

The Definability of Theological Conclusions According to Francisco Marín-Sola

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Do theological conclusions belong to faith? Are they definable? This is the problem of the definability of theological conclusions.¹ It is to this problem that we address in this paper. And we confine ourselves to the position of Francisco Marín-Sola as contained in his monumental work *La Evolución Homogénea del Dogma Católico*. Although he did not deal with the problem directly, nonetheless he discussed it indirectly in his treatment of the real meaning of virtual revelation.²

¹ A theological conclusion is defined as a proposition or doctrine deduced from revelation by means of reasoning. It is called theological because it is deduced from revelation; it is called conclusion because it is known by means of reasoning.

I reject R. Schultes' definition: "...any doctrine which is rightly deduced from revelation, which doctrine is neither explicitly or implicitly (meaning, equivalently) contained in it but only properly contained as in a principle or in a cause," (cf. "De definibilitate conclusionum theologiarum," *La Ciencia Tomista*, Vol. 23, 1921, p. 126.) because, aside from being a technical definition, it presupposes a certain understanding of virtual revelation, which, i.e., confusion over its meaning, is precisely one of the causes of the problem of definability.

Also, it is presupposed that the Church has authority to define theological conclusions into dogma.

² cf. *The Homogeneous Evolution of Catholic Dogma*, trans. by Antonio T. Piñon (Manila: Santo Tomas University Press, 1988), Ch. II, secs. II-VII, pp. 175-262.

I. A HISTORICAL SURVEY OF SCHOLASTIC POSITIONS BEFORE FRANCISCO MARIN-SOLA

The problem of the definability of theological conclusions is not new. It was dealt with by the Scholastics as early as the thirteenth century. However, it was expressedly and formally raised as a theological problem only after the Council of Trent.³ Our aim in this brief survey is to provide a background for the position of F. Marín-Sola. For between the thirteenth century and nineteen hundred six — the year he conceived his *La Evolución Homogénea del Dogma Católico* — the problem underwent various modifications.

A. The Scholastic Position in the 13th Century

Many Scholastics held that *consequentiae articulorum* (consequences of the articles of faith) are formally revealed; that some formally revealed truths are contained in others by way of conclusion,⁴ i.e., "a certain order is discernible in some revealed truths in such a way that some truths are implicitly contained in them just as every principle is reducible to the primary one."⁵ Thus, every conclusion deduced from them belongs to the faith of the Church. For just as every conclusion is contained in the principle, so also faith in said conclusion is contained in the faith of the Church, the proximate rule of faith. Therefore, said conclusion is definable.

B. The Scholastic Position in the 14th and 15th Centuries

While the Scholastics of the previous century were concerned in determining the objective relationship of the different truths of faith, i.e., what is contained in another as a conclusion is in a principle, the theologians of this period were concerned in determining the way by which one knows a truth contained in another, i.e., through logical reasoning.⁷ They held that some truths are expressedly revealed; others

³ cf. R. Schultes, op. cit., p. 305.

⁴ op. cit., p. 312.

⁵ *Summa Theologiae*, IIa IIae, q. 1, a.7.

⁶ loc. cit.

⁷ op. cit., p. 316.

are deduced from the words of Sacred Scriptures or from the definitions of the Church. They called said truths Catholic truths.

A Catholic truth is one which is found in Sacred Scriptures either explicitly in words or implicitly in "bona et necessaria consequentia," i.e., conclusions drawn with certainty by means of a proposition immediately evident from a truth in Sacred Scriptures or from a dogma of faith;⁸ they are called theological conclusions. Therefore, in this period the common opinion was: a Catholic truth (theological conclusion) belongs to the faith and is definable.

