

DEVELOPMENT OF DOCTRINE: AID OR BARRIER TO CHRISTIAN UNITY?

My title has two parts. The first, *Development of Doctrine*, is quite clear; it was chosen by the President of this society. The second, *Aid or Barrier to Christian Unity?* is involved in some obscurity; it is my own contribution to the choice of topic. Perhaps, then, an introductory word is in place here to clear up preliminary questions arising from my specification of the title.

One such question is why a novice in the field of ecumenism should presume to speak to you on that subject at all. My answer is partly to lay the blame on the Holy Spirit, who all too clearly means to involve everyone, expert or novice, in the ecumenical movement. Something wonderful, pentecostal, challenging, is going on in regard to Christian disunity, and we cannot evade the responsibility put upon us by the Spirit himself. Further, the invitation to speak on development of doctrine seemed to direct me in a rather special way towards the ecumenical aspect, for I have a strong conviction that the question of development is crucial in ecumenism; I have said so in writing without, however, eliciting much action or reaction,¹ and the chance to say so again before this audience proved irresistible.

A second question might be why I leave the title in question-form, and do not take a positive stand for one side or the other. Here I should first like to insist that the underlying statement is fully positive: development is a crucial question for ecumenism. If the statement is true, it does not really matter in the first instance whether development turns out to be an aid or a barrier; we have to study it anyway. But there is this point in leaving the title in question-

¹ "Development of Doctrine and the Ecumenical Problem," *Theological Studies* 23 (1962) 27-46. For proper evaluation notice that the article was originally written under the title, "How Inflexible is Catholic Dogma?" *Cross-light* (Montreal), 1961 (summer issue), pp. 14-26; this whole issue was devoted to ecumenism, but the specific topic assigned me was that indicated in the title I used. (Note: In the *TS* printing, p. 39, 9th line from the bottom, for "no less subject" read "no more subject.")

form, that the consequences of development depend in a measure on our own attitude towards it. A river can be, and *prima facie* is, a barrier between peoples who live on opposite shores; nevertheless it can also become the common highway to a further goal, and I am going to suggest that development plays an analogous role in Christian unity and disunity.

A third question will arise in regard to the words, Christian unity, for my illustrations will point discussion almost exclusively towards the Catholic-Protestant situation. This limitation has perhaps an excuse in my personal history, for I grew up at a time and place in which we were still very busy fighting the Protestants and felt very much more acutely our state of division from them. But in a wider historical context the limitation is gratuitous, and doctrinally, of course, it is without justification; so I can only plead the necessity of brevity and hope that the principles to be enunciated will have a wider application than I make of them.

And now to my paper which proceeds in four main steps.

I

My first point is that God reveals himself in sacred history and that this is revelation in a *primary* sense: history is the *fundamental* medium of revelation. God is a God who acts, and his mighty acts in the world are his word and message to men. Most of all he acted in his incarnate Son, and so the very epitome of revelation is the Christ-event: ". . . in former times God spoke to our forefathers . . . in fragmentary and varied fashion through the prophets. But in this the final age he has spoken to us in the Son. . . ." ²

I do not propose to justify this position now; I simply assume it as a proposition that crops up everywhere these days in theology and has become practically a cliché. But it is important to use clichés accurately too, so I allow myself two remarks in clarification of my use.

The first is that the doctrine can be based on a good Thomist principle. St. Thomas says that, as men use vocabulary to convey

² Heb 1:1. This and other New Testament passages I quote are from *The New English Bible*, Oxford and Cambridge, 1961.

their meaning, so God uses the very course of events to convey his.³ In other words, history is God's language; we move our vocal chords and human language issues from our lips with a meaning for our fellow-men; God moves the elements in the universe, the stars in their courses, men in their various activities, and a divine language is written in history for men to read and understand.

I do not say that the Thomist doctrine on this point is identical with the modern; there are obvious differences. St. Thomas was not thinking of universal history, he was explaining certain *types* of the New Testament found in the Old. And he certainly did not give any primacy to this medium of revelation; he holds, in fact, that, if the typical sense of scripture is to profit us, it has to be established elsewhere by the literal sense of some passage.⁴ But St. Thomas is in the habit of getting down to fundamentals, his principles often have a virtuality that extends far beyond the point he is making at the time, and I think that is what happens here; thus the principle that God uses men and things and events as we use our vocal apparatus, becomes available as a foundation for the modern doctrine that revelation is primarily the concrete totality of history centred in the Christ-event.

