BUILDING ON THE FOUNDATIONS OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

Essays in Honor of John S. Feinberg

EDITED BY

GREGG R. ALLISON & STEPHEN J. WELLUM

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WHEATON, ILLINOIS

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Introduction

John Samuel Feinberg was born April 2, 1946, in Dallas, Texas, the third child and second son of Charles Lee and Anne Priscilla (Fraiman) Feinberg. When Charles became the founding dean of Talbot Theological Seminary in 1948, the family moved to Los Angeles, California. John did his undergraduate studies at UCLA, graduating in 1968 with a BA in English. In 1969–1970, as an instructor in doctrine at the Los Angeles Bible Training School, he began what would eventually become nearly a half-century teaching career.

John remained in California to pursue the MDiv, graduating from Talbot Theological Seminary in 1971. The following year he completed the ThM in systematic theology from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. On August 19, 1972, John and Patricia Buecher were married. He began his PhD studies in historical theology and philosophy in the School of Religion at the University of Iowa, but his program was interrupted in 1973; subsequently, he concentrated on metaphysics and epistemology for his MA at the University of Chicago in 1974. He stayed there for his final studies in philosophy and his dissertation (*Theologies and Evil*), earning the PhD from the University of Chicago in 1978. At this time, John and Pat celebrated the birth of their first son, Josiah (1976); two other boys—Jonathan (1979) and Jeremy (1982)—were later added to the Feinberg family.

While pursuing his theological, pastoral, and philosophical training, John was involved in local ministry in a variety of capacities. As a staff member of the American Board of Missions to the Jews, he engaged in mission work in Los Angeles in 1970–1971 and in the U.S. Midwestern region from 1971 to 1974. He was ordained to the ministry in 1971 and served as the pastor of Elmwood Park Bible Church in Illinois from 1974 to 1976.

In God's providence, however, it was to a teaching career that God graciously called John to use his gifts and abilities to serve the larger

evangelical church. John served as assistant professor of systematic theology at Western Conservative Baptist Seminary from 1976 to 1981. He then became professor of systematic theology and philosophy, as well as chairman of the Department of Theological Studies, at Liberty Baptist Seminary and College from 1981 to 1983. John's alma mater sought him out, so he became, first, associate professor (1983–1990), then professor of biblical and systematic theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, the faculty position that he has held from 1991 to the present. He has twice served as the chairman of the Division of Biblical and Systematic Theology (1985–1992, 1999–2012).

In addition to these institutions, John has taught around the world. He has served as visiting professor or guest lecturer at numerous other venues, including Bethel Theological Seminary (St. Paul, Minnesota), Freie Theologische Akademie (Giessen, West Germany), Tyndale Theological Seminary (Badhoevedorp, Netherlands), Italian Bible Institute (Finocchio, Italy), Seminario Teologico Centro Americano (Guatemala City, Guatemala), Multnomah Biblical Seminary (Portland, Oregon), Emmaus Bible College (Sydney, Australia), Campus Crusade staff training (Split, Croatia), Greek Bible Institute (Pikermi, Greece), Odessa Theological Seminary (Odessa, Ukraine), University of Zimbabwe (Harare, Zimbabwe), Northern Province Bible Institute (Pietersburg, South Africa), Evangelical Reformed Baptist Seminary (Heidelberg, South Africa), Torch Trinity Institute of Lay Education (Norwood, New Jersey), Trinity Bible College and Equipping Center (Kursk, Russia), Talbot School of Theology: Feinberg Center for Messianic Jewish Studies (New York, New York), and The Master's Seminary (Sun Valley, California).

Having spent the majority of his teaching career at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, John is a fixture at TEDS and has mentored hundreds of students who are now working as pastors, teachers, professors, staff in churches and parachurch movements, missionaries, philosophers, ethicists, apologists, evangelists, denominational leaders, and much more. Because of his research and writing on, and experience with, evil and suffering, John has also encouraged these students to rely on God's inscrutable providence and loving care as they encounter the trials of life. Trinity has also been the community of faith that has walked alongside John and Pat as Huntington's Chorea has slowly whittled away her life. As an outstanding example of grace and solidarity, Trinity has never

questioned the advisability of John's ongoing teaching there in light of the demands that Pat's suffering has placed on him and his career.

Throughout his teaching career, John has established himself as a brilliant thinker, a prodigious scholar and author, an impassioned apologist for the faith, a demanding and fair instructor, a champion of clear and rational thinking, a giving friend, and a supportive mentor. John is well known in the classroom for his preparation and attention to detail, his careful analysis and critique of theological and philosophical positions and ideas, and his desire to see his students grow in the knowledge of Scripture and theological thinking. The same may also be found in all of his writing projects—detailed analysis, precision, and incisive biblical and theological exposition and critique. Besides teaching and writing, John has cultivated other interests and is always ready to discuss sports, show slides from his many travels, share the beautiful music of Andrea Bocelli, and wax eloquent about his wonderful wife and her sufferingproven faith.

John is well known for his many books, including Ethics for a Brave New World, coauthored with his brother Paul (Crossway, 1993; 2nd ed., rev. and expanded, 2010); The Many Faces of Evil: Theological Systems and the Problems of Evil (Zondervan, 1994; rev. and expanded, Crossway, 2004); Deceived by God? A Journey through Suffering (Crossway, 1997); his monumental No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God, part of the Foundations of Evangelical Theology series (Crossway, 2001); Where Is God? A Personal Story of Finding God in Grief and Suffering (B&H, 2004); and Can You Believe It's True? Christian Apologetics in a Modern and Postmodern Era (Crossway, 2013).¹

Another major activity in which John has been engaged for more than two decades is serving as general editor of the aforementioned series on eleven major areas of evangelical systematic theology, entitled Foundations of Evangelical Theology and published by Crossway. Because Gregg Allison and Steve Wellum, two of John's former students, are contributors to this series, the idea for this Festschrift in John's honor was born. This volume therefore takes its name from it: Building on the Foundations of Evangelical Theology. The contributors are John's friends, colleagues, former students, and/or contributors to the Foundations series.

This book consists of three sections that are organized around the

¹A complete list of John's writings may be found at the end of this book.

metaphor of building. Section 1, entitled "Designing the Architecture of Evangelical Theology," provides essays that discuss the areas of theological method (Kevin Vanhoozer), hermeneutics (Walter Kaiser, Jr.), continuity and discontinuity between the Testaments (Robert Saucy), philosophy (Thom Provenzola), and apologetics (Gary Habermas). The second section, "Setting the Foundations of Evangelical Theology," offers essays covering a wide range of biblical and theological topics such as: theology proper (Bruce Ware), Trinitarianism (Keith Yandell), bibliology (John Morrison), the problem of evil (Thomas McCall), Christology (Stephen Wellum), ecclesiology and pneumatology (Gregg Allison), and biblical reflections from Psalms 146–150 on God's faithfulness and human suffering (Willem VanGemeren). Section 3, "Erecting the Superstructure of Evangelical Theology," features essays on bioethics (John Kilner), Christian living (Graham Cole), globalization and mission in the midst of a rising religious pluralism (Harold Netland), and Womanist theology (Bruce Fields).

One of the great concerns of Crossway and all the contributors to this volume is how to honor not only John but his wonderful wife, Pat, as well. We know that heavy on their hearts, and on our hearts as well, is the debilitating illness, Huntington's Chorea, from which Pat suffers. All who know John and Pat are deeply saddened by this reality and have prayed for them and suffered with them. *Building on the Foundations of Evangelical Theology* intends to take this concern one step further. Instead of the royalties from this book going to the volume's contributors, they will be directed to the Huntington's Disease Society of America, in John and Pat Feinberg's names. It is the hope of the contributors to this volume that by our supporting research into Huntington's Chorea, the day will hasten when the riddle of this disease will be solved and prevention or even a cure will be discovered.

As the editors of this volume, and writing for Crossway and the other contributors, it is our sincere desire to express our love for our dear friend, colleague, professor, and mentor, John Feinberg, by honoring him with *Building on the Foundations of Evangelical Theology*. May this work not only express our gratitude to the Lord for the gift of John to the church, but may it also in some small way help the church to remain faithful in our day as we seek to do theology well for God's glory and for the good of the church.

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DESIGNING THE ARCHITECTURE OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

Improvising Theology according to the Scriptures: An Evangelical Account of the Development of Doctrine

KEVIN J. VANHOOZER

INTRODUCTION: DEVELOPING DOCTRINE BIBLICALLY

- "Christian Thought, for \$1,000."
- The most baffling and difficult problem of Christian theology.¹
- "What is the development of doctrine?"

No real *Jeopardy* contestant, to my knowledge, has ever had to ask this question. Yet the church is in jeopardy of losing its identity, and biblical moorings, if Christians do not ask and answer it: "no task confronting Christian theology today is more vital than the demand that it face this issue squarely." The challenge is to show how Christian doctrine truly is "in accordance with the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3). This is a particularly pressing problem for evangelical theologians, who affirm the supreme

¹From dust jacket of Jan Hendrik Walgrave, *Unfolding Revelation: The Nature of Doctrine Development* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972).

² Jaroslav Pelikan, "Theology and Change," Cross Currents 19 (1969): 384.

authority of Scripture yet identify with diverse denominations, theological traditions, and doctrines.³

There are three reasons why giving an evangelical account of the development of doctrine is a particularly apt way to honor John Feinberg. First, John was for more than twenty years head of the Department of Biblical and Systematic Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and the Department's name contains the very problem I wish here to address. "Biblical theology" has come to have two potentially contrasting meanings. The strict sense refers to the theology of the biblical books themselves (or to the historical task of determining and describing it), the broader sense to any theology that accords with the Bible. To speak of "development" of doctrine suggests that one is going beyond, but not against, biblical theology in the narrower sense of the term. That raises the question: is there something theologians have to do "after biblical theology"—after reconstructing the theology of the biblical authors—and, if so, what?

Second, John contributed an essay to and edited a highly regarded volume dealing with the problem of continuity and discontinuity, though John was addressing the problem of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments (and the difference between covenantal and dispensational systems for dealing with this), whereas I am addressing the problem of the relationship between Scripture and Christian doctrine. The underlying problem is the same, namely, how to account for both the *sameness* between what the Scriptures and later creeds teach (i.e., continuity) while acknowledging some kind of *change* (i.e., discontinuity).

