The Development of Doctrine.

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Of the many questions which gather round this great theme there are only two which are to be dealt with in this paper. On the one hand, there is the question as to how far development has already taken place and may still be expected in connexion with the interpretation of what has been revealed once for all in Scripture. On the other hand, there is the question as to whether additions have been made to the facts of revelation since the Canon closed, and, if so, how far such additions may still be looked for. The question as to how far there has been a development in revelation itself need not be raised, since no one who has even a glimmering of the truth can doubt that the divine revelation was progressive just because it was real. It is not easy to understand the position of those who think it an affront on Scripture to say that it led men on from stage to stage. It may be true that the New Testament lay hid in the Old, but it is also true that it had to be laid bare in Christ before men could know it and be led by it into the fulness of the life with God. It was Christ who brought life and immortality to light.

Even as regards the question about development in the interpretation and statement of doctrine as revealed in Scripture, there is practically no room for discussion. The fact that the history of doctrine is now a distinct and very important branch of theological study is only one of many proofs of this. Not only so, but it seems equally certain that such development must still go on as the forms of human thought and speech become more and more adequate to grasp and set forth in the fuller light of experience, that infinite fulness of the divine purpose which eternity itself will not exhaust. Just because the delivery of doctrine has never taken the form of logical propositions or scientific declarations, but has been made through historical events, its adequate interpretation requires time for development. Hence it is that we may still look confidently for vast advances as the coming of the Kingdom throws light on the predictions of its coming and on the purpose of its King. Those who are looking for such illumination will not miss it when it comes, nor will it require to be forced on them as so many revelations of God's will have had to be forced in the past on an unwilling Church.

It is only when we come to development in the delivery of doctrine that difficulties appear. It is then also, however, that the interest culminates. Must we say that even as regards delivery the development of doctrine has ceased? Is the only development which we can now look for, that which comes through fuller discussion in the light of experience of material which can never be added to, or does new material come to us on which the Christian consciousness and intellect must act in order to understand the mind and purpose of God more fully, and make the Church's statement of its doctrine a more adequate expression of His mind and purpose? Perhaps the words 'in the light of experience' in the former of these alternatives should not have been put in, for one reason why I favour the latter alternative is because the light of experience is one of the ways in which God adds to the material in question. Even in Scripture the material is for the most part illuminated experience and not divine proclamations. The question to be faced really amounts to this, does the self-revealing God still speak to men as He spoke to David and Isaiah, to Paul and John? If it can be shown that He does, the further question may be raised, what is the organ of interpretation by means of which this developing delivery of doctrine can be stated with reasonable accuracy, and made available for those who wish to know the will of God, that they may do it? The answer to this subsidiary question may be epoch-making, as it was for Newman.

The need for asking whether the development of doctrine in this sense is still going on is all the greater that there has been such progress in modern times in all departments of human knowledge. Development is the most potent category of our age, and, if possible, theology should be freed from the reproach that she alone of the sciences is without the divine attribute of growth. Surely Christian doctrine is not unable to incorporate the new life which is pulsing through the great

heart of humanity as never before. Surely it cannot be that it alone must live forever in the past, and have no hope of hearing anew the voice of the Living God, who was never revealing Himself more marvellously in the life and thought of men than He is now.

All competent authorities now recognize that there has been a development of doctrine in the Old Testament in which at the lowest estimate the implicit became explicit, and the obscure apparent. There was growth in moral conceptions, in the knowledge of God, and in what was involved in the belief that there is One Only Living and True God. The belief in an existence after death, for example, was among the fundamental conceptions of the Old Testament, but for long it was only there potentially. The prophets in their moments of profoundest inspiration were needed to make it part of the actual life of the Jews, and Christ Himself had to come, before it became a great transforming faith.