My other remark is the following: in my use of this doctrine, the propositional aspect of revelation is definitely retained. Nowadays it is customary to oppose the new view of revelation through history to the old view of revelation through true statements; I therefore ask for some attention to the point I am making and some effort not to involve me needlessly in the charges and counter-charges that are flung about by those who see an opposition between the old view and the new. My position is simple enough: I do not reduce revelation exclusively to propositions uttered by God, but I maintain that true propositions are an essential element in revelation; further, that God makes true statements through history with the same ease as prophet or evangelist using voice-box or writing materials.

A simple way to advert to the truth-element in revelation is to

³ *Quodl.* VII, q. 6, a. 2; see also a. 1.

⁴ *S.T.*, I, q. 1, a. 10 ad 1m; *Quodl.* VII, q. 6, a. 1 ad 3m & 4m.

analyze the encounter with God which the believing subject undergoes. What is this encounter? We think first on the simplest level of the face-to-face experience the apostles enjoyed when they saw and heard the Lord. But birds and beasts saw and heard the Lord, so something beyond this simple meaning of encounter is required, something specifically human. Now what differentiates man from bird and beast? We may locate the specifically human in wonder and idea; but wonder and idea were common to believers who said, "You are the Messiah" (Mk 8:29) and to unbelievers who said, "It is only by Beelzebub . . . that this man drives the devils out" (Mt 12:24). We are therefore carried forward another step to the necessity of the *true* idea as an intrinsic element in the encounter with God, the necessity of truth in the sense defined by John's purpose in writing his gospel, "that you may hold the faith that Jesus is the Christ" (Jn 20:31). That little word, *is*, as used by John, determines as clearly as need be the propositional element in revelation. If I repeat that this element does not exhaust revelation, that there are prior elements on the cognitional side, and subsequent elements on the side of loving response, I must insist also that truth is intrinsic to revelation, that without it belief is mere enthusiasm and theology a superfluity. Pardon me for spending so long on what is so obvious; the undefined clichés which clog popular theology force one to a tedious clarity.

I said, further, that God utters truth in the sense defined by "is" with the same ease as prophet or evangelist, and this too I have to insist on to the point of tedium, for it underlies the specific defense of development to be expounded here. It is quite common to talk of revelation through the medium of history; it is not so common to understand history as a divine language which makes statements in the strict sense. But what is lacking in history to invalidate it as a language which makes statements? Not the quality of the perceptible required for a sign; events are as perceptible as inkmarks on paper or vibrations on the eardrum. Not the quality of meaning deriving from the speaker, if St. Thomas is right. Not the possibility of interpretation by men, if the current view on prophets as primarily interpreters of history is correct. There does not really seem to be anything against history as language in the strict sense, except the

anthropomorphism that God must speak with a voice-box and write with a pen.

Now it makes a great difference in our understanding of development when we take seriously, in the Thomist sense, the principle that God speaks through events. The difference appears clearly in the way authors with other views reconcile development with the doctrine that revelation was completed in the apostolic era. For example, both K. Rahner⁵ and E. Schillebeeckx⁶ make strenuous efforts to show how later developments are contained already in the knowledge of the apostles and early writers of the church, and how the process of development is a true explicitation of what was implicit in that knowledge. But when we invoke the Thomist principle (neither of these authors does in the present question, as far as I know), a different program is open to us. We have a word spoken already which said far more than human interpreters till the end of time can fathom. Amos and Jeremiah, Paul and Matthew and Luke and John, all are human interpreters of that one word which is salvation-history in its totality, inspired interpreters to be sure, but human interpreters who do not exhaust the meaning of the divine language. Instead, therefore, of using the analogy of making explicit what was implicit, we might think of an archaeologist before a document written in a strange language; the word is uttered, but its meaning remains to be discovered in its full range.

The difference in language-media is the crucial point. The meaning of human language is limited by the mind of the human author,⁷

⁵ "The Development of Dogma," ch. 3 in *Theological Investigations* (London & Baltimore, 1961), pp. 39-78; also, "Ueberlegungen zur Dogmenentwicklung," *Schriften zur Theologie*, IV (Einsiedeln, 1960), pp. 11-50 (not yet translated into English, as far as I know).

⁶ "Exegesis, Dogmatics and the Development of Dogma," in the collection edited by H. Vorgrimler: *Dogmatic vs Biblical Theology* (Baltimore & Dublin, 1964), pp. 115-45.

⁷ What of the *sensus plenior*?

