

What are dogmas—and, more generally, standards of doctrine?

If Christian witness generally expresses or implies claims to validity, especially the two claims to be adequate to its content and fitting to its situation, the specific difference of dogmas and standards of doctrine is that they not only *imply* the claim to be adequate to their content—in the twofold sense of being appropriate to Jesus Christ and credible to human existence—but make this claim *explicitly* and even formally.

This explains why dogmas and standards of doctrine necessarily presuppose theological reflection in the strict and proper sense. Clearly, one can make an explicit and even formal claim to validity responsibly only if one has undertaken the process of critical reflection required to validate the claim.

Also clear is why, so far from somehow setting limits to theological reflection, dogmas and standards of doctrine are, above all, what require to be subjected to it. Precisely because they not only imply the claim to be adequate to their content but also advance this claim explicitly and even formally, they all the more invite the critical scrutiny that theology exists to provide. Thus, however much they may indeed provide the rules for the witness of the church, they least of all provide rules for theological reflection, whose whole point is to critically validate their claim to be the rules by which the witness of the church is to be regulated.

Needless to say, the same reasoning applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to canon law and, more generally, standards of life. Whether the rules in question are rules concerning things to be believed (*credenda*) or things to be done (*agenda*), the fact that they are rules indicates both that they presuppose theological reflection in the strict and proper sense and that they ever remain subject to it. For what makes either kind of rule a rule is that its claim to adequacy—to appropriateness and credibility—is not only implied but explicit and even formal, and so all the more in need of theological validation.