C. The Scholastic Position After the Council of Trent

Although theologians of this period retained in substance the position of the preceding periods, it was they who formally posed the problem: the first impulse came from Cajetan, it was set into motion by Melchor Cano and it was formally raised by Suárez.⁹

Suárez introduced a new concept: *formal confuso* (confusedly revealed formal revelation) and understood *proprio virtual* (virtual revelation properly speaking) in terms of *physico-conexivum* (physico-connective virtual revelation).¹⁰ He identified the former with implicit virtual revelation and the latter with virtual revelation properly speaking. This two-fold identification did not coincide with the prevailing understanding during that time: theological conclusion is identical with virtual revelation properly speaking.¹¹ Consequently, the problem of the definability of theological conclusions, i.e., virtual revelation properly speaking, is formally introduced.¹²

Scholastics from different schools reacted. And the common position was:¹³

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ *cf. op. cit.*, p. 317.

¹⁰ *op. cit.*, p. 319.

¹¹ *cf. R. Schultes, Introductio in Historiam Dogmatum* (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1922), p. 126.

¹² *op. cit.*, "La definibilitate . . .", p. 320.

¹³ *op. cit.*, p. 321.

1. Theological conclusions as such do not belong to faith.
2. Theological conclusions from implicit formal revelation are definable and they pertain to faith.
3. Conclusions from mediately revealed truths cannot be defined as pertaining to faith. Only formally or equivalently revealed truths do.

D. The Scholastic Position During the First Vatican Council

The question they dealt with was: whether theological conclusion is of faith? And their position may be summarized as follows:¹⁴

1. Conclusions formally taken (as conclusions and as they are deduced) are not of faith.
2. Conclusions materially taken (as propositions which although not immediately revealed in themselves, are nonetheless either deduced from the principal tenets of faith or explicated from revelation) are of faith.
3. Conclusions materially taken, which conclusions are not immediately revealed in themselves, but are only revealed in a confused way, are of faith.
4. Conclusions drawn from two immediately revealed premises, materially considered, are of faith.
5. Conclusions drawn from two premises, one from faith and another from reason, are not of faith.

II. THE POSITION OF FRANCISCO MARIN-SOLA

Francisco Marín-Sola's position may be summarized as follows: theological conclusions belong to faith and are definable because they are a metaphysico-inclusive virtual revelation. He arrived at this position after clarifying the position of Francisco Suárez.

¹⁴ cf. *op. cit.*, p. 328.

A. *The Suarezian Position*

Suárez posed two questions:¹⁶ 1) does a conclusion, which is deduced from a premise of faith and from a premise of reason, belong to faith before the definition of the Church? 2) or does it belong to faith only after the Church's definition? To the second he answered affirmatively in agreement with the then prevailing opinion;¹⁶ to the first he followed neither of the then two opposed positions.¹⁷ Rather, he proposed his own as a sort of compromise. In doing so, he introduced a word of his own creation: confusedly revealed formal revelation. This, according to F. Marín-Sola, is "the real cause of the confusion . . . as regards the definability of real theological conclusions."¹⁸

The Suarezian Innovation: confusedly revealed formal revelation and virtual revelation properly speaking.

Philosophy speaks of two groups of properties: metaphysical and physical. Correlative to this are two kinds of virtuality and two kinds of conclusion.¹⁹ Metaphysical properties constitute the implicit virtuality of mathematical and metaphysical sciences; while physical properties, the purely connective virtuality of physical sciences.

Suárez considers confusedly formal truths as belonging to the first group of properties and properly virtual truths to the second group. Thus, under the name of confusedly revealed formal revelation, he understands two kinds of conclusion:²⁰ 1) conclusions drawn by means

¹⁶ cf. F. Marín-Sola, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

¹⁶ His thesis is: theological conclusions belong formally and most properly to faith, not only mediately but immediately, after the definition of the Church. *ibid.*

¹⁷ The two radically opposed positions are: a) theological conclusions belong to faith even before the definition of the Church. An assent of faith is given to it. (Vasquez and de Vega) b) Theological conclusions do not belong to faith before the Church's definition. Only a theological assent is given to it. (most Thomists) cf. *op. cit.*, p. 184.

¹⁸ *op. cit.*, p. 185.