It is contradictory to predicate a contingent truth of God without a contingent reality that corresponds ontologically, an "extrinsic denominator" for the predication, a *terminus ad extra conveniens* (see B. Lonergan, *De Deo Trino*, II [Rome, 1964], pp. 217-21). "God is creator of the world" is true only if the world really exists in dependence on God; similarly, "God says that in the beginning was the Word" is true only if there is the created reality of the ap-

and this is acknowledged by exegetical procedures which build up dictionaries specifying the meaning of biblical words, try to discover the mind of Paul or Matthew or John, etc. But the language of salvation-history is not a human language; its meaning is not limited by human minds, but is measured only by the total intelligibility of the universe and the revelatory purpose God had in creation and redemption. There is then a vast surplus of meaning in history and the Christ-event; it is revelation in the strict sense of statements about the divine realities; and therefore the development of doctrine does not involve new revelation, it merely penetrates further and further into the meaning of a revelation given once-for-all in Christ.

appropriate statement uttered by God, in this case through John the evangelist. But the created reality defines and limits the contingent truth (it is the "terminus ad extra *conveniens*"), and it seems to me nonsense to predicate of God two different utterances and refer each to exactly the same extrinsic denominator. In other words, in so far as the defenders of the *sensus plenior* hold that in the same scriptural passage God intends two different meanings, but assign no difference external to God to account for the difference in predication, I think they are involved in incoherence.

However, there are at least three ways that occur to me of attributing a positive value to the quest for a *sensus plenior*. First, it testifies to the enduring belief of the faithful that there is a *surplus* of meaning in revelation beyond what we have yet understood, however one may finally explain it. Secondly, much that is said in favor of the *sensus plenior* demonstrates the occurrence in the sacred writer of what B. Lonergan calls the "heuristic" concept (*Insight. A Study of Human Understanding* [London & New York, 1957], see the Index): thus, our concept of being is heuristic, it is an indeterminate anticipation of what we may one day understand; thus too the Old Testament concept of the Messiah is heuristic; but notice that this heuristic sense is the sense of the human author. Thirdly, a statement may be uttered in a larger or a smaller context: thus, "not guilty" in the smaller context of a dictionary might mean just "not guilty" but in the larger context of the total legal process of a country might mean the assertion of one's right to go free unless convicted of crime. This gives two different extrinsic denominators for predicating a "word" of God: there is the smaller context of the human author, in which God means what the human author means; there is the larger context of the total process of interpreting the primary word of revelation that is sacred history. In this process God's ultimate intention is to bring us to the fulness of meaning, we can argue that his ultimate intention pervades every particular interpretation he inspires, and therefore that in the larger context he means the whole in each part. This gives a defined meaning to the *sensus plenior*, but at the same time makes it superfluous by identifying it with the sense of history: the meaning God ultimately intends us to find in history is the meaning he puts there as he "utters" it.

It is true that the first interpretations are basic to all others; only on the basis of "the traditions handed down to us by the original eyewitnesses and servants of the Gospel" (Lk 1:2) can we say anything at all about the meaning of the Christ-event. But this is equally true of all re-interpretation of the past; it is analogous to perception, as psychologists use the term, in which immediate sensation plays a necessary but insufficient role, with other elements entering from memory, understanding, etc.; it is, in fact, analogous to the interpretation of human language, where the mere inkmarks on paper are quite insufficient without the vast accumulation of interpreters' knowledge gathered in dictionaries, grammars, and other tools of the trade.

Before leaving this first part, let me illustrate its two main contentions from the New Testament itself. The doctrine that Christ is himself a word to men is beautifully illustrated in the second letter to the Corinthians. St. Paul is defending himself against the charge of being fickle, of saying Yes or No at once. In this rather childish context he writes one of those soaring passages for which he is dear to theologians:

As God is true, the language in which we address you is not an ambiguous blend of Yes and No. The Son of God, Christ Jesus, proclaimed among you by us . . . was never a blend of Yes and No. With him it was, and is, Yes. He is the Yes pronounced upon God's promises, every one of them (2 Cor 1:18-20).

There was a question about God, whether he was faithful to his promises. God answers Yes to the question. His answer is a statement, but that statement is not the sound or shape of the English Y-E-S, or even of the equivalent Greek or Hebrew or Aramaic. That statement is the very person of his Son sent into the world and answering the question in his own reality as God-Man.

