

Introduction

The pontificate of Pope Francis compels us to ask many theological questions again and provokes new ones, inspiring the clergy and the laity, experts in theology and “everyday” believers. Many people see in the words and actions of the “visible head of the Church” an opportunity to modernize the teaching, but there are also those who perceive the surfacing reports from the Vatican as an encouragement to leave essential evangelical truths behind and break with traditional interpretations. Journalistic commentaries, often lack deeper theological reflection and wider historical context. Therefore, it seems necessary to make efforts to sketch the substantive foundations for such a discussion, to look at the stages of formation of teaching about the development of doctrine and the Church’s Magisterium, to define trouble spots and perspectives for the future.

Such a reflection calls for two especially important questions to be asked. The first one concerns the relationship between the essence and contextual elements in particular doctrinal formulations. In other words, it means defining what is universal and timeless, a hard core of formulas, and what is connected only with contemporary problems in the times when the was formulated. The latter is limited by outdated scientific image of the world or by cultural circumstances. Finding a criterion for a precise distinction between these two elements is one

of the most serious metatheological challenges. The second question touches upon the criteria for the development of doctrine. In the face of modern hermeneutic theories, the validity of the principles, formulated by J. H. Newman, can be analyzed, considering the broader responsibility of *sensus fidelium*, and taking into account the modern sciences in the process of reinterpreting the Magisterium's teaching. Besides, the debate on the limits of hermeneutics of continuity is still valid.

The current issue of "Theological Research" contains, among others, texts touching upon the above problems. We find in it both: historical analyzes, zooming in on theological discussions, and proposals for new approaches, which – based on tradition – open the readers' minds to the potential directions of change. How did the teaching of the Church develop with regard to the nature of Tradition? What factors should be taken into account in the process of broadening our horizons in this area, and in which directions may it head towards? What belongs to the nature of the episcopate and in what historical circumstances did this institution take its present shape? How can this office be changed to emphasize the pastoral care of the Church in the practice of episcopal ministry? The authors of the articles tackle such questions.

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