¹⁹ Metaphysical properties, virtualities and conclusions are only conceptually distinct from the essence or principle from which they are deduced. They are really identical and inseparable from the original concept. Physical properties, virtualities and conclusions, on the other hand, are not only conceptually distinct but also really distinct from the essence or their principle. They are absolutely separable from the original concept, *ibid.*

²⁰ cf. *op. cit.* p. 185-186.

of improper discourse²¹ or simple explicitation of terms. Modern theologians call it *formal implicito* (implicit formal revelation);²² 2) conclusions which are conceptually distinct from the revealed premise but really identical with and inseparable from it. This is now called *virtual implicito* (implicit virtual revelation).²³

Under the name of virtual revelation properly speaking or theological conclusion strictly speaking, he understands only those conclusions which express something really distinct and absolutely separable from the revealed premise. This is now called *virtual no implicito*²⁴ (non-implicit virtual revelation) or *virtual physico-conexivo*. This, for Suárez, is the true virtual revelation, the true theological conclusion.²⁵

The Suarezian compromise. The compromise claimed by Suárez consists in the fact that he retained four things from the Thomistic tradition and that he introduced something as a novelty. He was traditional 1) in his division of revelation into formal and virtual, 2) in affirming that formal revelation is the object per se of faith, that virtual revelation is the object per se of theology, 3) in denying that virtual

²¹ A discourse is improper when there is only a nominal distinction between the conclusion and the principle. It is called improper discourse because only one intellectual act, i.e., simple analysis of the word, is involved. For example: Peter is a man. Therefore, he is a rational animal. Between "Peter is a man" (principle) and "Peter is a rational animal" (conclusion), there is only a nominal, not a real and conceptual distinction. Only an analysis of the word "man" is involved. cf. op. cit., pp. 151-152.

²² Implicit formal revelation refers to new formulas drawn from the original formulas, which new formulas are only nominally distinct from them. It is called formal because there is only a nominal distinction; it is called implicit because a certain explicitation of the original formula happens. This is called improper virtual revelation. cf. op. cit., p. 153.

²³ Implicit virtual revelation refers to new formulas deduced from the original formulas, which new formulas are nominally and conceptually distinct from them. It is called virtual because there is not merely a nominal but a conceptual distinction; it is called implicit because the transition of a concept to another happens within the same reality. cf. *ibid.* This is virtual revelation properly said.

²⁴ Non-implicit virtual revelation refers to new formulas drawn from the original formulas, which new formulas are nominally, conceptually and really distinct from them. It is called virtual because there is a distinction properly speaking; it is called non-implicit because there is a transition from one reality to another so that the conclusion is really an addition to the original formula. This is also called physico-connective virtual revelation. cf. op. cit., p. 154.

²⁵ op. cit., p. 186.

revelation belongs to faith even before the definition of the Church and 4) in maintaining that virtual revelation belongs to faith only after the Church's definition.

He was an innovator in considering physico-connective virtual revelation as really distinct and absolutely separable from formal revelation and in categorizing as formal revelation, although qualified as confusedly revealed, implicit virtual revelation. In other words, although he retained nominally the division of revelation into formal and virtual, he nonetheless elevated the traditionally known implicit virtual revelation to formal revelation with his confusedly revealed formal revelation terminology.

Therefore, the confusedly revealed formal revelation, according to Suárez, embraces the implicit virtual revelation and the implicit formal revelation; the non-implicit virtual revelation or physico-connective virtual revelation is equivalent to virtual revelation properly speaking.

Suárez' answer to the first question. With this understanding, his answer to the first question, i.e., do theological conclusions belong to faith before the definition of the Church, is:²⁶

- 1) as regards conclusions under the name of confusedly revealed formal revelation, said conclusions belong to faith even before the Church's definition;²⁷
- 2) as regards conclusions classified under the name virtual revelation properly speaking, said conclusions do not belong to faith before the definition of the Church.²⁸

The Suarezian understanding of confusedly revealed formal revelation and virtual revelation properly speaking added a new dimension

²⁶ cf. *op. cit.*, p. 157.