The doctrine that no human words, inspired though they be, exhaust the meaning of God's primary word to his people, is illustrated by collecting the New Testament titles given to Christ. V. Taylor, in a little book called *The Names of Jesus*, lists forty-two of them, some with sub-divisions: Jesus is Son, he is Lord, he is Alpha and Omega, and so forth. Every title adds something to our knowledge

of the incarnate Word, and so to our knowledge of what God is saying in the Son, but by the same token every title is partial. Neither is there any reason to suppose that taken all together they exhaust the meaning of God's utterance when he spoke his Son into the world. In fact, there is plenty of reason to suppose they do not, if we remember that the riches of that Son are unfathomable (Eph 3:8), and that the judgment with which God governs the course of salvation-history is unsearchable (Rom 11:33).

II

My second point deals with the counterpart to God speaking; that is, it deals with men hearing. More specifically, it deals with the basic condition for hearing on the side of man, which is his capacity for learning.

That capacity is manifested in questions, and it is the question which promotes that progressive penetration of the word of God by which we define development. The occasion of Paul's doctrine on Christ as the divine Yes was the (tacit) question, Is God faithful to his promises? The great discourse in Romans (chs. 9-11) on the destiny of Israel was likewise the fruit of a question. The whole book of Job is one long struggle with the question, How reconcile the justice of God with his treatment of the law-abiding man? The forty-two titles given Christ in the New Testament are just so many responses to the question who he is: "Who can this be whom even the wind and the sea obey?" (Mk 4:41) "Are you the one who is to come . . . ?" (Mt 11:3) "If you are the Messiah say so plainly" (Jn 10:24). "Mary treasured up all these things and pondered over them" (Lk 2:19).—The four passages are all forms of one question, but the answer is an infinite series.

It is extraordinary how prominent the question is in the Bible as an occurrence, *in actu exercito*. It is just as extraordinary how little attention the biblical reference works give it. You can find articles on the word "inquire," you will find hardly anything on the question as an activity of the biblical writers, on the question as a religious exercise, as a force in Jewish or Christian life.⁸ Yet questioning is the

⁸ The problem should be raised on a wider front of the insights to be gained by studying the cognitional *activity* of the people of God and not just

most fundamental of specifically human activities, and this in the sphere of the sacred as well as the profane. Bernard Lonergan says, "When an animal has nothing to do, it goes to sleep. When a man has nothing to do, he may ask questions."⁹ Cardinal Newman makes a similar point on the emergence of the trinitarian question from the baptismal formula: "It was impossible to go on using words without an insight into their meaning."¹⁰

Now I believe it clarifies the course and process of development if, instead of seeing it as the explicitation of the implicit, we examine it rather as the response to the native human activity of questioning. Again I have some remarks in exposition of my point, this time three.

First, it clarifies the difference between exegesis and theology while enabling us to define both as study of the word of God. Both are driven by the intellectual dynamism which is manifested in the question. But the exegete properly asks what Paul or Matthew or John said and thought about God and his dealings with men, and then we have what Lonergan calls theology *in oratione obliqua*.¹¹ The theologian, on the other hand, properly asks about God himself and his dealings with men, and then we have theology proper, theology *in oratione recta*. The difference is illustrated in conciliar definitions, which rarely tell us what scripture says, however much they quote it in support. Ordinarily, they tell us what is or is not: the Son *is* equal to the Father, man is *not* able to keep the law without special grace, and so forth.

In the present context this means that the exegete studies the revelation which comes to us through the sacred writer, revelation in that derivative sense which is already an interpretation; he studies the divine word which is also a human word. But the theologian studies that primary revelation which is the universe in its historical course; he studies the divine word which is not a human word. He should think of his work therefore as asking not just the intelligibility

their language and concepts. This I have illustrated in sketchy fashion in "Neither Jew nor Greek, but One Human Nature and Operation in All," *Philippine Studies* 13 (1965) 546-71.

⁹ *Insight . . .*, p. 10.

¹⁰ *Tracts Theological and Ecclesiastical* (London, 1924), p. 152.

¹¹ Unpublished lectures on the method of theology.

of the divine realities but also their meaning. For scientist and philosopher the world has intelligibility as corresponding to understanding; but, for the theologian who adopts the notion of revelation I have described, the world has meaning as corresponding to a word spoken by God to be heard by men, and study of theology takes on the same intersubjective quality as study of scripture does.

My second remark is that there are two types of question that are native to the human mind.¹² There are questions for direct understanding; in the presence of data, sights and sounds, experience in the strict sense, the mind of man is in a state of wonderment; the answer to this state of mind is an idea, a possible explanation. But ideas as such are all merely possible explanations; the dynamism of human intellect carries one to a further question, the question for reflection: Is my possible explanation the actual one? Is my bright idea correct? And the answer to this state of mind is a judgment dealing with truth, being, or what is.