Third, in his chapter in the aforementioned volume and elsewhere, John has shown himself to be a dual threat, a person who does theology as both exegete and philosopher. For example, in his chapter he helpfully cautions against confusing a biblical *word* (*oikonomia* = "dispensation") with a *concept* (dispensation), much less a conceptual scheme or theo-

³Alister McGrath refers to this as "the Achilles' heel" of contemporary evangelicalism: "Evangelicalism, having affirmed the supreme authority of Scripture, finds itself without any meta-authority by which the correct interpretation of Scripture could be determined" ("Faith and Tradition," in *The Oxford Handbook to Evangelical Theology*, ed. Gerald R. McDermott [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010], 82). Cf. Malcolm B. Yarnell III, who says, "Evangelicalism has not offered a uniformly accepted doctrine of development" (*The Formation of Christian Doctrine* [Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007], 107). ⁴John S. Feinberg, ed., Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testaments. Essays in Honor of S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. (Westchester, II.: Crossway, 1988).

logical system (dispensationalism).⁵ It is just such conceptual analysis that proves important in discussions of doctrinal development as well. A case in point: must doctrines be identical to retain their identity over time? Much depends on what "identical" and "identity" mean, and how one views change over time. These are philosophical questions. In light of John's work at the interstice of Bible, theology, and philosophy, then, I want to ask whether the continuity and discontinuity intrinsic to the development of doctrine is best understood by recourse to either analytic or Continental philosophical resources. Which best accounts for doctrinal development: analytic or hermeneutic theology?

The present essay responds to this either-or question, not by choosing one option but by incorporating aspects of both into a larger, properly dogmatic account of doctrinal development. Whereas church historians helpfully describe and interpret doctrinal change over time, systematic theologians need, and seek to provide, a normative account that assists the church in discerning which changes reflect genuine understanding and which do not. We need properly theological categories if we are to distinguish the development of orthodox doctrine from the kinds of changes that characterize things in general. To give a dogmatic account is to distinguish the special development of doctrine from theories of general development. What, then, is "special" about doctrinal development? My contention will be that (right) development of doctrine is an entailment of the gospel of the triune God: the Spirit "enlarges" the word in the process of its regional expansion in an economy of creative understanding that both preserves the good deposit and collects interest on truth's account.

DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT: THREE CASE STUDIES

Doctrine is what, on the basis of the Bible, the church believes, teaches, and confesses—both explicitly in its creeds and statements of faith and implicitly in its most characteristic practices. Evangelicals are willing to speak of progressive revelation in the Bible, but most do not believe that revelation progresses beyond the Bible. Flesus Christ is God's final word,

⁵Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," in Continuity and Discontinuity, 69. ⁶See Jaroslav Pelikan, The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, Vol. 1: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 1.

⁷Some scholars contend, however, that there is doctrinal development within the thought of the human authors of Scripture. See, for example, E. P. Sanders, "Did Paul's Theology Develop?" in *The Word Leaps*

and he is "the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb. 13:8). Hence revealed truth, the objective content of the faith, is fixed. By way of contrast, the church's appropriation of that truth is still in flux: the search for doctrinal understanding goes on.

Here, in two nutshells, is the problem: (1) evangelicals confess the sufficiency of Scripture but disagree as to what it teaches; (2) evangelicals proclaim *sola scriptura*, yet some doctrines are not explicitly taught in the Bible. It is impossible to study church history for long without being struck by both the continuities and the discontinuities in what the church believes, teaches, and confesses on the basis of the Word of God. As Jaroslav Pelikan notes, "The fact of the development of doctrine . . . is beyond question; what is at issue is the legitimacy and limits of development." 8

What does it mean for a doctrine to develop? What actually happens? We can begin by distinguishing minimal from maximal development. Development is minimal (i.e., there is least change) when the church does not add anything to what Scripture says but simply comes to understand it. Development is maximal (i.e., there is most change) when the church introduces a teaching that cannot be derived from Scripture, such as the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Assumption of Mary, about which we can say, "There was a time when it was not!" Many doctrinal changes lie somewhere between these two extremes. Consider, for example, the following three case studies.

THE DEITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Bible does not explicitly teach the doctrine of the Trinity as expounded at the Council of Nicaea in 325. That Council affirmed the Son was of "the same substance" (homoousios) as the Father, but it fell to Basil of Caesarea to complete the case for—to develop the doctrine of—the deity of the Holy Spirit, and he did so in the face of considerable opposition. Some in the fourth century thought the Spirit was a creature; others refused to commit themselves. The so-called *Pneumatomachians* (lit., "enemies of the Spirit") accepted the divinity of the Son but not of the Spirit, and appealed to differences in the language

the Gap: Essays on Scripture and Theology in Honor of Richard B. Hays, ed. J. Ross Wagner, C. Kavin Rowe, and A. Katherine Grieb (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 325–350.

⁸ Pelikan, "An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine," Church History 35 (1966): 4.

Scripture uses to speak of each. They were particularly fond of reading theology off of prepositions, insisting that "from whom" applies to the Father, "through whom" to the Son, and "in whom" to the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 8:6; Rom. 8:9).9

Basil opens his treatise On the Holy Spirit by acknowledging, "not one of the words that are applied to God in every use of speech should be left uninvestigated."10 Basil is vigilant in his use of language: he refrains from calling the Spirit "God" because the Bible does not; he is reluctant to say the Spirit is homoousios because the Nicene Creed fails to do so. However, he prays "to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit," and he vehemently protests the heretics' claim that, in doing so, he is denying the deity of the Spirit.

In a tour de force of prepositional theology, Basil painstakingly examines the biblical use of "through," "from," "with," and "in." He shows that Scripture uses the prepositions flexibly (e.g., "from whom" is often posited of the Spirit as well as the Father). More importantly, he argues that Scripture consistently ranks the Spirit with the Father and the Son, as when Jesus commands disciples to baptize "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). Basil pointedly asks his opponents how to understand this passage if this common name and rank "is not indicative of some [ontological] communion or union,"11

Basil's arguments carried the day at the Council of Constantinople in 381, which reaffirmed Nicaea, rejected the doctrine of the Pneumatomachians and, most importantly, confessed the deity of the Spirit, "who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified."12 Call it a "level-1" doctrinal development—one that identifies who the God who works salvation is, and thus a doctrine on which the integrity of the gospel itself likewise depends.¹³ The doctrines of the Trinity and the incarnation, formulated by the Nicene-Constantinopolitan (381) and Chalcedon (451) Creeds respectively, would be other examples. If neither the Son nor the Spirit were fully God, then at some point, the good news that believers

⁹Gregory of Nazianzus also engages this argument in the fifth of his "Five Theological Orations" (see his On God and Christ [Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002], 132).

¹⁰ Basil, On the Holy Spirit 1.1 (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011), 27.

¹¹ Ibid., 10.24 (55).

¹²This is one of the lines added by the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381) to the Nicene Creed (325). ¹³ Cf. Al Mohler's classification of first, second, and third order doctrines in his "Confessional Evangelicalism," in Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism, ed. Andrew Naselli and Collin Hansen (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 77-80.

who are "in Christ" enjoy communion with God is fatally compromised. To deny a level-1 doctrinal development—a development that issues in a dogma—is to fall into heresy.14

"HE DESCENDED INTO HELL"

Our second case study presents a quite different problem, focusing not on the divine agents but on the divine action. Not only does it concern what happened to Jesus Christ at a key moment in salvation history, but it also figures in the Apostles' Creed and claims some, albeit slim, biblical support (1 Pet. 3:18–20). The number of interpretations of "he descended into hell" is staggering, and we cannot here do justice to them all. My main purpose for including this second case study is twofold: it is a prime exhibit of doctrinal development because it encapsulates the problem of the relationship between Scripture and tradition; it pertains to the gospel, at least in indirect fashion, because it addresses the issue of what happened to Jesus after he died, and thus touches on matters pertaining to his person and saving work (i.e., soteriology).

"He descended into hell" is part of the second article of the Apostles' Creed, which begins, "I believe in Jesus Christ." 15 Why was it included, and what does it mean? J. N. D. Kelly suggests that the historical occasion of the descensus was Docetism, the heresy that denies the reality of Jesus's embodied existence. "He descended into hell" underscores the reality of his physical death.¹⁶ As to what "descended into hell" means, there are a variety of suggestions, including: (1) Jesus preached the gospel to those who died before his incarnation, to give them an opportunity to believe (early church; Pannenberg); 17 (2) Jesus proclaimed victory to and liberated the Old Testament patriarchs in Hades (Aquinas); (3) Jesus triumphed over sin, death, and Satan (Luther);¹⁸ (4) Jesus finished the work of redemption by suffering more (John Aepinus); (5) Jesus suffered

¹⁴ If doctrine is what the church believes and professes on the basis of the word of God, then we may define dogma as "a formal, official, public, and binding statement of what is believed and confessed by the church" (Jaroslav Pelikan, Credo: Historical and Theological Guide to Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition [New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003], 88).

¹⁶ In fact, the phrase had a checkered history. It first appeared in Rufinius's version of the Apostles' Creed around 400, where it took the place of "and was buried." By 700, both phrases were included.

16 J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd ed. (New York: Longman, 1972), 383.

¹⁷Interestingly, Philastrius of Brescia includes this belief in a catalogue of heresies, citing Psalm 6:5 and Romans 2:12 in rebuttal. See Martin F. Connell, Descensus Christ Ad Inferos: Christ's Descent to the Dead," Theological Studies 62 (2001): 265.

¹⁸ See esp. Luther's 1533 sermon, reproduced in full in Richard Klann, "Christ's Descent into Hell," Concordia Journal 2 (1976): 43-47.

not only dying, the moment of death, but also being dead and the second death/damnation (Balthasar).19

Wayne Grudem will have none of it, insisting in a hard-hitting essay that evangelicals dissent from the "descent" on the grounds that the clause is unbiblical: "It has no clear warrant from Scripture." ²⁰ Moreover, it flies in the face of biblical texts that clearly oppose it.21 For example, Jesus's words to the criminal crucified next to him, "Today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43), leave no time for a descent; and Jesus's next words, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" (Luke 23:46), suggest that he fully expected to ascend, not descend.²²

Somewhat surprisingly, John Calvin devotes more attention to this phrase than to any other in the Apostles' Creed. He knows it was a later addition; nevertheless, he thinks it makes an important contribution: "But we ought not to omit his descent into hell, a matter of no small moment in bringing about redemption. . . . if it is left out, much of the benefit of Christ's death will be lost."²³ Calvin and the Reformed tradition affirm the descent in two ways: (1) The descent of Jesus's body. Question 50 of the Westminster Larger Catechism is, "Wherein consisted Christ's humiliation after his death?" and answers, "Christ's humiliation after his death consisted in his being buried, and continuing in the state of the dead, and under the power of death till the third day."24 The biblical support is Jesus's own statement: "For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:40). (2) The descent of Jesus's soul. Here Calvin is careful to stress the symbolic meaning of "descent." Jesus endured the kind of death we all endure, the separation of soul from body, but he also suffered a hellish agony of the soul specific to his messianic office: separation from God. Calvin is not bothered about the chronology of the events. Jesus suffered death in his soul (i.e., descended into hell) while on the cross (after his death his soul went to

¹⁹ See Alyssa Lyra Pitstick, Light in Darkness: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ's Descent into Hell (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007); and David Lauber, Barth on the Descent into Hell: God, Atonement, and the Christian Life (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), esp. chapters 2-3.