It is equally beyond doubt that there was a development of doctrine in the New Testament, say from the time of the Sermon on the Mount until John wrote his Gospel. Jesus began with men at a higher point than that at which God began with Abraham when He called the Patriarch to walk by faith in the unseen, and He led them on to still loftier heights. But the principle and method of the training were the same. The divine teacher saw what only the divine teacher then saw, that ready-made doctrines would be as useless as a ready-made language. And all through, the developing process gathered round events rather than round precepts. Christ made the Atonement. It was left to Paul and the other Apostles to elaborate a theory of it. Our Lord's life and death were deeds of grace, and it was not till long after the Ascension that the Church, through the indwelling Spirit, worked out the rationale of what He had done. Even in the ministry of Christ there was a process of growth determined as all development must be by the capacity and experience of those who were being taught. When His earthly ministry was at an end, there were still many things which they were not able to learn, and these the Spirit who came to carry on His work taught them as they were able to receive them.

Nor was the method of the Spirit, in doing this, new. He taught the first disciples by object-lessons at Pentecost, Samaria, and Cæsarea, as the Gospel laid hold of the Hellenists, the half-Gentile Samaritans, and the wholly Gentile Cornelius in turn. He taught them, too, by sending them all over the Empire, sometimes even by persecution. All through the period covered by the New Testament record development of doctrine went on in harmony with the ordinary laws of life and thought. It is, however, when we cross the bar and enter the era not covered by Scripture that controversy arises. That there was development after that in Christian doctrine is of course beyond question, but what I wish to show is that all through the history of the Church the Holy Spirit has been adding to the material from which this developing statement should be educed. Principal Rainy's view, which is that of all the sub-Reformation theologians, was stated thus in his Cunningham Lecture: 'The Church under the Old Testament was trained under a progressive course of revelations. At each stage the revelation was incomplete and seemed to leave the Church thankful yet questioning, looking wistfully for something further. With the New Testament Church it is otherwise. A manifestation has been made to us of the mind of God and of His ways in which Revelation is complete. He has made that discovery of Himself in which, for men on the earth and for the Church in its earthly state, His whole counsel is embodied. He has no more to add. We have no more to receive. We have not now a developing and advancing but a complete revelation.'

But what does this mean? The book is not a revelation apart from the Holy Spirit's work, and all history since the book was finished, like all history before, has been the living garment of God making it a fuller revelation. Even those who refuse to admit any other development rejoice in a deeper comprehension of the inexhaustible meaning of Scripture as the ages throw their light on it. But this takes us far on the way to a development in delivery, inasmuch as a revelation is no revelation for us until we are able to receive it. It is no gain to a Chinaman to hear about salvation from sin until he has some idea of what sin and salvation are. The cuneiform inscriptions on the Assyrian remains were unmeaning signs until the key to their interpretation was found. But whenever it was found they became living things telling the story of the far-distant past;

and among other services giving a new significance to many parts of the Bible. And so with the records of the completed revelation of God. They may have contained His whole mind for us about salvation through Christ, but without illumination and interpretation they were for men what a book is to those who cannot read. Scripture contains more for our age than for any other, and my contention is that the events which have thrown light on it, and the discoveries of the saints which have revealed its undreamt-of depths, were a genuine addition, divinely made, to its content. Not only so, but I contend that these events and discoveries are on the same plane as those in which the revelation was embodied at first. What we have is not merely new light breaking forth from the Bible, but new light breaking forth on the Bible and calling the other and ever-enduring light forth.

Appeals are often made to us to go back to the Christ of the Gospels. But who that knows the facts can doubt that our living and working doctrine of the Person and Work of our Lord is richer than that of any age prior to our own? We now rejoice in the Christ of the Gospels, in the light of all the centuries of life and work in the Dispensation of the Spirit, whose function it is to take of the things of Christ and show them unto us.

