



Doctrine and Dogmatism

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Etymologically, both *doctrine* and *dogma* mean *teaching*. A teaching always requires an *a priori* object to which it refers. Therefore, one could not speak about *a doctrine* unless its object precedes it logically and ontologically. On the other hand, a doctrine, being the teaching about its object, and proceeding from that object, cannot be but true, since it is its perfect expression. Consequently, a false doctrine does not proceed from the object it claims to express, and does not manifest its intrinsic qualities. Because of the very distinction object/subject, the object is relatively absent from the knowledge of the subject undertaking the activity of learning.¹ But since the subject is virtually capable of receiving this doctrine, in both its aspects, as we will see below, it follows that such assimilation will identify the subject with the object, and also, it means that the subject virtually holds the same essential nature as that of the object. Once the assimilation is realized, this objective nature becomes actual in the subject, and does not remain just virtual.

Any doctrine, in order to be what it is, manifests or conveys the essential qualities of its object, handing down those attributes which defines it to be *this* and not *the other*. So being the case, any teaching that is the expression of a definite object is true in itself, and within the limits of that particular object, yet false if applied to another kind of definite object. Therefore, a universal doctrine is, by this very fact, true in the highest degree, because it transcends the level of duality and manifestation, which is the very domain of relativity and multiple truths.

The *metaphysical doctrine*, as long as it uses a discursive modality of expression, teaches about the distinct attributes of the metaphysical “object”. Such a teaching is *ontology*. But the object of the metaphysical doctrine, being thoroughly universal, besides its distinct attributes susceptible of expression, possesses something which remains non-manifested, and which cannot be expressed in an affirmative manner, its essential, intimate reality remaining fundamentally hidden from any kind of manifestation. Since this level of reality transcends the one of the manifested attributes, it can be expressed discursively only through the negation of these manifested qualities.² Guénon has remarked that neither Being, nor Non-Being (that is, neither the origin of manifestation, nor the non-manifestation) is Infinite,³ and

¹ We say “relatively absent” because the absence appears only when the distinction between object and subject takes place, and because this distinction has an indefinite scale.

² We see that the apophysis is only a modality of kataphasis. This is why the pure metaphysics is conveyed through silence. However, one must not forget that, as long as expression is used, the synthetic language of traditional symbolism is the most suited modality of conveying such doctrine.

³ See *The Multiple States of Being*, chap. 3.

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thus, neither one, nor the other constitutes the universal “object” par excellence. The Infinite, Guénon says, is the totality of Being and Non-Being.

Now it must be remarked that the discursive doctrine should not be identified with its object, between these two being an ontological distinction. Better said, the discourse cannot exhaust its object, because it represents only the manifestation of its distinct qualities. This is why the complete identification between the knower (the subject) and the known (the object) is possible only by undertaking the negative aspect of the doctrine too, which, in its real nature, is not the kataphasis, but the silence.⁴ The distinction thus made, between a discursive modality of knowledge and a silent one, mirrors the distinction, on the one hand, between the analytical knowledge and the synthetic one (proper to the language of the traditional symbolism), and, on the other hand, it reflects the distinction between the exoteric knowledge and the esoteric one.

And so, if the complete realization of the metaphysical “object” is to become actual, the subject needs to experience both the manifested qualities and the non-manifestation. The possibility of such experience and assimilation is offered by the initiatic way, which is meant to carry the neophyte from virtual identity to complete metaphysical realization.

When the exoteric knowledge is cut off from its esoteric complement, what is lost is the initiatic experience and the actual assimilation through silence of the doctrine presented in a discursive modality by the exoteric aspect of the dogma. And so, the teaching is severed from its essential core, becoming thus what is usually called “dead letter”, that is, rigid and abstract dogmatism which properly reflects the petrified heart and the blind eye of the subject.⁵

⁴ The apophasis, being only another modality of discourse, even though negative in form, does not succeed to elevate the subject to the proper realization of the object it describes, this is why silence is the way of actually experiencing and of conveying the Non-Being. It is the same in the case of the kataphasis (the affirmative discursive modality), where the actual realization of the qualities described is to be fulfilled only through the genuine experience, from the part of the subject, of those attributes belonging to the manifested object. In other words, a purely “theoretical” contact with the doctrine, does not infuse the subject with a real knowledge of the object, and the result in such a case is only a superficial contact at the level of reason, but the proper assimilation is not realized. Real knowledge is always that which produces the identification between the subject and the object, and so it can also be said that the real doctrine is only the one which leads to such assimilation.

⁵ The means for metaphysical realization always passes through the middle, and this is obviously true for all applications of the symbolism of the center.