²⁰ Wayne Grudem, "He Did Not Descend into Hell: A Plea for Following Scripture instead of the Apostles' Creed," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 34/1 (1991): 113.

²¹ Grudem is also aware of the spotty evidence for the antiquity of the phrase, noting its absence from the earliest versions of the Apostles' Creed.

²² We could also mention Jesus's words "It is finished" (John 19:30), which indicate that his suffering was over, effectively rebutting Balthasar's thesis that Jesus's suffering would continue a bit longer in hell. ²³ Calvin, *Institutes* 2.16.8.

²⁴ Emphasis mine.

heaven even as his body was in the tomb): "The Creed sets forth what Christ suffered in the sight of men, and then . . . speaks of that invisible and incomprehensible judgment which he underwent in the sight of God in order that we might know . . . that he paid a greater and more excellent price in suffering in his soul." Jesus conquered not only death but also the dread of death: "And surely, unless his soul shared in the punishment, he would have been the Redeemer of bodies alone." Let a set a set of the control of the cont

That Jesus died for our sins is part and parcel of the gospel (Rom. 5:8; 1 Cor. 15:3). The event of atonement—the reconciliation of God and humanity made possible by the cross—is a *sine qua non* of salvation. That is why crucicentrism is one of David Bebbington's four distinguishing marks of evangelicalism.²⁷ However, when it comes to explaining the mechanism of the atonement, we are dealing with a level-2 doctrine. Level-2 doctrines deal with some aspect of the history of redemption—not with the divine persons per se, but with what they have done (and with what humans have or have not done in response). However, though Christians affirm that Iesus died "for us," they disagree about what happened (i.e., the meaning of the events in question). Calvinists and Arminians agree that Jesus's death has atoning significance, but they disagree about the nature and extent of the atonement. "He descended into hell" is not like the deity of the Holy Spirit. It is a level-2 doctrine that seeks to understand the significance of Iesus's death.²⁸ Denominations may divide over their understandings of the cross, yet they continue to acknowledge one another as fellow Christians: "Bible-believing Christians can allow themselves to differ on the nature of Jesus's descent into hell. Some will be able to recite this part of the Apostles' Creed with conviction, while others may choose to remain silent."29

THE SALVATION OF UNBAPTIZED INFANTS

Our third case study involves not the meaning of Jesus's saving work but one of its entailments: the fate of unbaptized infants. If all human beings

²⁵ Calvin, *Institutes* 2.16.10.

²⁶ Ibid., 2.16.12. For a fuller presentation of the Reformed view, see Daniel R. Hyde, *In Defense of the Descent: A Response to Contemporary Critics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage, 2010).

²⁷ David W. Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s (London: Routledge, 1993), 3.

²⁸ Ideally, a doctrine of the atonement should do justice to the full range of biblical metaphors for explaining the saving significance of the cross: (penal) substitution, satisfaction, ransom, victory, etc.

²⁹ Millard Erickson, "Did Jesus Really Descend to Hell?" *Christianity Today* 44/2 (February 7, 2000): 74.

share in Adam's sin from the moment of conception (Ps. 51:5; Rom. 3:23), then it seems to follow that infants are lost unless the Spirit unites them to Christ too. What can we say to bereaved parents after the loss of an unbaptized child? This is an important issue for systematic and pastoral theology alike.

B. B. Warfield wrote a booklet in which he demonstrates that, while the church has always had a doctrine on this topic, there has been "a progressive correction of crudities in its conception."30 The Fathers agreed that, with the exception of martyrs, "no infant dying unbaptized could enter the kingdom of heaven."31 Augustine held the more moderate view that, though unbaptized children are condemned to hell, they suffer "the mildest punishment." The medieval consensus was that only those who committed actual sins would suffer the torments of hell, with infants paying only the penalty for original sin—the deprivation of the vision of God—in "limbo," on the fringes of hell.³³ By the time of Vatican II, however, many Roman Catholic theologians felt that this exclusion of unbaptized infants was incompatible with God's universal salvific will. Jean Galot appealed to the idea of a "hierarchy of truth" to argue that the necessity of baptism "is secondary to the salvific will."34 The Catechism of the Catholic Church (1997) explicitly addresses the question of children who have died without baptism: "the Church can only entrust them to the mercy of God . . . who desires that all men should be saved."35

Reformed theologians approached the question differently by (1) emphasizing membership in the invisible rather than the visible church, (2) insisting that such membership proceeds from divine election and, on account of the grace of God, (3) viewing death in infancy as either a possible or likely sign of election.³⁶ Warfield notes that Reformed

³⁰ Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield, The Development of the Doctrine of Infant Salvation (New York: Christian Literature, 1891), 5. ³¹ Ibid., 7.

³² Augustine, Enchiridion chapter 93.

³³ Pope Innocent III confirmed this in 1201.

³⁴ Cited in Francis A. Sullivan, "The Development of Doctrine about Infants Who Die Unbaptized," Theological Studies 72 (2011): 8.

³⁵ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2nd ed. (New York and London: Doubleday, 1997), para. 1261, 353. See also the 2007 International Theological Commission statement, "The Hope of Salvation for Infants Who Die Without Being Baptized, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents /rc_con_cfaith_doc_20070419_un-baptised-infants_en.html (accessed February 27, 2014).

³⁶ Warfield is putting a happy face on the Reformed tradition. The actual situation on the ground was considerably more complicated, and less optimistic vis-à-vis the fate of nonelect children. Lutheran theologians viewed the Reformed position differently (see C. P. Krauth, Infant Baptism and Infant Salvation in the Calvinistic System: A Review of Dr. Hodge's Systematic Theology [Philadelphia: Lutheran Book Store, 1874).

Confessions "with characteristic caution refrain from all definition of the negative side of the salvation of infants."37 There is no presumption here. Indeed, Warfield is aware that the greatest obstacle to the development of this doctrine is "the unchristian conception of man's natural innocence."38 In this regard, he argues that neither Roman Catholicism nor Wesleyan Arminianism can comfortably accommodate infant salvation into their respective systems. In Rome's ecclesiastical conception, there is no salvation outside the church, hence the necessity of baptism, the means of saving grace. In Arminianism's synergistic conception, free will must improve upon the grace given to all, but infants have no opportunity to do this. According to Warfield, only the Reformed tradition can coherently explain how unbaptized infants may be saved, namely, by being graciously elected, and thus united to Christ and the people of God. How do we know which infants who die unbaptized are elect? All those who die in infancy is "as legitimate [a scriptural] and as logical an answer as any, on Reformed postulates."39 Indeed, if all infants are saved, it is not because they have been baptized into the visible church or have improved upon a universal grace, but only because the Spirit regenerates those whom God elects.

As Warfield admits, there are a variety of opinions even within the Reformed tradition, largely because we cannot presume upon God's gracious election. The doctrine of infant salvation is therefore a level-3 doctrine: one that does not threaten the integrity of the triune God (i.e., the identity of the divine persons) or the gospel (what the divine persons have done, are doing, and will do for us and our salvation), and over which there is disagreement even within one's theological tradition. Whereas disagreements over level-2 doctrines lead to different denominations, there can be debate about level-3 doctrines without compromising fellowship at either the denominational or congregational level.

THE IDEA OF DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT: A BRIEF TYPOLOGY

Doctrine—what the church believes, teaches, and professes on the basis of the Scripture—develops. This much is incontestable, as our three case

³⁷ Warfield, Development of the Doctrine of Infant Salvation, 44.

³⁸ Ibid., 50.

³⁹ Ibid., 60.

studies have shown.⁴⁰ Such developments, even if they prove to be mistaken, are not altogether irrational. If we wish to understand the development of doctrine, however, we need to examine the relationship of reason and history more closely. What is the logic or force or principle behind such development?

THEOLOGY AS BIBLICAL REASONING

Christian theology is the human attempt to understand and respond to God's self-communication in the redemptive-history that culminates in the event of Jesus Christ and its apostolic witness. John Webster describes theology as a kind of biblical reasoning, "the redeemed intellect's reflective apprehension of God's gospel address through the embassy of Scripture."41 The aim is to learn what God is making known about God, and doing in Christ, by following the words of the text: "Dogmatics is the schematic and analytic presentation of the matter of the gospel."42 Webster is not asking theologians for a formalized set of deductions; rather, theology is systematic "in the low-level sense of gathering together what is dispersed through the temporal economy to which the prophets and apostles direct reason's gaze."43

Types of Biblical Reasoning

The challenge in formulating doctrine is to attend to the truth of revelation preserved in Scripture, unfolding without betraving it either by changing it into something else or by corrupting it by adding foreign particles. Of course, one theologian's healthy development may be another's pathology. Everything depends on (a) the nature of the objective revelation, (b) the ways in which reason processes it, and (c) the criteria for evaluating this process. There are three basic types of theories when it comes to evaluating reason's role in doctrinal development: conservative, liberal, and moderate.44

⁴⁰ "If Christian theology is to be taken seriously as an enterprise of 'faith seeking understanding,' it must come to terms with the fact that its doctrines have developed in history" (Jaroslav Pelikan and John P. Whalen, "General Editors' Foreword" to Walgrave, Unfolding Revelation, xi).

41 John Webster, The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reason (London and New York: T.

[&]amp; T. Clark, 2012), 128.

⁴²Ibid., 131.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴For a similar typology that distinguishes between static, (r)evolutionary, and dynamic types, see Rolf J. Pöhler, Continuity and Change in Christian Doctrine: A Study in the Problem of Doctrinal Development (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999), esp. chapter 3.

The Conservative Approach: Logical Development (Idem Identity)

"Guard the good deposit entrusted to you" (2 Tim. 1:14).