In the Eastern Church the doctrine of the Person of Christ only became explicit after years of controversy, and if in the end it became too formal and hard it had gathered up and incorporated much which had been revealed during three centuries of the supreme realization of the presence and power of the ascended Lord. In our own day the doctrine has had its Western development in the discussions which have gathered round the various Kenotic and Humanistic theories, and if it be less definite and logical in form than it once was, it is more profound and real, and Christ was never more truly living for His people than He is to-day. New aspects of the truth have been made known throughout the ages, and for practical purposes it is the same to the Church whether these were then revealed absolutely for the first time, or were revealed to her for the first time, through the work of the Spirit in history and the soul of man.

Dr. Rainy seems to admit this when he describes the Reformation as a great doctrinal development. 'It was not,' he says, 'merely and only a clearing away of corruptions and superstitions and a regress to some standard of early attainment. Nay, it was not only a regress to the Scriptures themselves, it was also a progress in the Scriptures. It involved a positive hold on truth doctrinally, especially on some truths, such as constituted a positive advance and progress in insight into the Scriptures, as compared with anything that had been before attained in the history of the Church.' Similarly the late Professor Mitchell of St. Andrews speaks of the Reformation as a deeper plunge into the meaning of revelation than had ever been made by Augustine, or Anselm, or St. Bernard, or À Kempis, or Wiclif, or Tauler. But how was this deeper plunge, this positive advance made? Surely through the recognition of what the Spirit had been teaching the Church since the days of the Apostles. The history of these ages might not have been illuminating had they stood alone without the Bible, but given the Bible, they provided new material for insight and advance. Not only so, but if the Reformers had recognized this more, their work might have been without that reactionary element which did so much to bring about the Counter-Reformation, as well as a new and disastrous dogmatism within the Reformed Church itself.

There are, of course, facts and events in Scripture which can never be added to or duplicated. All that the succeeding ages can do in regard to them is to let the light fall on them as it comes, which is much. But there are also facts and events in Scripture which may be duplicated as long as time lasts, just because our God is the living God. The same Spirit who taught the Apostle Peter, through his experience in connexion with Cornelius, that Christianity could be no mere appanage of Judaism, taught John Wesley, through men and women won at field-preachings, that he must be done forever with the prejudice that the gospel could only be preached in consecrated buildings, or by men on whom a bishop's hands had been laid. The one discovery was as much a divine revelation as the other, and whatever inspiration may mean or do Peter had to grope his way very much as Wesley had.

Even the unique facts of Scripture have to be seen in the light of history before they can be understood in their full significance. Augustine, Anselm, and Calvin had each the same initial

Bible facts before him regarding the mission of the Saviour, but each of them saw these in the light of an added body of illuminating facts, and therefore each of them had a fuller revelation than his predecessor had of their meaning. In the same way, in the spirit of that peerless exegete, we have advanced on Calvin at his best, having seen the unchanging facts in the still fuller light of history, and not least in the light of Calvinism itself, so strong and massive even in its comparative one-sidedness. We have come to see that Christianity is more human than Calvinism, more divine than Arminianism, and more Christian than either.

Scripture itself recognizes such a growth in insight in the light of events. After John gives his account of the triumphal entry he adds: 'These things understood not his disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified then remembered they that these things were written of him, and that they had done these things unto him.' So as the years went past and the Empire was won, and there were Christians all over the earth, new light was shed on the universality of the divine love and on the magnitude of the divine purpose, as well as on the methods of the divine working; and in this new light many a prediction and event in Scripture became instinct with new meaning and power. As for the facts which not only throw light on the never-to-be-repeated facts of Scripture, but are, as I think, on the same plane of revelation as many of these, the question really resolves itself into this, Is the universe spiritual, that is, is God in history? If He is, He must be speaking to those who are ready to hear and obey. It would be sorry work to make Scripture less divine, but it would be work worth doing to make all history more divine, to show that the earth is crammed with heaven, and is everyway bound by gold chains about the feet of God, and that the Holy Spirit is abiding with His people, as He said. Surely our national struggles for freedom and reform are as interesting to our Father as those of the Hebrews, and just as Moses was inspired when he sang, 'I will sing unto the Lord for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea,' when the flood rolled between him and bondage, so England was inspired to cry out, 'God blew and they were scattered,' when the Spaniards were engulfed in the remorseless waters. It was mainly through historical events that God manifested His will in Bible times, and He has been manifesting Himself in history ever since for those who had the eyes to see and the ears to hear. The alternative to this is to divide history into secular and sacred, and that is what no one will do who knows what history is. That way lies materialism and unbelief.

