constitutions...; but that the sense condemned in the five aforesaid propositions of Jansenius’s book, which those words convey, as stated above, must be rejected and condemned by all the faithful of Christ as heretical, not only with the mouth, but also with the heart...” (D 1350).

A few years later (1713) the errors of Paschasius Quesnel (1634—1719) were condemned by the same Clement (D 1351 ff.)(5).

**839.** By this controversy, so prolonged and so vehement, the question of *dogmatic fact* has been thoroughly treated and resolved. The Church, to be sure, attributes to herself the right of judging not only concerning *doctrine* (about grace and freedom) but also concerning the fact that some doctrine is enunciated *in certain words*. She can therefore authentically resolve both the question of *law* and of *fact*. Moreover, she adjudicates the question of fact in such a way that she declares what is the *natural sense of the words* as they lie before us (D 1092), as they were therefore

intended by the author who uttered these words (D 1098). Therefore, the *author* as such is condemned for error; the author indeed, as they say, *objectively*, but not *subjectively*. For the objective author is known from the words and their sense, which is drawn out according to commonly prevailing rules (from the native sense of the words—from the context and connection—from the fundamental law that a sound man does not express through his words something contrary to what he himself wishes to express). But the *subjective* author, who perhaps wrote falsely, whether unknowingly or knowingly presenting something contrary to his own opinion, is not judged by the Church(6).

From the same controversy, the necessity becomes clear that the Church should judge and be able to judge concerning doctrinal facts, that is, concerning the natural and obvious meaning of the words of any proposition. For doctrine can neither be protected from error nor properly expounded and proposed except through aptly chosen words. The Church, therefore, as teacher of nations and guardian of Christian revelation, must judge not only concerning the meaning but also concerning the signs by which this meaning is aptly expressed, that is, concerning words. For, as Thomas Aquinas says, “if there be disordered speech concerning those things which are of faith, corruption of faith can follow from this” (Summa Theologica II-II, q. 11, a. 2 ad 2). Only in this way will the Church be able to remove every danger of error from her faithful and securely and clearly explain the complete meaning of the deposit of faith.

**840.** Hence the Church from the very beginning has exercised this right, defining certain terms, e.g. θεοτόκος, ὑπόστασις (D 113 ff.), φύσις, τριάς, οὐσία (D 213), “transubstantiation” (D 877). Furthermore, it condemned the errors of heretics, such as the “wicked and perverse dogmas of Nestorius” (D 125) in the Council of Ephesus(7), the “impious writings of Theodoret,” who as the author of these writings is called “impious” along with Nestorius himself (D 226). *Innocent II* in the year 1141 (says): “all the dogmas of this same *Peter (Abelard)* . . . we have condemned along with their author, and we have imposed perpetual silence upon him as a heretic” (D 387). The Wycliffites and Hussites are to be questioned whether they acknowledge “the condemnations of John Wycliffe, John Hus, and Jerome of Prague, made concerning their persons, books, and documents . . .” as rightly done (D 659). Concerning the Jansenists, cf. above n. 837 ff. Finally, Pius IX in his letter “Gravissimas inter” of December 11, 1862, writes these words: “Jakob Frohschammer . . . defends very serious errors in his works. . . . Therefore, the same Congregation . . . judged that the author thinks incorrectly on many points and that his doctrine deviates from Catholic truth” (D 1667).

To one inquiring what the *theological qualification* of this position might be, it must be answered that this position is at least *theologically certain*; but having examined the judgments of the Church—so numerous and weighty as to be beyond doubt—an even greater degree of dogmatic certitude can safely be attributed to it, especially since the most grave penalties are inflicted upon those who have not obeyed the statutes of the Roman Pontiff (Clement XI; D 1350).