Evangelicals who affirm *sola scriptura* and the sufficiency of Scripture will perhaps sympathize with Patristic theologians like Vincent of Lérins, who worried that doctrinal development risked opening up the deposit of faith to corruption. Vincent appealed to church consensus as a stabilizing factor because, as he well knew, not everyone understands Scripture in the same way. In Vincent's words, "we can find almost as many interpretations as there are men." Accordingly, the so-called Vincentian canon states, "care must be taken so we hold that which has been believed everywhere, always, and by everyone [semper, ubique, et ab omnibus]." 46

The Patristic watchword was not *semper reformanda* ("always reforming") but *semper eadem* ("always the same"). Vincent believed that ecumenical councils preserved the propositional deposit of the faith: "The classical theory of doctrinal development is that there is no real development in doctrine." Yes, there is conceptual polishing, but this is simply a matter of refining the propositional content already revealed in Scripture. The words (e.g., *homoousios*) may have changed, but not the meanings or thoughts they convey. Development here resembles logical entailment: to conclude "John is a bachelor" from premises (1) "bachelors are unmarried men" and (2) "John is unmarried" is simply to restate the same thought in other terms. On this view, then, doctrines preserve the conceptual content of Scripture and so partake of *idem* identity (i.e., conceptual sameness or permanence over time).

Permanence over time—immutability—is a form of *hard* continuity. Discontinuity appears here as a kind of damaging mutation. This was precisely Adolf von Harnack's objection to orthodoxy.⁴⁸ Harnack adopted a critical stance toward the development of Christian dogma, concluding that creedal orthodoxy corrupted the "essence" of Christianity—the pure faith of the gospel—by seeking to understand it in terms of Hellenistic philosophy. For Harnack, to develop doctrine is to intellectualize what ought to be a matter of interior faith, effectively exchanging the fatherhood of God for a formula of deity (viz., the Trinity).⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Vincent of Lérins, Commonitorium 2.2.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 2:5.

⁴⁷ Yarnell, Formation of Christian Doctrine, 107.

⁴⁸ See Adolf von Harnack, *The History of Dogma*, 3rd ed. (1885; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1997). ⁴⁹ Several recent works have rebutted Harnack's hypothesis: instead of speaking of the Hellenization of the gospel we do better to speak of the evangelization of Hellenistic culture and thought. See, for example,

As our case studies have shown, doctrines at all three levels have developed. Even something as fundamental as the deity of the Holy Spirit does more than restate the explicit teaching of Scripture. To confess the deity of the Spirit on the basis of God's Word involves considerably more than deducing that John is a bachelor. Vincent himself knew this, which is why he formulates a second rule for assessing acceptable progress: "Yet it must be an advance [profectus] . . . and not an alteration [permutatio] in faith. For progress means that each thing is enlarged within itself, while alteration implies that one thing is transformed into something else."50 As an example of the kind of development he has in mind, Vincent offers an analogy with the growth of bodies: from childhood to adulthood I may grow larger, but I remain the same person. The emphasis is still on conservation. Even where there is growth, then, it must not upset the earlier consensus about the deposit of faith: "speak newly, but never say new things [dicase nove, non dicas nova]."51

The Liberal Approach: "Free Radical" Development (Non-Identity)

If the watchword of conservative theology is "continuity for the sake of fidelity," that of many liberal-leaning theologians might well be "discontinuity for the sake of intelligibility—and liberation." Maurice Wiles, a liberal Anglican, argues that the most important criterion for formulating doctrine is not whether it preserves old formulations but whether it continues the aims of the church "in a way which is effective and creative in the contemporary world."52 Wiles thinks that many of the earlier doctrinal formulations have become either irrelevant or meaningless and are in dire need of revision. He is therefore willing to "remake" certain doctrines, and infamously tried to do so when, with John Hick, he dismissed Chalcedonian two-nature Christology (i.e., the deity of Jesus) and instead promoted the "truth" behind the myth of God incarnate—that Jesus, though not himself God, nevertheless lived a life that displayed obedience to God and communicated God's very character.53

Paul Gavrilyuk, The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), esp. chapter 1, "The Case Against the Theory of Theology's Fall into Hellenistic

⁵⁰ Vincent, Commonitorium chapter 23. See also Thomas G. Guarino, Vincent of Lérins and the Development of Christian Doctrine (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013).

⁵¹ Vincent, Commonitorium 22.7.

⁵² Maurice F. Wiles, The Making of Christian Doctrine: A Study in the Principles of Early Doctrinal Development (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 177.

⁵³ See Maurice F. Wiles, "Christianity without Incarnation," in John Hick, ed., The Myth of God Incarnate (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), 1-11. See also Maurice F. Wiles, The Remaking of Christian Doctrine

Wiles thinks that theologians must always "remake" Christian doctrine to keep in step with today's world. Indeed, theologians are free to make even radical revisions to doctrinal formulations: "True continuity . . . is to be sought not so much in the repetition of [the Fathers'] doctrinal conclusions or even in the building upon them, but rather in the continuation of their doctrinal aims." By "doctrinal aims" Wiles has in mind the church's concern to keep in mind Scripture, the practice of worship, and the (contemporary) experience of salvation. The interpretive paradigm that wins the day in a doctrinal revolution is not the one that simply tidies up old formulas of the past but rather the one that opens up new possibilities for the future. 16

The Balanced Dynamic Approach: Organic Development (Ipse Identity)

John Henry Newman's *Essay on Development* is probably the most famous treatise on the topic and represents a third approach, one that attempts to strike a happy medium by giving equal time as it were to both continuity and discontinuity by acknowledging *real growth*. ⁵⁷ The Christian tradition is not an immutable deposit (contra Vincent) or a series of relativistic revolutions (contra Wiles) but rather something living and growing, which is why Newman employs an organic model to explain doctrinal development. What we have in Scripture is a seed—a seminal idea, to be precise—which eventually blossoms into a mature plant (i.e., a doctrinal system).

Organic growth involves both continuity and change. What stays the same is not an already developed set of propositional truths but rather a prereflective intuition: the idea of Christianity. Newman preached a sermon at Oxford University in 1843 on doctrinal development, taking Luke 2:19 as his text: "But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart." Theologians should go and do likewise, inasmuch as they too have not only to profess the faith but also to work out its

⁽London: SCM, 1974).

⁵⁴Whereas continuous (evolutionary) development was the watchword of the nineteenth century (see below on Newman's idea of development), the twentieth century saw cataclysmic changes in both history and science. As Pöhler rightly observes, our present-day cultural context is thus more disposed toward thinking in terms of heterogeneous discontinuity rather than homogeneous continuity (see his Continuity and Change in Christian Doctrine, 81).

⁵⁵ Wiles, Making of Christian Doctrine, 173.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 171.

⁵⁷ John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, 6th ed. (1878; repr., Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989).

⁵⁸ John Henry Newman, "Sermon 15: The Theory of Developments in Religious Doctrine," *Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford between A.D. 1826 and 1843* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 312–351.

implications. The basic idea that Mary and the church ponder—the incarnation—remains the same, but over time the seedling idea grows into a mature dogmatic system. Organic growth, from acorn to oak, partakes of *ipse* identity, the kind of identity that a self has as it grows from infant to adolescent to adult. In one sense, I am the same person I was when I was five years old, with the same name, same narrative, and same DNA. In another sense, however, I am different; my fifty-something self knows more and is wiser than my five-year-old forebear.

For Newman, the idea of Christianity grows because it is part of a living tradition. The church, as the body of Christ, has its being-in-time. Time is the operative concept: it takes time for ideas to develop. Whereas the young Anglican Newman saw later doctrinal developments as corruptions, the mature Roman Catholic Newman believed later developments, such as purgatory or the merits of the saints, to be part of the original idea of incarnation; they simply needed time to mature. Newman eventually had to appeal to ecclesial authority (i.e., the magisterium) as a criterion for discerning proper development (maturation) from improper (mutation).⁵⁹ In addition to this formal question concerning doctrinal authority (Whose say-so counts in determining legitimate from illegitimate development, continuations rather than reversals of the essential idea?), Newman's account also raises a material question concerning doctrinal content: how do we know whether a given doctrinal development reflects a growth in understanding rather than a positive increase in the deposit of faith—a new revelation—in which case it would constitute a development beyond the "idea" embodied in Jesus Christ?60 The distinction between Roman Catholic and Protestant approaches may indeed boil down to the latter's claim that we ought to discern the difference between development that unfolds what is implicit in Scripture and development that adds something new to the content of the faith.

Analytics versus Hermeneutics: A METHODOLOGICAL HOUSE DIVIDED?

Into which of the above three types do evangelicals best fit? We can probably dispense with what I have called the liberal approach, because it

⁵⁹Newman proposed seven criteria for judging doctrinal developments, but admitted that they would not work by themselves apart from the magisterium. See the discussion in Jaroslav Pelikan, Development of Christian Doctrine: Some Historical Prolegomena (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969), 12–24. ⁶⁰ Yarnell objects to Newman's misapplication of the biblical metaphor of growth, which concerns the kingdom of God, not the development of doctrine (Formation of Christian Doctrine, 59n53).

cedes too much to discontinuity when it comes to the identity of revealed truth over time. That leaves the first and third approaches, marked by two kinds of identity (*idem* and *ipse*) and two kinds of development (logical and organic). I submit that these two approaches to doctrinal development are closely related to two types of theology—the analytic and the hermeneutic—and their philosophical counterparts, Anglo-American and Continental philosophy respectively.⁶¹ These connections may not be obvious, but I think they are worth pondering in our hearts, particularly because each approach has something to contribute when it comes to doing theology "according to the Scriptures." The way forward for evangelical theology lies not in choosing to inhabit one house or the other, but in integrating aspects of each into a unified theory of development.

Analytic theology draws on the strengths of analytic philosophy.⁶² These include putting a premium on definitional clarity, conceptual precision, and logical coherence.⁶³ With regard to doctrinal development, then, this approach excels in making distinctions and drawing out consequences—in a word, *explication* (i.e., *logical* development). Explication is a ministerial use of reason in which what is implied (*implicatus*: "folded in") by the text is *unfolded* (i.e., made explicit). Calvin defended something similar: "But what prevents us from explaining in clearer words those matters in Scripture which perplex and hinder our understanding?" Doctrine develops largely through analysis: clarifying concepts (e.g., God), scrutinizing, and then systematizing the logical relationships between propositions. Analytic theology has particular affinities with the way in which Basil analyzed biblical prepositions as part of his case for the deity of the Holy Spirit.

Hermeneutic theology takes its cue from Continental philosophy (i.e., European philosophy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries). In this extended family of approaches, the emphasis is not on explanation but on understanding. Though both analytic and Continental philosophers are concerned with interpreting language and texts, when the latter speak of hermeneutics they are not thinking about a scientific "method" for ex-

⁶¹See C. G. Prado, ed., A House Divided: Comparing Analytic and Continental Philosophy (Amherst, NY: Humanity, 2003); James Chase and Jack Reynolds, Analytic versus Continental: Arguments on the Methods and Values of Philosophy (Montreal: McGill–Queen's University Press, 2010).