On the strength, then, of this division of the facts of Scripture into those which cannot be repeated and those which can, I would describe the development of doctrine which must go on until the full light of the eternal comes, as a double movement. There is an inner movement, the basis of which is the revelation in word and deed of which Scripture is the record. And there is an outer movement, the basis of which is the process of accretion by which the inner takes up and incorporates the message of the ages as they sweep on to eternity. There is thus no suggestion that everything may be thrown into the melting-pot, or that we may not know what a day or an hour may bring forth. The heart of the movement is always the same, and the new can never contradict the old, since it comes from the same divine source. The very conception of development involves identity, for unless a common life is manifesting itself all through, the process is not development whatever it may be. Just as all scientific inquiry rests on the continuity of nature, all faith and Christian experience rests on the continuity of the self-revealing God. Nor need there be any difficulty through the testimony of the human spirit being put against the teaching of Scripture in such a way as to lead to an indefinite mysticism. All that is needed is that Christian men should be open-eyed and open-minded on the lines of sane historical criticism to all that is going on; their feet all the while being planted on the things once for all delivered to the saints. It may be remarked in passing that to quote these words of Jude as against growth in doctrine is singularly maladroit. If Jude wrote them they were written before John wrote his Gospel and made such splendid additions to the faith. Clearly the faith once delivered to the saints means the great unique facts of redemption which gather round the life and death and resurrection of our Lord.

Whenever we think in this way of development as a twofold movement we get the explanation of

the one-sided developments which have so often characterized the history of the Church, as well as of such retrograde movements as are to be found in the Middle Ages and the eighteenth century. The inner and outer sides of the process must both be at work if there is to be true growth. When the outer was represented by the barren forms of an Aristotelian scholasticism it was inevitable that the inner should be buried under the débris of mere logomachies and pagan categories. So, too, when the outer was lost in the vain attempts of mysticism to flee from its own shadow and rise above the very conditions of human thinking, the inner became so unmeaning that it served only as the vehicle for fantastic notions which were found in it because first of all they had been taken to it. It has only been when the two sides were in their right place and proportion, as at the Reformation and during the Evangelical revival, when believers on the whole were loyal at once to the teachings of Scripture, the needs of their own time, and the message of the ages, that there has been an all-round development of divine truth. For we must never think of the development of doctrine as either blind or necessary. The truth does not come to a man in his sleep, nor can it come to the Church unless she is spiritual enough to recognize the voice of the Good Shepherd even when He fulfils Himself in unwonted ways.

It is not easy to isolate any particular doctrine in order to see this development at work, for Christian doctrine is one and indivisible, and the interaction of the various doctrines is part of the outer side of the movement as just described. But we might look at the doctrine of God from this view-point. Long ago Ewald traced five stages in the development of this doctrine in Israel: the Almighty of the Patriarchs; the Jehovah of the Covenants; the God of Hosts of the Monarchy; the Holy One of the Deuteronomists and the later Prophets; and the Our Lord of Judaism: Christianity bringing no new name but fulfilling them all. But the process was far from being at an end then. It is not at an end yet. It is true that the last and highest message from the unseen is that of John that God is light, God is spirit, and God is love, but that was not an effective message for long. It is hardly effective yet. Certainly it is not effective yet as it will be when the Church has apprehended its full significance. St. John could rise to the height of it because he was the Apostle of Love and because his soul was filled with the light, just as those who have the insight of genius can rise far above the limitations of their time and see what for others is still afar off. But history shows that it was long before the Johannine heights were reached by the Church as a whole. Yet the divine doctrine was at work in men's hearts long before they realized anything like its full significance. It met and claimed what was true and congruent, alike in Monotheism, Polytheism, and Pantheism. The movement was very slow, however, and at least to the close of the Middle Ages objective views prevailed. Even the Atonement was represented as a bargain between the Father and the Son, Satan sometimes being also brought in to the transaction, giving rise to an unworthy Anthropomorphism such as has always marked subsequent revivals of similar conceptions.