This pattern also helps clarify the process of development: the individual element, the charismatic, the theological, all find their fullest exercise in responding to the first question on the level of understanding and ideas. But the church as a body, the institutional, the authoritative, these all find their proper exercise on the second level of judgment.

This means that the widest range of possibilities obtains on the level of ideas, and unlimited freedom reigns. How can you prohibit the occurrence of an idea? If it occurs, it occurs, and there is nothing pope or council can do about it. How, in fact, do ideas occur? How did the idea of Mary's Assumption first occur? Was it in the meditation of some sleepless eremite, in the dream of a pious widow, in the study of a dull theologian reading the dull work of another dull theologian, in the effort of a preacher to create a sensation, under inspiration in a mystic? Who knows how it first occurred, and in any case what difference? Ideas are a dime a dozen, though bright ideas might come a little higher.

But truth is not so cheaply won. Truth is not just an idea, even

¹² See Lonergan, *Insight*. . . . Various references are given in the Index, s. v. Questions, but see especially pp. 271-74.

though it be a bright one. Truth is single, truth is objectively determinate, truth in the field of mystery is reached only with the help of God giving more than the natural light of judgment can attain. It may be that we do not always advert to the two distinct steps determined *de jure* by two distinct questions; perhaps *de facto* we jump uncritically from the occurrence of an idea to its assertion as truth. But the *magisterium* has the task of reminding us, sometimes painfully, of the difference. Freedom for the individual to get ideas, yes; freedom for the individual to pronounce them true? Naturally, he forms his opinion but it is not he, it is the whole church that has the role of defining truth. *Securus judicat orbis terrarum*.

My third remark will be brief: questions go on for ever, mostly in a dialectical process. Questions never cease: the answer to one becomes the basis for another. We ascend the mountain of divine mystery by a series of plateaus. The meaning of Christ is always subject to new questioning and, when Teilhard de Chardin asked about the relation of Christ to the Omega-point of evolution, he was doing essentially what Paul and Matthew and John did, each in the terms familiar to him. Further, the questions tend to take a dialectical pattern as first one side, then the other, is considered in a relationship that is partly opposition, partly complementarity. From the unity of Christ at Ephesus we came to the duality of his natures at Chalcedon; from the primacy of the pope at Vatican I to the collegiality principle at Vatican II.

III

My first point was the idea of revelation through history; it seemed to me to supply a principle of development in the inexhaustible meaning of the word spoken. My second point was the human capacity to learn manifested in questions, which seemed to me to supply a principle of development on the side of man hearing, one that is quite unlimited in intention. But on this side we have as yet not an adequate principle of attainment; judgment in the field of divine truth is more than human, so we need a divine principle of development also on the receiving side, and this—my third point—we find in the doctrine of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In Karl Barth's trinitarian doctrine, the Father is Revealer, the Son is Revelation, and the Holy Spirit is Revealedness, where Revealedness refers to the impartation of revelation or its reception on the side of man through the work of the Spirit.¹³ I do not use this analysis of revelation to *prove* the trinitarian doctrine, as I think Barth does, but it seems to me valid as an explanation of the "economic" Trinity and helpful for the present question. It is clear enough, in fact, from St. John's theology that the role of the Spirit is not to bring new revelation but is determined in every respect in function of the Son's role: "He will glorify me, for everything that he makes known to you he will draw from what is mine" (Jn 16:14). The Spirit is sent, therefore, to enable us to receive the Son; in the present context, his role is that of enabling us to hear the word of revelation completed in the Son.

Now John expresses his notion of revelation most often in terms of Christ's human word or words, and therefore conceives the role of the Spirit as that of *recalling* the word Christ spoke: he "will teach you everything, and will call to mind all that I have told you" (Jn 14:26). Luke also thinks in these terms: As Peter meditates on the vision recorded in chapter ten of Acts, his understanding of Christ and his mission undergoes a development. It is the Holy Spirit who speaks to Peter on this occasion and leads him forward in his development (Acts 10:19), but in a later explanation this development is interpreted as recall: "Then I recalled what the Lord had said to me . . ." (Acts 11:16). All of which accords with what we now know of the habit the sacred writers had of attributing words to Jesus that expressed their own theology.

If, however, we think of revelation as primarily given through sacred history, and of hearing the word as most fundamentally interpreting and hearing the word of history, then the role of the Spirit has to be correspondingly modified. He will not merely recall the words of the Lord to the apostles, but he will help them and us interpret the word of God which was spoken through events in the history centred on the Christ-event. I do not think there will be any

¹³ See Claude Welch, *The Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (London, 1953), *passim* but especially pp. 168-72. (I believe this book was originally published in the United States under the title, *In His Name*.)

real difficulty over such a modification for those who admit my first point, but I wish, for the third time, to make some remarks in clarification.