²⁷ Suárez' own words are: "... formal revelation, even though confusedly revealed, suffices as the formal object of faith and consequently, an assent of faith is given to truths contained therein ..." *ibid.*

²⁸ Hé says: "Virtual revelation does not suffice as a formal object of faith and consequently ... assent to it is only theological ..." *ibid.*

to the problem of definability.²⁹ Theologians before Suárez accepted that virtual revelation, i.e., implicit virtual revelation, is definable. But, with the Suarezian innovation, that virtual revelation is definable is retained by theologians, only that virtual revelation is now understood as non-implicit virtual revelation, which, although is called revealed, is not actually revealed.³⁰

B. *The Position of Fr. Marín-Sola*

His thesis is: the physico-connective virtual revelation is not a true virtual revelation. He proves this by showing that physico-connective reasoning³¹ is not a real theological reasoning; it does not produce a true theological conclusion. He gave two reasons.³² We give only his primary and basic reason. He says:

²⁹ Fr. Marín-Sola observed two interesting phenomena in the problem of definability: a) when a theologian denies the definability of theological conclusions, he is actually denying the Suarezian theological conclusion; b) when he affirms the definability of a confusedly revealed formal revelation, he is affirming the definability of the true virtual revelation, i.e., implicit virtual revelation. cf. op. cit., p. 202.

Furthermore, he enumerated four principal opinions on the problem of definability:

1. Theologians before Molina - That theological conclusions belong to faith and are definable they agree unanimously. They differ, however, as to whether they belong to faith before or after the definition of the Church.

2. Molina - Theological conclusions, either inclusive or implicit virtual revelation, do not belong to faith either before or after the Church's definition.

3. Vázquez and de Vega - every true theological conclusion belongs to faith and can be assented to with faith even before its definition.

4. Suárez and Lugo - Inclusive (implicit) virtual revelation belong to faith; physico-connective virtual revelation (virtual revelation properly speaking, for Suárez) belongs to faith, after, not before, the Church's definition.

Understandably, however, he proposed only three theories in this matter, excluding the fourth position. For, he claimed that whereas the first three dealt with true theological conclusions, i.e., implicit virtual revelation, the fourth dealt with non-true theological conclusions, i.e., physico-connective or non-implicit virtual revelation. Cf. op. cit., pp. 203-209.

³⁰ op. cit., pp. 210-211.

³¹ Fr. Marín-Sola mentioned six types of reasoning from essence to property (cf. p. 162), which he reduced into two: reasoning by real distinction or by pure connection without implicitude and reasoning by real implicitude (cf. p. 163). Physico-connective reasoning is of the fourth type (as regards the six), i.e., reasoning from pure essence to accidental property, and of the first type (as regards the two). In connection with the scale of doctrinal development (cf. pp. 152-154), it belongs to the third scale, i.e., new formulas which are really, conceptually and nominally distinct from the original formulas constitute it.

³² cf. op. cit., pp. 211-226

There is an axiom in logic which says that truth cannot be concluded from false premises or if a conclusion is false, it is because either one of the premises is false or the syllogism is bad.³³

In physico-connective reasoning, the major premise is from revelation; it deals with the pure essence³⁴ of a thing. The minor is a premise of physical necessity. And the conclusion is not necessarily connected with the revealed major premise. It deals with an accidental property.³⁵ For example:

The Body of Christ in the Eucharist is a true body.
 But every body occupies space.
 Therefore, the body of Christ in the Eucharist occupies space.

In the example, no premise is false: the major is a revealed datum; the minor is physically certain. The only problem, however, is that it is a bad syllogism: from the point of view of logic and from the point of view of theology.