The Reformation brought a new tenderness into the doctrine of God and for a time even the decrees were viewed as a means of grace. Then came the creed-makers, the Illuminati, and the Rationalists, who all left their mark on the doctrine. The nineteenth century was synthetic on the whole. It gathered up much which had been made known through new aspects of social life, new forms of thought, new scientific discoveries, new religious and intellectual needs, and a new apprehension of what Evolution means, with the result that theology has now a fulness of meaning and a spiritual content which it never had before, except perhaps for the master-spirits in the kingdom. It is interesting to recall the varied conceptions of God which the centuries have enshrined, as the inner side of the developing process was illuminated and enriched through the outer movement becoming more complex and profound. We have the Physical conception of the great uncaused First Cause; the Æsthetic conception of the supreme principle of harmony concerned about truth because beauty is truth; the Logical conception of the supreme truth, the thought of the universe with form rather than content; the Juridical conception of the Judge of all the earth dealing with penalties rather than with persons; the Private Individual conception of one concerned first of all about his honour and then about his

plans; and the Moral conception of one caring only that men should repent, and regarding amendment as the best atonement. Many have come to see that all these conceptions may find a place in what may be called the Religious conception that God is love. In this conception the discordant elements are harmonized because nineteen centuries of life and thought and need have deepened and widened the stream of redeeming love, which is itself the revelation of what God is, and has its source in the Incarnate revelation of the infinite pity and compassion.

It may be objected to this that many good people do not recognize that there had been such a movement as this, but it may be replied that many good people deny progress in biblical theology where it is obvious to all who know even the rudiments of it. They find Leviticus as full of evangelical truth as the Gospels, and morsels from Esther and Chronicles as soul-satisfying as the Epistles. The truth is that the thought of development is so unwelcome to some, and the eyes of many so unfit for the light, that they cannot recognize it when it comes, no matter how apparent it may be to others who have the understanding heart.

If the doctrine of God in Christ serves as an instance of development in doctrine, that of the Holy Spirit may serve as an instance of arrested growth, and that of the final state of the impenitent as an instance of one-sided growth. So far as the doctrine of the Spirit is concerned, owing to the apathy and lack of spirituality of the Church, the outer side in the movement has either not been supplied at all or has been such as to hinder growth, while the inner side, as on *à priori* grounds it was bound to be, was somewhat intangible to begin with. Yet there is no need of the Church to-day which is more pressing than a more profound conception of the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit, and this can only come through a reverent study of what He has been doing since Pentecost, in the light of the Scripture revelation. The Reformers got their doctrine of the Spirit through their own experience of His working. Rome had asserted that the Spirit only worked through certain channels and along certain lines. The Reformers replied that the Spirit of God spoke direct to the spirit of man, and is not limited by the prejudices of men. 'We know that,' they declared, 'because He has come to us in that way.' This was Peter's method of inference and observation, too, in the house of Cornelius, and it is the only way in which the Church can ever discover and state the truth.

As regards the doctrine of the finally impenitent, the outer side in the development has been supplied mainly by reminiscences of the Paganism which so quickly found its way into the theology of the early Church, and still remains there like the Jebusites in the midst of Israel. The result has been an ill-informed dogmatism on both sides of the main question. The recent history of this doctrine raises the further question as to how far change in the actual doctrine of the Church can be allowed to go without any corresponding change in its creed. There can be little doubt that the spirit of the age, as interpreted by 'In Memoriam' and otherwise, has shaken some phases of the old beliefs, and that there is a powerful if somewhat formless conviction that there has been far too much dogmatism on the whole subject. From the nature of the case there are and can be no illuminating or illuminated historical facts in this connexion.

