

On the Development of Doctrine

On a blog post awhile back entitled “Some Basic Theological Principles (to be discussed later)” I had stated:

On the question of doctrinal development, the fundamental choice is between Newman’s and Barth’s understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity. The issue of continuity between (1) God’s revelation in the history of Israel, Christ, the apostolic Church; (2) the canonical Scriptures; and (3) the post-apostolic Church, must be decided theologically, in terms of the inherent intelligibility of the subject matter of revelation, not by alien philosophical criteria rooted in such historical conundrums as the relation between the one and the many, or problems of epistemological scepticism.

There have been a few inquires about what I meant by the “fundamental choice . . . between Newman’s and Barth’s understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity.” I haven’t answered that question yet. (My life has changed considerably since becoming a theology professor. Ironically, I have less time to do theology blogging.) However, I got an email today from someone (a Roman Catholic) who had read my post on “Why Not Leave?,” and asked me if I had changed my mind. This is my answer, and it relates to the question of development of doctrine:

Dear xxxxxx,

Thanks for writing. I do need to take some time and update my website with contact information.

No, nothing in the last couple of years or so has caused me to change my mind about my commitment to Anglicanism. I have been blessed to be able to fulfill my lifelong dream of teaching in

an Anglican seminary for the last year, where I find myself surrounded by wonderful colleagues and students. I just finished teaching a June term course this spring on the *Anglican Way of Theology*, which was a refresher course for me on the Reformed Catholic tradition that I appreciate in Anglicanism.

I love and admire the (Roman) Catholic Church. I did all of my graduate studies in Catholic settings, and I am grateful for the generous scholarship that was provided me at the University of Notre Dame. If I were going to become Catholic, I would have done it during my years studying in Catholic institutions.

It is not my intention to encourage anyone to leave the faith tradition he or she is in. I would especially not encourage someone to leave Rome or Orthodoxy now to become Anglican, given the battle we are in the midst of. At the same time, I am rather encouraged by the events of the last several years. I have been convinced for at least a decade that the Anglican Communion would split over the issue of homosexuality. Whether that would be a split between the whole of the Communion and the handful of Western churches that have embraced the liberal agenda, or whether that would be a split between North and South would depend largely on the direction taken by the Archbishop of Canterbury. This summer the two alternative conferences of GAFCON in Jerusalem, and Lambeth in England, made clear that the future will involve a North/South split. (Whether the Global South technically withdraws from the Communion is a matter of definition, since it is clear that they now consider Canterbury to be an irrelevance, if not an obstacle to orthodoxy.) The vast majority of the Global South will go with GAFCON and a new orthodox Anglican province will be formed in the US. I have cast my lot with GAFCON and the Global South.

My own reasons for not becoming Roman Catholic have not changed. It was precisely the problem of doctrinal development

that I found unsatisfactory. I believe that J. B. Mozley's *The Theory of Development* provides the decisive critique of [John Henry] Newman on development of doctrine. Mozley argues that Newman commits a logical fallacy of ambiguity by not distinguishing between two different kinds of development. Newman is correct that there is genuine development in the early church. For example, Nicea's doctrine of the *homoousios*, or the Trinity as formulated by the Cappadocians, or the Chalcedonian formula of the incarnation as one person and two natures is not found explicitly in the New Testament. At the same time, however, what is in the New Testament is all the data that make the *homoousios*, the Trinitarian formula of three persons and one substance, and the Chalcedonian formula necessary conclusions. So, for example, the New Testament is clear that Jesus Christ is not only human, but fully divine. He is the Word who was "with God" and "was God" and was "made flesh" (John 1:1,14). Passages that apply to YHWH in the Old Testament are quoted as referring to Jesus in the New Testament (Phil. 2:10-11; Heb. 1:8). Jesus is the One through whom the Father created the world (Col. 1:16). He is God's wisdom (Col. 2:3), and the "fullness of deity dwells bodily" in him (Col. 2:9).

To the question whether the New Testament teaches that Jesus is fully God, the answer must be "yes."

Similarly, to the question whether there is one God, and yet three who are identified as God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—the answer is also "yes."

So the "development" of incarnational and Trinitarian doctrine that takes place at Nicea, Chalcedon, etc., is really simply the necessary logical unfolding of what is already clearly present in the New Testament. If Jesus is fully God, then he must "of the same substance" as God. If the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are equally God, and yet there is only one God, then God must be three persons in one nature.

Karl Barth began the contemporary revival of Trinitarian theology in his *Church Dogmatics* 1/1 by articulating the principle that God must be in himself who he is in his revelation. If God has revealed himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the history of revelation, then God must be Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in himself. The economic Trinity necessarily implies the immanent Trinity.

In Bernard Lonergan's *The Way to Nicea*, he makes a similar point by distinguishing between common sense realism and critical realism. The genre of the New Testament writings is that of common sense realism. The New Testament uses the language of symbol and narrative to tell of how God relates to us in Jesus. The language of Nicea is the language of critical realism. Nicea speaks of who the Son of God must be in himself if he is going to be God for us.

Mozley speaks of this kind of development in terms of what I will call "Development 1." Development 1 adds nothing to the original content of faith, but rather brings out its necessary implications. Mozley says that Aquinas is doing precisely this kind of development in his discussion of the incarnation in the *Summa Theologiae*.

There is another kind of development, however, which I will call "Development 2." Development 2 is genuinely new development that is not simply the necessary articulation of what is said explicitly in the Scriptures.

Classic examples of Development 2 would include the differences between the doctrine of the *theotokos* and the dogmas of the immaculate conception or the assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In the former, Marian dogma is not actually saying something about Mary, but rather something about Christ. If Jesus Christ is truly God, and Mary is his mother, then Mary is truly the Mother of God (*theotokos*). She gives birth, however, to Jesus' humanity, not his eternal person, which has always existed and is generated eternally by

the Father. The doctrine of the *theotokos* is a necessary implication of the incarnation of God in Christ, which is clearly taught in the New Testament. However, the dogmas of the immaculate conception and the assumption are not taught in Scripture, either implicitly or explicitly. They are entirely new developments.

The same would be true, of course, for the doctrine of the papacy. The New Testament says much about the role of Simon Peter as a leader of the apostles. It does not say anything explicit, however, about the bishop of Rome being the successor to Peter. The Eastern fathers, e.g., Cyprian, interpret the Petrine passages that Rome has applied to the papacy as applying to all bishops.

Other examples of Development 2 would include purgatory and indulgences.

Newman presents his argument for development as a dilemma. Anglicans (and Protestants in general) accept the dogmas of Nicea, of the Trinity, of Chalcedon, etc., but these are not taught explicitly in Scripture. They are developments. But Anglicans do not accept the doctrines of the papacy, the Marian dogmas, etc., which are also developments. Anglicans are accordingly inconsistent. To accept one development is logically to accept the others as well.

Mozley's response is that Newman conflates two quite distinct kinds of development. Development 1 adds nothing new to the content of faith. Development 2 does. Accepting Development 1 is a necessary consequence of taking seriously what the New Testament actually says. Development 2, however, adds something genuinely new to the content of faith. Nicea is an example of Development 1, not Development 2. The infallibility of the papacy is an example of Development 2, not Development 1. Accepting Development 1 does not logically entail accepting Development 2. By not distinguishing between the two kinds of development, Newman commits a logical fallacy, and his

argument collapses.

I do think Mozley's critique of Newman is correct.

I hope that helps. Again, I wish you the best in your current situation. It is not at all my intention to convince Roman Catholics to leave their church or become Anglicans. I've just told something of why I cannot become a Catholic myself.

Grace and Peace,

William Witt