⁶² See Oliver D. Crisp and Michael C. Rea, eds., *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), esp. the introduction and chapters 1, 2.

⁶³To my knowledge, no analytic theologian has yet proposed a theory of doctrinal development.

⁶⁴Calvin, *Institutes* 1.13.3.

plicating texts or analyzing propositions; rather, they are thinking about the problem of what it is for human beings, rooted in a particular place and time, to understand people, and texts, from other times and places. For hermeneutic philosophers, human finitude and historicity (life) problematize attempts to gain objective knowledge via interpretive methods (logic). 65 For Continental thinkers, it is as important to describe the conditions of historical existence out of which statements emerge and, in particular, to which they are directed (i.e., readers today), as it is to examine the statements themselves.66

If analytic theology stresses cognitive continuity, a hermeneutic theology of doctrinal development puts the accent on historical discontinuity, on understanding at a distance. The apostles' context is not ours, hence we hear them through the filter of historical tradition, a history and a tradition that no one can entirely escape. That is why Hans-Georg Gadamer says that interpretation is both reproductive and productive: on the one hand, it tries to recover how the original readers understood the text; on the other hand, it tries to answer what the text means for us today.⁶⁷ Understanding is the result of a "fusion of horizons," where what the reader understands is in part a result of where (and who) the reader is: "In other words, our interpretations are always relative to the location—linguistic, historical, cultural—from which they are made."68 If analytic theology resembles the conservative (logical) approach to doctrinal development, hermeneutic theology finds its analogue in the idea of dynamic (organic) development: growth over time, which is another way of referring to tradition.

In sum: calling attention to the analytic/Continental philosophical divide brings to the fore the fundamental problem underlying the various approaches to doctrinal development. The problem, again, is how to do justice to both continuity and discontinuity, sameness and otherness. Whereas analytic theology sees the development of doctrine as a kind of translation (i.e., saying the same thing in clearer terms), hermeneutic theology sees development as a kind of dialogue at a (temporal) distance, which is another way of describing human being-in-tradition. The process

⁶⁵ See further Andrew Cutrofello, Continental Philosophy: A Contemporary Introduction (New York and London: Routledge, 2005).

⁶⁶ Simon Oliver's review of Crisp and Rea's *Analytic Theology* repeatedly makes this point ("Analytic Theology," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 12/4 [2010]: 464–475).

⁶⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Continuum, 2002), 369–379.

⁶⁸ Merold Westphal, "Hermeneutics and Holiness," in *Analytic Theology*, 275.

of development on this view is more like application or contextualization than translation: the attempt "to hear Scripture's meaning speak in new contexts." ⁶⁹ With this basic analytic/hermeneutic distinction in hand, then, we turn now to examine some evangelical accounts of doctrinal development.

RECENT EVANGELICAL ACCOUNTS:

"GENERAL" OR "SPECIAL" DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT?

Nineteenth-century Protestant responders to Newman's theory of doctrinal development, while willing to accept the fact of historical development, were unwilling to accept the premise that the apostles taught things that were neither contained in nor deducible from the Bible. Such a premise would directly contradict the confession of the sufficiency of Scripture. So, while Protestants acknowledged "subjective" development (i.e., greater understanding), they rejected the idea of "objective" development, if this means the actual growth of the deposit of revelation. What God says in Scripture is invariant; by way of contrast, what Christians from different times and places understand God to have said may vary in quantity and quality.⁷⁰ From another angle, James Orr rebutted Harnack's charge that the development of orthodoxy was a corruption of the gospel, arguing instead that the history of dogma is an evolutionary history that progresses further and further toward (but never reaches) completion.⁷¹ By and large, evangelical Protestants tended to treat doctrinal development as a problem for biblical hermeneutics.

PETER TOON

Peter Toon's *The Development of Doctrine in the Church* made the first post–World War II evangelical case for a treatment of the topic that would be distinct from hermeneutics.⁷² In particular, he called evangelicals to (1) accept the historical and cultural conditions of doctrinal statements, including creeds, (2) declare as historically inadequate all "static" theo-

⁶⁹ Jeannine Brown, *Scripture as Communication: Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 25.

⁷⁰ See William Cunningham, Discussions on Church Principles: Popish, Erastian, and Presbyterian (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1863), esp. chapter 2; Robert Rainy, The Delivery and Development of Christian Doctrine (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1874).

⁷¹ James Orr, The Progress of Dogma (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1901).

⁷² Peter Toon, *The Development of Doctrine in the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979).

ries that effectively deny development, and (3) acknowledge that a high view of Scripture does not by itself ensure doctrinal agreement.

Toon compares the actual process of development to what Thomas Kuhn calls "normal science," namely, the pursuit of a particular research paradigm. Toon gives six criteria for discerning whether a doctrinal formulation indeed represents progress—understood as a deeper insight into God's word written—including the requirement that new developments "must positively cohere with (that is, be entailed by, not merely consistent with) what is already believed at other points."73 Toon's account has clear affinities with analytic theology. Yet he is also aware of cultural conditioning, and for this reason appeals to the Spirit's guidance of the early church in its formulation of the doctrines of the Trinity and Christology: "This is not to deny that these doctrines are integrally related to their historical situation in reference to concepts and language; but, properly understood, they are accurate statements addressed to our intellects and, therefore, though they can possibly be improved, they can never be denied."74

ALISTER MCGRATH

Charles Hodge thinks doctrine—our grasp of the "facts" of Scripture progresses in the same way as science's knowledge of the Book of Nature, through cumulative inductive study.⁷⁵ Alister McGrath agrees up to a point: the development of doctrine is formally parallel to scientific theorizing, but science does not work the way Hodge thought it did. Like Toon, McGrath appeals to Kuhn, though not to highlight "normal science." On the contrary, McGrath points out that science does not always progress in smooth linear fashion, but sometimes as a result of radical paradigm shifts (e.g., from Newtonian to Einsteinian physics). Science is the work of an interpretive community that shares the same paradigmatic assumptions and that, under various kinds of pressure, may as a community adopt new paradigmatic assumptions: "There are clear parallels between the development of doctrine and the emergence of new paradigms within the scientific community."⁷⁶ Indeed, one might describe the Reformation, and the doctrine of justification by faith, as a consequence

⁷³ Ibid., 117 (emphasis his).

⁷⁴Ibid., 120.

⁷⁵ See ibid., 51–53.

⁷⁶ Alister E. McGrath, A Scientific Theology, Vol. 3: Theory (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 233.

of the community's changing the paradigm for thinking about the way we get God's grace.

McGrath's account of doctrinal development is "Continental" to the extent that it calls evangelicals to acknowledge how everyone "is condemned to live and speak in history and historical forms." The focus is therefore on particular interpretive communities—in a word, theological traditions—in which all Christians, including theologians, live and move and have their being. Indeed, the very term "doctrine" implies "reference to a tradition and a community," because doctrine "is essentially the prevailing expression of the faith of the Christian community with reference to the content of the Christian revelation." The development of doctrine is a response to the "generative event" of the history of Jesus that is mediated to the community through the gospel narrative: "Doctrine is an *activity*, a process of transmission of the collective wisdom of a community." McGrath here recalls Gadamer's idea of tradition as an ongoing conversation between a community and its founding text. 80

Tradition is the process of handing on the narrative of Jesus and its understanding. McGrath agrees with Gadamer: one cannot know the history of Jesus apart from the history of its reception in the church.⁸¹ The continuity that counts is, for McGrath, as *communal* as it is *conceptual*; for tradition is not simply a collection of static beliefs, but a set of dispositions and practices that preserve the memory of Jesus and embody the mind of Christ. In sum: apart from the church's ongoing historical existence, we would have neither doctrinal development nor doctrine itself. Put differently: both doctrine and the church are effects of the history of Jesus.⁸²

⁷⁷ Alister E. McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine: A Study in the Foundation of Doctrinal Criticism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 81.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 10-11.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 11.

⁸⁰ For the significance of Gadamer in McGrath's account, see Steven L. Oldham, "Alister E. McGrath and Evangelical Theories of Doctrinal Development" (PhD diss., Baylor University, 2000), 115–126.

⁸¹I would have liked to include a discussion of Anthony Thiselton's hermeneutical variation on a Gadamerian theme, if space had permitted. Like McGrath (and Continental thinkers in general), Thiselton is reluctant to treat doctrine apart from the historical life of the church. Unlike McGrath, Thiselton deploys the full resources of hermeneutical theory to understand the process of doctrinal development. Tradition for Thiselton is an ongoing corporate conversation—a question-and-answer dialogue—about the meaning of the Christ event. Following Gadamer, Thiselton views meaning as poised between the two horizons of text and contemporary community, such that understanding is always application/contextualization. See his *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007); and Rhyne Putman, "Postcanonical Doctrinal Development as Hermeneutical Phenomenon" (PhD diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012).

^{82 &}quot;Doctrine cannot be regarded as an isolable aspect of the Christian faith, as if it could be detached from the community of faith and treated as a purely ideational phenomenon" (McGrath, Genesis of Doctrine, 193). Thiselton would say "Amen": doctrines are not simply true propositions but self-involving claims

MALCOLM YARNELL

Malcolm Yarnell, a Southern Baptist, has written an account of doctrinal development from a believers' church perspective. Though he is aware of the other two evangelical models we have discussed, he is unimpressed. Toon is too analytic for assuming "rational tests may discern true developments from corruptions," while McGrath is too hermeneutic for assuming "tradition necessarily supplements Scripture."83 Furthermore, "both are weak with regard to pneumatology and ecclesiology."84 Yarnell believes their theories come to grief largely due to a faulty conception of the church. We might say that Yarnell faults Toon and McGrath for falling short of a special (i.e., properly theological) account of doctrinal development, one that makes full use of what the Bible teaches about itself, the Holy Spirit, and discipleship.

At the heart of Yarnell's theological method is the idea that the church is a community of disciples who follow Christ by listening to the Spirit as they read Scripture together: "The free churches begin their theology of discipleship with a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, seek to understand His ordinances through His word illumined by the Spirit, and institute those ordinances within the church, according to the biblical order."85 Neither analytic nor hermeneutic does justice to the kind of pneumatic development Yarnell has in mind. Yarnell believes that the Spirit continues to lead the church, by which he means local churches, "into all the truth" (John 16:13), and he contrasts this leading with the "rationalism" of evangelical exegetes who rely on analytic and hermeneutic methods for a deeper understanding of Scripture. 86 There is "more truth and light yet to break forth out of [God's] holy word," but this is due to the Spirit's illumination of that word, not to further revelation or the "supplement" of tradition.