The first is a truism: The Spirit is really given. His sending is just as real as that of the Son. It has a purpose as essential for salvation-history. It results in a presence as significant for the life of the church. In some way it is even more advantageous for the church to have the Spirit rather than the Son: "it is for your good that I am leaving you. If I do not go, your Advocate will not come . . ." (Jn 16:7). I apologize for the truism; creatures of sense that we are, we have continually to remind ourselves that the Spirit's presence is really real.

My second remark is less of a truism, but I hope not less true. It is this, that, whereas the Christ-event happened at a definite time and place long ago in Palestine, the Spirit-event did not happen at a definite time and place in a once-for-all fashion; it did not merely happen long ago in Palestine, it goes on all over the world till the end of time. The Christ-event marks a point at the centre of history; the Spirit-event characterizes the whole messianic era which is spread over these last days for we do not know how many centuries. The Spirit is permanent gift—no one will quarrel with that: "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another to be your Advocate, who will be with you for ever" (Jn 14:16). But we are saying a little more than is ordinarily understood by "permanent gift": we are saying the giving is a recurring activity. For the Spirit resides in the hearts of men, nowhere else on earth; and men keep recurring. So the Spirit is continually being sent from the Father in the name of the Son. Father Schillebeeckx refers to Pentecost in the New Testament as less an event on a particular day than "a continuous activity,"¹⁴ and if the Spirit is permanent gift then our argument should extend that continuous activity till the end of time.

Earlier I indicated some doubt that we really took seriously the doctrine of history as revelation; now I have to express my doubt that we really take seriously the extension of the Spirit-event through the whole messianic era. When we take both points seriously the

¹⁴ *Worship* 35 (1960-61) 341.

consequences for a theory of development are quite remarkable. If history is the primary medium of revelation, we eliminate the objection that development requires new revelation; now we may add that, if the giving of the Spirit is a continuous activity, we eliminate the objection that the once-for-all character of the early church excludes from us the power of hearing revelation in the same way early Christians did. For we have clarified the *hapax* character of Christian beginnings, which has been such a bone of contention between Catholics and Protestants. Certainly there was an original, a unique, a once-for-all character in the events of the Holy Land nineteen centuries ago. But in what does that once-for-all character consist? We can put it under two headings: the sending of the Son, and the apostolic witness to the Son. And what is not *hapax* and unique and once-for-all? It is the sending of the Spirit, which is continuous throughout time.

Some such view is really postulated by the relation of the Christian era to that of the preparation for Christ. For on the contrary view we have God speaking to us still from the Old Testament, but we have no corresponding activity in the centuries following Christ; it is as if, with the sending of the Spirit, real initiative on the part of God ceased, and the nineteen centuries after Christ showed a diminution of providential care in comparison with the nineteen that preceded.

IV

My final step is to relate the foregoing three points to the question of Christian unity as it affects especially Catholics and Protestants. I intend to view this aspect, as I did the first three questions, in the widest possible perspective. This will serve the jesuitical purpose of avoiding details of scholarship I am not prepared to handle, but it has the better purpose of keeping us out of the ruts of old controversies; we have been in them so long, and they are worn so deep, and it is so hard to move freely in a broader sweep once you are in them.

I am therefore going to ask what happened in the 1500s, but to ask the question with the utmost generality. I omit all discussion of scripture and tradition, of original sin and the state of human

nature, of faith and justification, of the sacraments and sacrifice. Behind these particular quarrels, what really was happening? Speaking always from a doctrinal viewpoint—my concern at the moment is not with the state of morality at the time—I suggest that most fundamentally what happened was the emergence into clarity of the difference between the 1500s and the first century as documented in the New Testament. It was the Reformers who saw the difference most vividly; and, unable to account for it, they rejected the 1500s in favor of a return to the beginnings. Catholics, on the contrary, clung tenaciously to what they had in the present; they could hardly deny the asserted difference, they affirmed in their own way a continuity with their beginnings, but they were in fact no more able than the Protestants to link their present adequately with the past of the New Testament.

There was in other words a common failure to understand the fact of development. How could it be otherwise? If the 1500s discovered the fact of difference, it would be only the 1800s that would discover the fact of development (Vincent of Lerins is really of slight significance here), and only the 1900s that would begin to assess the discovery accurately.