In logic, it is a general rule that a syllogism must have only three terms: subject, predicate and middle term. In the above example, however, there are four, not three, terms: subject (body of Christ), predicate (occupies space), and two middle terms (body as pure essence-major premise and body as integral essence-minor premise). Therefore,

³³ cf. p. 212

³⁴ The word "essence" has three meanings: pure essence (first), integral essence (second) and perfect essence (third). Pure essence denotes the essential predicates; integral, essential predicates plus all integral parts which an essence can have according to the laws of nature; perfect, all of the above plus accidental perfections which an essence is capable to have.

This threefold meaning of essence is important in the problem of definability. There is a gradation among the three in such a way that the third includes the second, the second the first. Thus, pure essence is implicit in integral essence, integral essence in perfect essence, but not perfect essence in the second nor integral essence in the first. Cf. op. cit., p. 160.

³⁵ The word "property" has two meanings: essential and accidental. The former is really identical with the essence; the essence cannot exist without them. The latter is really distinct from the essence; the essence can exist without them.

The combination of the threefold meaning of essence and the twofold meaning of property gives rise to the six types of reasoning from essence to property. Cf. op. cit., pp. 160-162

the conclusion is not a true conclusion, much less, a true theological conclusion.³⁶

It is accepted that revealed truths are the true principles of theology. Thus, every true theological reasoning has at least one premise from revelation, while the minor is either from faith or from reason. When the minor is from reason, the minor serves as an instrument whereby the virtuality contained in the major is deduced, not, the major serves as an instrument whereby the virtuality contained in the minor is deduced. In physico-connective type of reasoning, however, the major serves as an instrument whereby the virtuality contained in the minor is deduced. Therefore, it is not a true theological reasoning and the conclusion is not a strict theological conclusion.³⁷

The answer then to the question "do theological conclusions, i.e., physico-connective virtual revelation, belong to faith," is obvious. Since it is not contained, even in the least implicit manner, in the deposit of revelation, in no way do they belong to faith. To define them means to add new truths to revelation.

His next thesis is: the true theological conclusion is the metaphysico-inclusive virtual revelation. He says that if the physico-inclusive virtual revelation is not a true theological conclusion, then what is the true one? It is the metaphysico-inclusive virtual revelation,³⁸ i.e., that which is implicitly contained in the revealed premise.

A conclusion is considered a true theological conclusion if it fulfills the following conditions:³⁹

1. At least one of the premises must be from faith. If it were not, then the reasoning would be philosophical, not theological. For theology deals with truths of faith as its principles.
2. The other premise, if it is from reason, must be inclusive or really identical with, but virtually different from the revealed premise. It is not a mere nominal distinction nor a pure

³⁶ cf. *op. cit.*, pp. 212-215.

³⁷ cf. *op. cit.*, pp. 217-218; 220-223.

³⁸ cf. *op. cit.*, p. 232

³⁹ cf. pp. 247-255.

physical connection. If it were a mere nominal distinction, then it would be an improper discourse. If it were a pure physical connection, the conclusion would be metaphysically or theologically certain.

3. The inclusive premise from reason can be demonstrated. It must not be doubtful nor probable. If it were doubtful or probable, then nothing would be achieved in reasoning.
4. The syllogism must be well-constructed, i.e., the conclusion should be deduced from the premises. If one of these is lacking, then there is neither a true theological reasoning nor a true theological conclusion.

For example:

God is absolutely immutable.

But, that which is absolutely immutable is eternal.

Therefore, God is eternal.

The major premise is from faith; the minor from reason. The minor is inclusive and demonstrated. The syllogism is well-constructed. Therefore, the conclusion is a true theological conclusion.

Observe that the subject of the conclusion is the same as the subject of the revealed premise. It has to be. Otherwise, it would not be a theological conclusion. For theology has for its object the discovery of something in the premise from faith, not from reason.

Therefore, the true theological conclusion is the metaphysico-inclusive virtual revelation, i.e., a conclusion which is truly implied in the revealed premise from which it is deduced. Fr. Marín-Sola proceeds to analyze this implicitude within the context of theological reasoning.