Yarnell's believers' church theory of doctrinal development derives from his free church theology of history. The history of the church is neither a prolongation of the incarnation (contra the Roman Catholic conception of visible catholicity) nor the story of the visible church being

that serve "to nail the speaker's colors to the mast as an act of first-person testimony and commitment" (Hermeneutics of Doctrine, 13 [emphasis his]).

⁸³ Yarnell, Formation of Christian Doctrine, 126.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 127. Yarnell thinks Reformed theology, represented by Herman Bavinck, is guilty of both rationalism and traditionalism, faults that he traces to the doctrines of common grace and the invisible church respectively (see 49-59).

⁸⁵ Ibid., 70.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 137.

reformed in light of its spiritual ideal (contra the Reformed conception of invisible catholicity). Yarnell rather insists that the New Testament speaks of the church in local terms only. He views what happened at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) as the template for all subsequent doctrinal development: "Christ, by His Spirit, moves among the churches sovereignly and mysteriously. No church has any priority over any other. . . . Every church is under the direct headship of Christ and responsible to Him for the way it reads the Bible and follows the Spirit."⁸⁷

Why, then, should free churches be Trinitarian, if the doctrine of the Trinity is a product not of a local church but of ecumenical councils (Nicaea and Constantinople)? Yarnell cites Athanasius, who saw that the pattern the early churches used for interpreting Scripture came from Scripture itself. Yarnell also appeals to Basil of Caesarea, who notes that proper interpretation of Scripture is due to "the government of the Holy Spirit." Yarnell concludes, "A true free church may err, but heretical it cannot be, for free churches are willing to be corrected but only by the Word of God illumined by the Holy Spirit of God."

Yarnell's account of doctrinal development is "special" because his appeal to the Spirit's leading local congregations of disciples draws on distinctly theological resources (e.g., it is *pneumatic*) and so transcends the *analytic/hermeneutic* divide. I believe his account to be flawed, however, due to an inadequate ecclesiology—inadequate not because of what it affirms but because of what it denies: *catholicity*. Yarnell thinks each local congregation should profess what is right in its own eyes, assuming its willingness to be corrected by Word and Spirit. However, he does not seem to realize that the Spirit often uses the universal (i.e., catholic) church to correct the local church.⁹⁰ It was, after all, the catholic church that developed the doctrine of the Trinity and continues to maintain it.

Ironically, Yarnell turns a deaf ear to what other theologians (and local churches!) have to say about the nature of the church. He criticizes Herman Bavinck—and Reformed theology in general—for holding "an extrabiblical view of the universal church as invisible." According to Bavinck, catholicity qualifies the church "as a unified whole in contrast

³⁷Ibid., 178.

⁸⁸ De Spiritu Sancto 77, cited in Yarnell, Formation of Christian Doctrine, 189.

⁸⁹ Yarnell, Formation of Christian Doctrine, 203.

⁹⁰He does, however, affirm the congregation's role in correcting individuals.

⁹¹ Yarnell, Formation of Christian Doctrine, 54.

to the dispersed local congregations that make up the whole."92 Yarnell complains that Bavinck gives only one biblical passage in support of the idea of catholicity, and a disputed one at that: Acts 9:31, which refers to "the church [singular] throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria." On Yarnell's free church understanding, the text should read "the churches" (plural), and this is what we find in the textus receptus—but, significantly, only in the textus receptus. Yarnell fails to appreciate the irony of a biblicist appealing to tradition, which is what textus receptus means (and what it is). Bavinck's reading is on much stronger text-critical ground, and most translations now reflect this by using "church" in the singular. It thus appears that the notion of a translocal church is biblical after all.93

Yarnell worries that the notion of an invisible catholic church confuses what in his view can only be an eschatological reality with something present, and results in a tyranny of (Reformed) theologians who appeal to the notion to impose their systems on others. I understand his concern. Nevertheless, my own concern is that Yarnell, in refusing to recognize any authority whatsoever to the deliverances of regional (i.e., ecumenical) church councils, is in danger of failing "to discern the body" (see 1 Cor. 11:29). 94 For what is the invisible church if not the "body" that is composed of many members (Eph. 4:4-5), the sum total of saints who are "in Christ"?95

The local church is a particular instantiation of the church universal. Yarnell "confines the body of Christ to the local presence of Christ" as opposed to seeing the body of Christ as having "a trans-local reality." 96 He insists that the local church stands under the authority of Christ alone and is thus free from coercion from any outside human authorities. But Christ rules in ten thousand places. It is therefore inconsistent to say that Christ rules one's own local church and not others. However, if Christ and Christ's Spirit illumine other local churches, then should not

⁹²Herman Bavinck, "The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church," *Calvin Theological Journal* 27 (1992): 221 (trans. John Bolt, from an address originally delivered in 1888).

⁹³This is significant not least for understanding evangelicalism as a transdenominational and translocal movement. "Translocality" has become an important concept in recent social geography and anthropology. See Clemens Greiner and Patrick Sakdapolrak, "Translocality: Concepts, Applications, and Perspectives," Geography Compass 7/5 (2013): 373-384.

⁹⁴ Of course, the authority I have in mind is only ministerial, one that derives from the magisterial authority of the triune God speaking in the Scriptures.

⁵⁷ Cf. Yarnell's critique of Timothy George, a fellow Baptist, for focusing on the invisible church, and hence ecumenical dialogue, at the expense of the local church (*Formation of Christian Doctrine*, 71).

⁹⁶ Paul S. Fiddes, "Christian Doctrine and Free Church Ecclesiology: Recent Developments among Baptists in the Southern United States," *Ecclesiology* 7 (2011): 205.

every local church interpret the Bible in conversation with other local churches as well as with members of its own congregation? This too is a way of discerning the body. It follows that local congregations, while free, are also interdependent: members of a larger koinonia. 97 Clearly, these different conceptions of the nature of the church have important consequences for how we understand the normative element in the process of doctrinal development. To reject the invisible catholic church is to reject the normed norm of postapostolic ecclesial tradition.98

A NEW EVANGELICAL ACCOUNT: DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT AS MISSIOLOGICAL IMPROVISATION

Alister McGrath perfectly captures the challenge of balancing continuity and discontinuity as the church attempts to say what it believes on the basis of the word of God: "The genesis of doctrine lies in the exodus from uncritical repetition of the narrative heritage of the past."99 We need a "deuteronomy" of doctrine: a "second normative statement" of the faith once confessed. 100 Because doctrine is a second statement, we can rule out replication (i.e., repetition of Scripture); because it is a normative statement, we can rule out innovation (i.e., departure from Scripture). How, then, do we arrive at this second statement of biblical doctrine?

The word "develop" has a range of meanings, including to unfold, expand by degrees, make explicit what is implicit, actualize the potential of, evolve, etc. What exactly are we doing to Scripture when we develop doctrine from it? The suffix -ation pertains to "the action or process of doing something." We have already eliminated replication and innovation as possibilities for genuine development. The former takes continuity to a pathological extreme (too much sameness); the latter does something similar with discontinuity (too much difference). Models of development

⁹⁷ Fiddes points out that seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Baptists affirmed three forms of the church—a visible local church, an invisible catholic church, and a visible universal church—all of which coinhere: "the local is *wholly* the church and yet is not the *whole* of the church" ("Christian Doctrine and Free Church

⁹⁸ Fiddes contends that Yarnell is on the verge of admitting the ministerial role of tradition but holds back out of fear of admitting the invisible catholic church through the back door: "Belief in the rule of Christ in the church in all its dimensions, local, regional, and universal, might well provide the context for a non-oppressive concept of the catholic church" ("Christian Doctrine and Free Church Ecclesiology," 219). 99 McGrath, Genesis of Doctrine, 7.

¹⁰⁰ It should be noted that the normativity of dogmatic statements is ministerial. What authority they have is secondary to and derivative from the magisterial authority of Scripture. Cf. Carl R. Trueman: "if Scripture is the norming norm, then creeds and confessions, when adopted by churches as statements of their own faith, are the normed norms" (The Creedal Imperative [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012], 80 [emphasis mine]).

that favor the analytic approach have translation (i.e., re-textualization) as their goal and tend to see the process of growth in terms of *explication* and elucidation. What change there is exists only for the sake of clarification; nothing new is added, for the emphasis is on conceptual sameness. By way of contrast, models of development that favor the Continental/ hermeneutic approach have application (i.e., contextualization) as their goal and tend to see the process of growth in terms of maturation and amalgamation (e.g., the fusion of two horizons). Such models excel not in preserving sameness but in acknowledging difference.

I believe there is a more excellent way, one able to preserve the sufficiency of Scripture and the sameness of the gospel (continuity) on the one hand, while acknowledging genuine growth and otherness (discontinuity) on the other. Further, I agree with Yarnell that we must draw on the resources of Christian theology itself in order to do justice to what is "special" about the process of doctrinal development. 101

EVANGELIZATION: MISSION AS GOSPEL TRANSMISSION

A properly theological account of doctrinal development begins with the realization that it is part and parcel of the triune God's missionary movement in our world, a means by which the Spirit leads the church further into the light of God's Word. To take the most conspicuous example: the doctrine of the Trinity exemplifies not the Hellenization of the gospel but the evangelization of Hellenism. Doctrine develops as missionaries restate the gospel in new languages, cultures, and conceptualities.

Andrew Walls, a missiologist, roots Christian missionary activity in God's own mission to the world: "Christian faith rests on a divine act of translation: 'the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us' (John 1:14)." 102 What ultimately gets translated in subsequent Christian mission is the mind and way of Christ. The church evangelizes by taking every thought and practice captive to Christ, demonstrating in the process what discipleship, and thus the lordship of Christ, means in specific situations. The history of the church's transmission of the faith exposes the inadequacy

ed. D. A. Carson, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, forthcoming).

102 Andrew Walls, "The Translation Principle in Christian History," in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of the Faith* (Maryknoll, NY, and Edinburgh: Orbis and T. & T. Clark, 1996), 26.