If this hasty sketch is valid, the consequences for ecumenism are important. For it means that agreement on the beginnings of Christianity does not eliminate difficulties between Catholic and Protestant. There is, in fact, a large measure of agreement on beginnings: Catholic exegesis is hardly distinguishable from Protestant, as is right; the problem of apostolic tradition, if not eliminated, is cut down to size, as is also right. And in some circles the highest optimism reigns, as if at last we had practically overcome the barriers that divide us. But, of course, these are not the circles that are most attached to dogma, and I cannot share their optimism. In my view the real differences are only now emerging with all clarity. The real and crucial differences regard not the beginning, but what happened afterwards; they regard the fact and significance of development.

At this point it could be objected with great show of reason that I have simply loaded the question in favor of the Catholics. For the thrust of my first three points is certainly to justify a theory of

development. Development is therefore legitimate and is to be accepted. Catholics accept it, Protestants do not. The conclusion follows easily: Protestants need only do their homework in the theory of development and all will be well again in the body of Christ.

The matter is not quite so simple. I indeed believe that Protestants must attend to development more than they have done in the past; at present it is almost exclusively a Catholic question—you can look in vain in most of the great Protestant works of doctrine for even a mention of the question.¹⁵ I believe too that my first three points do justify development, and do so in a way that should appeal to Protestants on their own principles. I believe further—and I am sorry that I have not been able to go into this aspect—that development responds to Protestant aspirations to make the word of God immediate, relevant, and contemporary, and could thus be for them a positive help to unity. But we Catholics have our own homework to do if development is not to be like the river that is a barrier, but like the river that is a common highway to a common goal. For it is not just the general position we take for a development after the New Testament that repels Protestants; it is our rather one-sided way of viewing development, whose correction, therefore, might make the notion more palatable to Protestants.

The summary statement, in my view, of what Catholics have to do is this: we must attend more to the process itself and less exclusively to the results of the process. The Marian dogmas and other definitions are results of the process, and we know that each side approaches the discussion of such dogmas with something of a chip on its shoulder. But suppose we together look more at the process. Suppose we study the movement of ideas even in the New Testament itself, where we might observe, for example, the shift of emphasis from an other-worldly spirituality in the letters to the Thessalonians and Corinthians, when the *parousia* seemed imminent, to a more this-worldly spirituality in the pastorals, where the church seems to be settling in for a longer stay. This kind of approach,

¹⁵ Or you meet occasional references that simply reject development; thus Max Thurian, "Développement du dogme et tradition selon le catholicisme moyen et la théologie réformée," *Verbum Caro* 1 (1947) 145-67, tells us: Not development but repetition.

carried through the critical periods of history, would bring out the complementarity of apparently opposed ideas in the dialectic, would enable us to assess more accurately both the contribution of the other side and the defects of our own, would expose the relativity of the merely relative, and would link our efforts more cooperatively with those of the Protestants in the ongoing process which is our common penetration of the meaning of the Christ for us and for our times. As I have spent some time in justifying development more especially for the sake of Protestants, let me spend my few remaining minutes in drawing attention to some Catholic deficiencies of understanding.

My first brief and really quite obvious suggestion: can we not be less grudging in learning from Protestants? Gold is where you find it, and so is intelligence, even religious intelligence. Yet how hesitatingly we have moved towards an appreciation of scripture, towards a proper devaluation of merely human works and merely human institutions, towards the liberty of the individual, towards the idea of perpetual reform in the church. A footnote to this heading: if the Reformers of the 1500s had ideas worth adopting, their descendants of the 1900s will have them too; if the movement that broke with the Catholic church had within it elements of a valid development, then we may expect that development has also gone forward among Protestants in their state of separation from us.

My second suggestion, still within the bounds of the obvious: that we, as individuals, pay some attention to the possibility—the real, concrete possibility—of being carried ourselves into heretical positions. Some supporters of Ephesus, within one generation of their triumph, were backed straight into heresy by their refusal to accept Chalcedon. Suppose there is a similar dialectical movement between Trent and the present, and suppose our fathers at Trent defined Catholic truth legitimately indeed but onesidedly, and suppose the Reformers in their underlying intention stood for valid aspirations whose hour for fulfillment has now come in the great church—can any of us claim immunity from the danger the followers of Cyril succumbed to at Chalcedon?

