

5. Establishing the statement of a Doctrine

Steps in
developing
statements
of doctrine:

In our analysis there are six steps (at least) in the establishment of a doctrine in statement form. These can be altered or reinterpreted, no doubt, but they seem the most important in this discussion:

Setting

a. An historical setting...a situation in which minds are allowed to ferment ideas of value. The occasion for discussion arises in such a setting and the breadth or lack of breadth for the setting determines very much about the adequacy of the formulation.

Challenge

b. A challenge...something to stimulate thinking in the areas where the statement will later have its reflection. The challenge that does the most good must come from within the community (or its professed sphere) although extra-community challenges are not to be overlooked. The reasons for this are simple: community often overlooks external challenge as simply "foolishness" on the part of those who don't know...but challenge within the community threatens the very "reason to be" and must be answered for the continuity of the body and the intelligence of its mission and purpose.

Study

c. A study...in the case of doctrine a renewed study of the Scriptures in the light of our note on page 3 of this syllabus. Studies grow from challenge to a large extent and, although it is possible to have a study without one, it is not likely. The study may be group or individual, it does not matter, but an intense research effort is needed to the growth of the statement.

Finding

d. A finding...the study results in some production or effort. At this point, it may be the finding of an heretic or an orthodox person. Some propagation grows from the study and becomes either a "teaching" or an expression in writing, etc.

Test

e. A test basis...occurs in which the finding is submitted to the analysis of the community by and large. This test basis may be promoted by unfortunate schism or division but it will be there and the findings on community basis will largely determine the character of the statement.

Formulation

f. A developed formulation...an ultimate expression which may simply be a creed, a statement or opinion of a teacher. Its binding character will depend somewhat on the group that produces it but it will be binding on that group...there being only the question of how it affects others.