¹⁰¹ For further discussion of various kinds of -ation and doctrinal development, see my "May We Go beyond What Is Written after All? The Pattern of Theological Authority and the Problem of Doctrinal Development," in "But My Words Will Never Pass Away:" The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures,

of *idem* sameness: there is no one Christian language or culture because Christian faith is *infinitely* translatable.¹⁰³ To be sure, there is constancy and continuity: what gets transmitted is faith in the one Jesus Christ. However, what Walls finds marvelous about the process of transmitting the gospel is the way in which it leads to further growth in faith's understanding: "As Paul and his fellow missionaries explain and translate the significance of the Christ in a world that is Gentile and Hellenistic, that significance is seen to be greater than anyone had realized before. *It is as though Christ himself actually grows through the work of mission.*" ¹⁰⁴

The book of Acts says something similar about the word of God. On three occasions Luke states that "the word of God increased [ēuxsanen]" (see Acts 6:7; 12:24; 19:20). Calvin understands Luke to be referring to the word's geographic and demographic spread: as more and more people come to faith in response to the apostolic preaching, the domain of the word enlarges. Yet according to Calvin, the word of God grows in two ways: first, when new disciples come to faith; second, when those who are already disciples "go forward therein." Walls's point is that transmitting the faith cross-culturally results in both kinds of enlargement: a greater number of believers, yes, but also greater understanding: "Translation did not negate the tradition, but enhanced it. The use of new materials of language and thought . . . led to new discoveries about Christ that could not have been made using only the Jewish categories of messiahship." 106

DIALOGIZATION: TIME AND TALK AS CONDITIONS FOR CREATIVE UNDERSTANDING

If Walls is right, then the passing of time (i.e., history) does not necessarily erode the truth but may, on the contrary, serve as the condi-

¹⁰³ Ibid., 22. Cf. Lamin Sanneh, who describes the history of Christianity as a "vernacular translation movement" (*Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989), 7. ¹⁰⁴ Ibid., xvii (emphasis mine). Cf. James Risser: "The fact that understanding is not an action of subjectivity but an entering into—a participation in—an event of transmission is perhaps the central insight of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics" (*Hermeneutics and the Voice of the Other: Re-reading Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics* [Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1997], 74). The merit of Walls's account is that it frames understanding missiologically, highlighting the progress of the biblical word in the economy of redemption

¹⁰⁵ Calvin, Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1844), 239. See further Jerome Kodell, "The Word of God Grew: The Ecclesial Tendency of the Logos in Acts 6:7; 12:24; 19:20," *Biblica* 55/4 (1974): 505–519.

¹⁰⁶ Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll, NY, and Edinburgh: Orbis and T. & T. Clark, 2002), 80.

tion for truth's full blossoming. Time is God's gift to the church that enables evangelization and discipleship. 107 Consider, for example, the time it took the disciples on the road to Emmaus to talk with one another about the things that had happened to Jesus in Jerusalem (Luke 24:14-15). Similarly, it took time for the apostles to understand that the gospel was meant for Gentiles as well as Jews, and this was arguably the most radical doctrinal development of all in the earliest church (Eph. 2:11–21). Most of all, it takes time to communicate the gospel to outsiders. Walls's term for two people from different cultures coming together to learn Christ is "the Ephesian moment." Here is how Walls describes the process: "We need each other's vision to correct, enlarge, and focus our own; only together are we complete in Christ."108 It takes time and space for the church to attain "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13).

We do well to pair Walls's account of the way in which transmission of Christian faith across cultures results in a growth of understanding to Mikhail Bakhtin's account of creative textual understanding. There is space here merely to highlight two remarkable parallels. First, Bakhtin resists Gadamer's notion of the fusion of horizons on the grounds that "outsideness"—historical or cultural distance—is not an obstacle to, but rather the very condition of, a deeper understanding of an other (i.e., author). If we simply recovered the author's understanding we would have replication, which is no advance at all. Gadamer's fusion of horizons is monologic; in a genuine dialogue, neither conversation partner is absorbed into the other. In contrast, Walls's idea that Christ grows as a result of cross-cultural transmission finds its counterpart in Bakhtin's notion of creative understanding: "Creative understanding does not renounce itself, its own place in time, its own culture; and it forgets nothing. . . . It is only in the eyes of another culture that foreign culture reveals itself fully and profoundly."109

Bakhtin's central idea is that only dialogue can fathom the full meaning potential of a text: it takes at least two cultural perspectives to enlarge one's own understanding of "all these things that had hap-

¹⁰⁷ For time as "space" for communicative action, and divine patience as the time God gives sinners to repent, see my Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 321–323 and 449–451.

¹⁰⁸ Walls, Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History, 79.

¹⁰⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, "Response to a Question from the Novy Mir Staff," in Speech Genres and Other Late Essays (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 7.

pened" to Jesus in Jerusalem (Luke 24:14). "Meaning potential" is the operative concept: the dialogue that is doctrinal development does not add something to the biblical text, but we need outsideness—different languages, concepts, and cultural locations—to mine the treasure buried in Scripture (i.e., its implicit, latent meaning). Interpreters do not invent but discover truth in and through the process of dialogue: "Semantic phenomena can exist in concealed form, potentially, and be revealed only in semantic cultural contexts of subsequent epochs that are favorable for such disclosure." Bakhtin is not referring to doctrinal development in this quote, but he may as well be, so close is the connection. Christian mission to other cultures is a paramount instance of evangelization through dialogization, and thus becomes "an occasion for exploring the potentials of the work in a way not available to its original authors and readers." "111

It takes time to dialogue, particularly when the topic is the depths of the wisdom of God (Rom. 11:33). To confine a text to its own time only is to enclose it in its own epoch, thus reducing its significance to what Bakhtin calls "small time." By way of contrast, the word of God "increases" (in a sense that combines Acts 12:24, Walls, and Bakhtin) over time. We see this both in the time span between the Old and New Testaments and between the closing of the Canon and subsequent church history. Scripture is sufficient, and is the supreme norm of theology, but it need not follow that theological understanding is confined to the past. Both Walls and Bakhtin insist that it is a mistake to think that one gains a "purer" understanding if one forgets one's own place, time, and culture (as if that were even possible!) and simply duplicates past understanding (i.e., what the original readers would have understood). Rather, the goal is to achieve a "creative" understanding that does not merely replicate the past but mines its resources for the sake of the present. It took time for the early church to achieve a creative understanding of what Paul said about the Son's "equality" with God (Phil. 2:6). The result of that century-long dialogue between East and West was the Nicene concept homoousios. And, as we saw in our first case study, it took even more time for the church to understand that the Spirit was

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 5.

¹¹¹Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 429.

homoousios too. It takes what Bakhtin calls "great time" to achieve creative understanding.112

IMPROVISATION: CONTINUING THE SAME GOSPEL IN NEW CULTURAL-LINGUISTIC TERMS

God has graciously given the church time, great time, to take the gospel to every tribe and nation. This great time also affords the church a precious opportunity to achieve a deeper understanding of her faith, for we do not really understand something until we are able to explain it in our own words to others. Christ-which is to say our understanding of Christ—grows as the church interprets and acts out the truth of the gospel in ten thousand places.

The company of faith transmits the faith not only by translating Scripture but also by transposing it: performing the gospel; living out what is in Christ; speaking and displaying creative understanding. In a word: the church improvises, in new terms for new contexts, the faith once delivered to the saints. Improvisation is ultimately another way of speaking about creative understanding. Note well: it is important not to confuse improvising with innovating. A jazz musician improvises freely within certain melodic and rhythmic constraints. 113 Theatrical improvisers, similarly, act spontaneously in ways disciplined by the initial premise of the scene. In each case, there is something historical, in the sense of a prior action, which anchors and orients improvisation. Peter's sermon in Acts 2:14–36 clearly sets out the central themes of redemptive history. Improvising is the process of discovering the full meaning potential of Scripture by continuing the disciples' story, speaking new lines and acting out new scenes in new cultural contexts in ways that preserve the evangelical truth and action at the heart of the drama of redemption. Developing doctrine in the church is one more in a series of improvisations: the disciples' story is an improvisation on the history of Israel. Jesus Christ is himself an improvisation on a covenant theme: God's steadfast

¹¹² Mikhail Bakhtin, "Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences," in Speech Genres and Other Late Essays, 170. For a fuller discussion of "great time," creative understanding, and doctrinal development, see my The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2005), 346-354.

¹¹³ See Bruce Ellis Benson, "The Improvisation of Hermeneutics: Jazz Lessons for Interpreters," in Hermeneutics at the Crossroads, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, James K. L. Smith, and Bruce Ellis Benson (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006), 193-210.

love and righteousness.¹¹⁴ In each case, there is both creativity (newness) and fidelity to what preceded (sameness).¹¹⁵

Improvisation accents the importance of both speaking and acting out faith's understanding. As we saw in our three case studies, the development of doctrine belongs not to speculative but to pastoral theology. In each case, doctrine helps the church to know what to say, think, and do in the face of new challenges. Is it proper to speak of the Holy Spirit as God? Should we affirm Jesus's "descent into hell," and if so, what should we mean by it? What kind of comfort can we offer to the bereaved parents of unbaptized children? These questions are similar to the ones faced by the church fathers at Nicaea: does Scripture depict the Son as the greatest of God's creations or as the same as God? Walls rightly reminds us, "The purpose of theology is to make or clarify Christian decisions. Theology is about choices; it is the attempt to think in a Christian way. And the need for choice and decision arises from specific settings in life. In this sense, the theological agenda is culturally induced; and the cross-cultural diffusion of Christian faith invariably makes creative theological activity a necessity."116 The development of doctrine is a matter of thinking biblically in new situations. Scripture shapes our vision of the whole, instills mental habits, forms the desire of our hearts, and trains us in the way of discipleship. Doctrine is essential for training in discipleship, and that includes missiological improvisation—knowing how to go on in the same gospel way in different situations.

Here is the end of the evangelical matter: the triune God has acted in our world and summons the church to play a part in the triune drama of redemption, spreading and embodying the good news that the Father is renewing all things in the Son through the Spirit. Doctrine helps the church understand God, the gospel, and her own nature and mission. The challenge of theology is to direct the church rightly to participate in the *same* drama of redemption in *different* conceptual contexts and cultural-linguistic forms.¹¹⁷ It is not that doctrine is infinitely revisable,

 $^{^{114} \}rm Improvisation$ is how the execution of God's plan of salvation appears to us, human beings in time, but not to God, who is eternal.

¹¹⁵God improvises by making good on his promise in new ways. However, the Word of God becoming flesh is more than an improvisation; it is a new revelatory act, as is the New Testament itself (Heb. 1:1–2). ¹¹⁶Walls, *Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*, 79.

¹¹⁷The sameness in question here is, of course, *ipse* (same drama of redemption; same divine wisdom) rather than *idem* (same lines; same formulas) identity.

but rather that doctrine is infinitely realizable, for biblical judgments may be formulated in a variety of languages and cultural settings. Doctrinal development is ultimately a matter of the church's faith improvisation in accordance with the Scriptures and with earlier faithful improvisations (e.g., creedal formulations).