A plausible objection to this view of the development of doctrine is that history as we know it is quite unfit to serve as a guide to the necessary facts. One historian makes Henry VIII. a monster, while another makes him a sensitive, constitutional ruler. One philosophy of history makes our era represent the highest stage of social growth yet attained. Another declares that our boasted freedom is mainly freedom to starve. But in reality the broad lessons of history rise above such apparent contradiction, just as the broad lessons of Scripture rise above the contradictions of its expositors. Nor has either Council or Convocation been needed to attain this. 'Securus judicat orbis terrarum' is a greater truth than even Newman imagined. The truth is that Newman did the development of doctrine a great wrong when he associated it with the corollary that the Church of Rome must be the interpreter. It is so evident all through that he was arguing in the interests of that Church that his defence of development is a vicious circle. The Church has been and must be the interpreter of God's works in history, but by the

Church we must understand all believers everywhere, with the Holy Spirit as their guide.

A study of how proportion and emphasis may change, even where the doctrines are the same, would illustrate this both as to the method and the result. We hold very much the same creed that our fathers held, and yet we have made it different by a change of emphasis and a new sense of proportion. The spirit of its compilation was not the same as that of its interpretation. Even those who accept the Westminster Confession do so with a difference. The most orthodox would admit that if they had to re-write it they would alter the emphasis. Who cares now whether a man is a supra- or an infra-lapsarian? How many could tell the difference between the two. Men have found out that a doctrine may be founded on Scripture and yet may not exhaust Scripture. The whole attitude of thinking men to the world in which they live has changed since the Westminster divines met. Questions about Church and State alike, which mean much now, had not been asked then. There was no study of comparative religion then; criticism had not given scholars the material, in spite of their massive learning. Nor were there any foreign missions then to deepen the life of the Church, through the light which obedience never fails to bring. Modern science (in spite of Aristotle and Roger Bacon, we might almost leave out the modern) had not been born. The influence of the steam-engine on theology would take us too far afield, but it has been great. It may be, however, that it would be a mistake to hurry the development in statement to correspond with the development in delivery which has resulted from all this deepening and quickening of the Church's life. It is characteristic of modern thought on the right lines that its recognition of the infinite is such that it sees that much is lost when attempts are made to force it into the forms of finite words.

What is needed most is spirituality in the Church. Just as in philosophy materialism is individualistic, whereas idealism attains the universal; so in doctrine when the spirit of man is in sympathy with the Spirit of God the universal is reached and is self-evidencing at that. Dogmatism is often the refuge of the unspiritual, who can form syllogisms and draw inferences, although they can neither hear the voice of the Good Shepherd nor see the unseen. The denial of development is often the refuge of those who are too unconcerned to seek for new light or too worldly to pay the price of it. Newman, who had argued for development, thanked God that when he became a Romanist the Fathers were his in a new sense. As if the truth in any developing process were to be found at the beginning and not at the end. It is not by grubbing among the roots that the truth is to be found, but in the fruit which the growing tree has borne.

The reproach of the Church in our time has been that even the light in which we now rejoice—the light of discovery and research, the light of the new category of development itself—has usually been accepted with a grudge and when it could no longer be gainsaid. Surely there is a golden mean between credulity and incredulity, for those who believe in the living God. There need be no opposition between perfection and growth. Christ the perfect One was made perfect, and if only believers everywhere were spiritual and open to the light; if only they were in touch with that other Comforter who has come to abide with us forever; if only they believed in the Holy Ghost, not as a shadowy or fickle power, but as the interpreter of Scripture and history alike and of the universe itself which is spiritual, progress would be so manifest that not even the world, to say nothing of the Church, would be able any longer to say that theology alone of the sciences bears no new fruit, that the record of revelation is closed, or that the development of doctrine has come to an end.