Implicitude within the context of theological reasoning

In this example

God is absolutely immutable. (major premise-from faith) But, that which is absolutely immutable is eternal. (minor premise from reason)

Therefore, God is eternal. (theological conclusion)

the following must be observed:⁴⁰

1. The subject (God) of the conclusion is the same as the subject of the premise from faith. This shows that the conclusion is virtually contained in the revealed premise and therefore, is a true theological conclusion.
2. Premise from faith refers to divinely revealed truths whose objectivity and truth are guaranteed by God's authority and are illumined by the light of faith, not the pure names of God, nor pure subjective concepts joined nominally by the verb "to be", nor symbols of subjective experiences.
3. The premise from reason is inclusive, i.e., although it expresses an intellectual aspect distinct from the subject, it is really identical with it so that there are no two realities but one. In short, the predicate (is absolutely immutable) of the premise from faith refers to the very essence of the subject. Thus, absolute immutability and eternity are two aspects of one reality; both refer to the essence of the subject (God).
4. The subject (that which is absolutely immutable) of the minor premise, which is also the middle term of the syllogism, is the predicate (is absolutely immutable) of the premise from faith. It is one of the two ideas formally revealed (God, being the other one). Thus, the middle term is formally revealed.

The predicate (is eternal) of the minor is the same predicate in the conclusion. It is really identical with the middle term (that which is absolutely immutable). And the middle term is the predicate of the revealed premise.

Let us illustrate it by means of an equation:⁴¹

A=B (from faith)

But, B=C (from reason-inclusive)

⁴⁰ cf. *ibid.*

⁴¹ cf. p. 256.

Therefore, $A=C$ (theological conclusion)

Let A be the meaning of the major term which is revealed; B the meaning of the middle term, which is also revealed; and C the meaning of the minor term, which is the predicate of the conclusion.

That $A=B$ is guaranteed by God; that $B=C$ is presupposed. Therefore, $A=C$, i.e., that which is signified by the revealed datum (God) is the same as that which is signified by the predicate of the conclusion (is eternal).

Therefore, the implicitude means that the proposition or doctrine is included in the revealed premise itself and can be deduced from it through a true theological reasoning. Indeed, a transition occurs, but it occurs within the revealed premise itself.

CONCLUSION

The definability of theological conclusions is relevant to the homogeneous development of dogma. It is precisely because they belong to faith and are definable that development is homogeneous. This, however, is true only when one speaks of the true theological conclusion, i.e., the metaphysico-inclusive virtual revelation. Metaphysico-inclusive virtual revelation refers to a proposition or doctrine deduced from the original revealed formulas, which proposition or doctrine is inclusively or implicitly contained in them. The proposition or doctrine is drawn from within the revealed deposit itself, not from without, by way of a theological reasoning. This seems to be in conformity with what Vatican I says: "... let there be growth and abundant progress in understanding, knowledge and wisdom ... but only within the proper limits, i.e., within the same dogma, the same meaning, the same judgment."⁴²

But, if one describes theological conclusions in terms of physico-connective virtual revelation, then development becomes heterogeneous. Although the physico-connective virtual revelation carries with it the word revelation, it is not actually revealed. The proposition or doctrine deduced is not inclusively nor implicitly contained in the original revealed formulas. It is simply drawn from them by purely physical connection. It is drawn from the outside, not from within the

⁴² J. Neuner & J. Dupuis (edd.). *The Christian Faith* (London: Collins Liturgical Publication, 1983), p. 47.

deposit of revelation. If, inspite of their being non-revealed, they can still belong to faith by virtue of the definition of the Church, then a logical, but absurd, conclusion follows: the necessity of new revelation of some kind after the definitive constitution of the deposit of faith.⁴³

Therefore, theological conclusions, i.e., metaphysico-inclusive virtual revelation, belong to faith and are definable. Their definability guarantees the homogeneity of the development of Catholic dogma.

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⁴³ Jan Walgrave, *Unfolding Revelation: The Nature of Doctrinal Development* (London: Hutchinson and Co. Ltd., 1972), p. 172.