CONCLUSION

"Truth in God . . . is unchangeable; but truth in man, or the apprehension of it, grows and develops with man and with history. Change . . . is not necessarily a mark of heresy, but may be a sign of life and growth, as the want of change, on the other hand, is by no means always an indication of orthodoxy."118

The development of doctrine is part and parcel of the mission of the church. Doctrine helps disciples individually and corporately to make right decisions about what to say and do in order to participate rightly in and continue the same drama of redemption in which Israel, Jesus Christ, and the apostles played leading parts. The purpose of theology is to make disciples, players in God's drama of redemption who are able to play their parts with faithful and creative understanding.

Thus far I have described the process of doctrinal development in terms of dramatic improvisation. I conclude by anticipating an obvious yet important objection: How do we know whether a particular doctrinal development represents a genuine growth in understanding, and hence a faithful improvisation, rather than a misunderstanding or false innovation?

IMPROVISATORY CORRESPONDENCE (CANONICITY)

An evangelical account of the development of doctrine will give pride of place to evangelization, the translation of the gospel in new culturallinguistic settings. The content of the gospel—the good news of what is "in Christ"—is the *material* principle of doctrinal development. This principle generates the all-important criterion of canonicity, because there is no other gospel than the one attested by the prophets and apostles (Gal. 1:6-7). In addition to corresponding to "the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3), contemporary improvisations should

¹¹⁸ Philip Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom, 6th ed. (New York, 1931), 87.

also embody the same evangelical wisdom—conformity to the new order inaugurated by the risen Christ—that has been paradigmatically instantiated in the occasional writings that comprise the New Testament. Just as what happened to Israel served as an example to the early church, "written down for our instruction" (1 Cor. 10:11), so what happened to the apostolic church serves as an example to us. 119 The church is a company charged with improvising gospel wisdom in continuity with its authoritative transcript (holy Scripture). However, it is not the exact words, concepts, and actions of the New Testament authors that we must preserve (this way lies the replication of *idem* identity), but rather the evangelical judgments embodied in their words, concepts, and actions (the *ipse* identity that continues the same drama albeit in new scenes). 120

IMPROVISATORY CONDUCTIVITY (CONTEXTUALITY)

The material principle—what is in Christ—generates a second criterion for discerning genuine from spurious doctrinal developments whose focus is not text but context, in particular, the edifying effect of our improvisations in the church. Do our doctrinal improvisations enable others to participate rightly and thus continue the drama of redemption in their own contexts? This second criterion highlights evangelical conductivity, the property of transmitting not heat, electricity, or sound, but rather the light and energy of Jesus Christ. The purpose of the development of doctrine is ultimately to enlarge our understanding, yes, but also to expand the sphere of Christ's lordly influence, that is, the kingdom of God. Doctrinal development serves the church when it deepens our understanding of what discipleship looks like in new situations and expands the kingdom of God.

IMPROVISATORY COHERENCE (CATHOLICITY)

The previous two criteria are helpful as far as they go, but some readers may feel they do nothing to help regulate the evangelical quickstep, namely, the fancy exegetical footwork by which one attempts to move

¹¹⁹ See Nicholas Lash on Newman: we have to ask "whether the 'development' in question expresses or embodies a style of life, an ethical response, which is in conformity with the style of life commanded or recommended by the gospel" (Lash, Newman on Development: The Search for an Explanation in History (London: Sheed & Ward, 1975), 142.

¹²⁰ For more on the difference between "concepts" and "judgments," see David Yeago, "The New Testament and the Nicene Dogma: A Contribution to the Recovery of Theological Exegesis," in *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Stephen Fowl (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 87–100.

directly from biblical text to application without passing hermeneutical "go." Even heretics argue from Scripture, and many traditions claim to be biblical, so how do we know which improvisations are most faithful to the biblical text or most fruitful in their context? It is not enough to have bare criteria; we must also determine whose use of these criteria is authoritative. We therefore need a *formal* principle, and a third criterion, to complete our evangelical account of the development of doctrine.

Whereas the material principle pertains to the substance of the gospel, the formal principle concerns the scope of its authorized reception—authorized, that is, by the Holy Spirit, who guides the church in discerning the truth of the gospel. The *formal* principle of doctrinal development is therefore *catholicity*. By "catholic" (i.e., whole, universal) church I mean the company of the faithful, the sum total of saints who have believed and creatively understood (i.e., improvised) the gospel across space and time. After all, the church is not simply a theme of the gospel but its lived exhibit. The church is not simply local but translocal: the people of the gospel hail from every tribe and nation. In invoking catholicity, then, I am claiming that the scope of the body of Christ is relevant to the task of discerning genuine doctrinal developments. Hence our third criterion: Is what we are proposing to say and do at least congruent with the catholic tradition—the ways in which Christians from other times and places have participated in the drama of redemption in their own words and in their own contexts? It is important to respect these catholic precedents as the church improvises what it means to be biblical in new situations.

In Why Study the Past? The Quest for the Historical Church, Rowan Williams puts the question of doctrinal continuity and discontinuity into perspective by contemplating the body of Christ. The saints from earlier times and other places "are helpful to us not because they are just like us but in fancy dress, but because they are who they are in their own context."121 To put it in Bakhtinian terms: they are helpful because they are outside us. We can say something similar about the ancient creeds: they display what it means to be biblical in their own contexts. While no single way of embodying the gospel or identifying Jesus Christ is exhaustive, occasional performances—and all attempts to articulate theological understanding are "occasional"—may produce permanent gains. Nicaea and Chalcedon provide concrete examples of the kind of things Christians

¹²¹ Rowan Williams, Why Study the Past? (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 26.

ought to say about God and Jesus Christ on the basis of the word of God. What the rest of us ought to imitate is not their fancy dress (i.e., Greek philosophical concepts) but their good theological judgment and biblical wisdom: they knew what they had to say to carry on the same drama of redemption in their own particular contexts.

Reading with the Spirit-led church—the community of the Canon extended in space and time—serves as a helpful subsidiary criterion. Church tradition provides a rich resource of case studies in how other members of the company of Jesus have made judgments concerning canonical correspondence as they sought to continue the apostolic tradition. By studying past improvisations, Christians today can learn how best to extend in new situations the same pattern of thinking, feeling, and acting instantiated by Christ and the apostles. Improvisatory coherence means that the beliefs and practices of local churches today must continue the same understanding action exemplified by the fathers and councils of the early church.

While the Canon alone is the norming norm, the consensus of the early ecumenical councils is a normed norm insofar as it displays biblical judgment in the context of Hellenistic culture and philosophy. Vincent was right: local churches ought to affirm what everyone has believed everywhere, at all times. Yes, there is development: the council of Nicaea did not replicate but improvised the concept of homoousios. Yet, because homoousios is now part of the catholic tradition, churches today must improvise in ways that go on in the same homoousios way, even if they do not explicitly invoke the same Greek concept. 122 However churches speak of Jesus Christ in new contexts, there must be continuity as concerns the underlying judgment instantiated by Nicaea: the Son who took on humanity has the same being—nature, properties, characteristics, etc.—as God the Father.

To invoke catholic sensibility as our third criterion for discerning right doctrinal development is to acknowledge the importance of doing theology in communion with the saints. By studying earlier creedal formulations, the church today gains a precious insight into the God of the gospel: who God is, who Jesus Christ is, and what is in Christ. 123 These

122 Minimally, this would mean not going against (i.e., explicitly denying) it.

¹²³ The doctrine of the Trinity is not simply a complicated aspect of the doctrine of God, but rather a summary or précis of the gospel itself. There can be communion with God only if Father, Son, and Spirit alike are each God. It is the Spirit who unites us to Christ and thus relates us to God. For a fuller treatment of this idea, see Fred Sanders, The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything (Wheaton,

formulations yield true insights, and for that reason must be valued and affirmed, even if there is more to be said.

Catholicity also affords us a practical gauge for distinguishing between levels of doctrine. Catholic sensibility alone allows the church to maintain a healthy tension between coherence (on essentials) and contingency (on nonessentials). Briefly: a first-level doctrine—a doctrine that identifies the persons of the triune God on whom the integrity of the gospel depends—is one in which the communion of the saints has already formed a consensus. 124 Surprising though it may at first appear, we must conclude that an evangelical account of the development of doctrine will at some point have recourse to ecclesiology: catholicity is implicit in the idea of doctrinal rank. It is difficult to distinguish between essential and nonessential doctrines without the criterion of catholic consensus. Level-1 doctrines represent the agreed universal judgments of the church: what Christians at all times and places must confess in order to preserve the intelligibility of the gospel (material principle) and partake of the fellowship of the saints (formal principle). Level-2 doctrines treat events (e.g., atonement, resurrection) and aspects of salvation history (e.g., image of God; sin; justification) that must be affirmed, though there is some scope for different interpretations. Disagreements about level-2 doctrines do not disqualify one from the fellowship of the saints, though they often represent points where there are "regional" differences (i.e., points at which confessions, theological traditions, denominations, and congregations diverge). Level-3 doctrines, though important, are usually not regarded as church-splitting differences, but teachings on which there can be a legitimate diversity of opinion, even in the local church. 125

The church is relevant to the development of doctrine in one other important respect: it is the place where Christians learn theology, the sum total of beliefs and practices that, when embodied in a local church, represent the church universal. The disciple-improviser learns the way of Jesus Christ through imitation and instruction when local churches go on in the same way as (i.e., continue) the catholic tradition. The develop-

IL: Crossway, 2010), and my "At Play in the Theodrama of the Lord: The Triune God of the Gospel," in *Theatrical Theology*, ed. Trevor Hart and Wesley Vander Lugt (Eugene, OR: Cascade, forthcoming). 124 Of particular note is the focus of the first six ecumenical councils on the identity of the triune God and, in particular, the person and natures of Jesus Christ.

¹²⁵ It is no coincidence that these three levels of doctrine more or less correspond to the universal, translocal, and local manifestations of the church. This is what we would expect given what I have called the "formal principle" of doctrinal development: catholicity (i.e., the length and breadth of the Spirit-indwelt body of Christ).

ment of doctrine is part and parcel of the church's task to fulfill the Great Commission to make disciples who know how to go on in the same way in different situations. Scripture is the norming norm, but it takes great time, and a Spirit-led company, to plumb its depths. Great Commission (evangelization); great time (tradition); great church (catholicity): a three-fold great is not quickly broken (Eccles. 4:12).

In sum: doctrine serves the cause of discipleship, the project of following and embodying Christ in ten thousand places. Doctrine develops in order to advance the cause of discipleship, and the gospel, forming disciples who know how to embody the mind of Christ at all times and in all places, disciples who exhibit *great understanding* of "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13).¹²⁶

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