My third suggestion: to attend more to the process is to welcome more warmly the dialectical play of ideas which is necessary to the

process. At the term of discussion, when judgment is pronounced, you have truth and error as white and black—between Yes and No *non datur tertium*, at least with regard to the specific issue settled. But in the process there is a stage prior to truth in which you have not only a *tertium*, but a thousand possibilities; truth is Yes or No, but ideas are a dime a dozen. After Nicea you either hold the equality of the Son or you are a heretic; but on the way to Nicea you have the long dialectic of ideas by which the question was sufficiently clarified to make Athanasius and Nicea possible.¹⁶ There were indeed mistaken judgments on the way, but not such as merited immediate condemnation. Must we always have our fingers on the trigger of condemnation? It is a safe bet that, if the "Death of God" theologians were Catholics, they would be condemned by now; but is there not some advantage in having them around to jolt us out of our complacent intellectual lethargy? We suppressed modernism sixty years ago and have not yet come to terms with its legitimate aspirations. It is a pastoral question, to be decided on pastoral principles, when a movement of ideas is to be checked and when it is to be allowed to run its course; but it seems to me that in the future we must be more willing to let the ideas occur and be debated, and trust the self-correcting process of human learning, guided by the Holy Spirit, to come to the truth in due time, and to enrich us in this way with a clearer apprehension of what we hold and what we do not hold.

My fourth suggestion: if particular movements are to be allowed their freedom for the sake of the definitive development that will result, we should remember also that the *status quo* itself is not the goal but a point in the process. The Catholic totality that we receive from our fathers, accumulated tradition in the widest possible sense of the word, is in fact a hodge-podge in which defined dogmas mingle with opinions and outright mistakes, pious practises can be infected with superstition, and the merely relative readily assumes the character of the absolute. As such, it is always subject to critical evaluation and discrimination. Every one of us, as he goes through

¹⁶ B. Lonergan, *De Deo Trino*, I (Rome, 1964); see the "*Pars Prima*" of the book (pp. 15-112), and the "*Aspectus Dialecticus*" (pp. 137-54) in the proof of thesis I.

life, is involved in a process of correcting mistakes, discarding untenable opinions, expelling superstition, cutting the merely relative down to size. If every one in the church does it, why be troubled that the church as a whole must be committed to such self-criticism? This should trouble us the less, since in fact we implicitly subject New Testament Christians themselves to the same discriminating tests. They practised baptism on behalf of the dead (1 Cor 15:29), we do not. St. Paul required women to cover their heads when they prayed or prophesied, and argued his case with full theological thoroughness; but we regard his precept as conditioned by his times and circumstances. They gave the Lord forty-two names; we legitimately allow several to remain in disuse, as being less meaningful for us today (not so legitimately do we fail to exercise our creative imagination in supplying other names that suit our times).¹⁷

My fifth and final suggestion is a little more general: attention to the process of development brings out the need of a theology of change as such. We have a theology of what is, we need a theology of what goes on. And this is the more necessary since the changes now taking place are so much more radical than they were in earlier times. The movement of the last centuries has not been just from one point of particular objective dogma to another; it is a movement on much more fundamental levels, like the movement from an other-worldly ethic to a this-worldly, or even more radically, from the object itself to the subject, from the study of God to ourselves as studying God. Surely we need stable bases and fixed points of refer-

¹⁷ Some may find it self-contradictory to talk in one and the same paper of the infallibility of the whole church and of the whole church being involved in the self-correcting process of learning. But infallibility refers to a definitive judgment in which the truth-function of the church is at stake; the self-correcting process is prior to that definitive judgment and then the truth-function of the church is not yet at stake.

In general the truth-function emerges only when a question demanding Yes or No for an answer is somehow present; meanwhile various ideas may enter one's mentality, various opinions may be current, without truth being an issue. Thus, as far as I know, the "three-storied universe" of the early Christians never came up for the judgment, Yes or No? The question did come up, Is the Son equal to the Father, but prior to that there were many ideas pertaining to truth-on-the-way and contributing to the final formulation of the question; as a matter of fact, Arius contributed greatly to the formulation of the Nicene question.

ence—I hope I insist on this as much as anyone should—I merely say that in our new universe they are not enough; we need Telstars as well as lighthouses.

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I might continue the list of suggestions, which has by no means run out—one does not so easily exhaust the obvious—but my time has run out. May I make this remark in conclusion? The five suggestions of my fourth point are already platitudes to many of you and will surely be merely hilarious reading for a future generation; if I have judged it proper to utter them in the present state of rather general uncertainty in the Catholic Church, I would not wish those of you who have already gone far beyond me in this direction to judge the whole paper by its final part. I myself would wish it to be judged by its first part where I have borrowed from Aquinas a principle that seems to me both fertile for present problems and neglected by most of those who treat them.

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