

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF DOCTRINE, THE NOTION THAT THE CHURCH KEEPS LEARNING

There is tension between how Christianity has developed and the Bible teaching that divine inspiration as in making new scriptures and new prophets is over since the last apostle died.

In Cardinal John Henry Newman's Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine he acknowledged that the Church of Rome different from the Early Church but held that Protestantism was not identical to the Early Church. According to him the Early Church was the same religion as Roman Catholicism and that the Church learned more about the gospel through time and eventually it came to teach explicit Roman Catholic doctrine. The primitive Church evolved not into Roman Catholicism but into clarified Catholicism.

He gave seven tests to show when a genuine development has taken place for it can happen that some developments are not developments at all but errors. Among the tests is the idea that there must be a basic doctrine that implies other ones so that they can be developed from it and that another that this basic doctrine must come from the apostles to be a real development.

Another is that the development must fit the other revealed doctrines. Another is that the development must be logically derived from the basic root doctrine.

Another is that the development be the only possible one for trouble would ensue if a doctrine implied two or three different things. Another is that the development must have taken the simplest road to be genuine. For example, the simplest implication of a doctrine should be the accepted one.

Another is that the developing be done by or validated by the legitimate authorities in the Church. The doctrine must be meant to be developed as well. For example, if you say that the doctrine of original sin implies baptism is necessary for infants to get rid of it then the problem is proving that original sin meant to imply that. Perhaps God wipes the sin after it appears without baptism or perhaps it will not be pardoned until the child is able to renounce sin or perhaps if the child die God will send it to Limbo from where it can go to Heaven if it chooses. For a doctrine to be really open to development it would have to explicitly say that it is just a root. The example we have given fits absolutely none of the rules and yet it was a "developed" doctrine that is one of the foundation stones of Roman Catholicism. It proves that Roman Catholicism is wrong and a hoax. It really did alter and add to the Christian faith.

Despite the opposition when they first came out, Newman's ideas were locked into the Church's official stance at the Second Vatican Council (page 210, The Lion Concise Book of Christian Thought).

It is a fact that few if any of the Catholic developments are in harmony with these rules. The Church says it has to understand doctrines better all the time meaning that the way a doctrine was stated before could be inaccurate so it has to be improved. When Hell used to be thought of as a fire with demons with horns in it under the earth that could have led to the development of misleading doctrines, say that Hell will one day break out on earth and that demons have bodies and that the sinners there deserve to burn as if their despair is not enough. The rules are useless except for exposing the sham of Roman Catholicism.

The Development of Doctrine is a meaningless hypothesis for it opens the way to invent new doctrines. For example, the early Church insisted that sin committed after baptism had to be paid for in penance. Newman argued that the Church when dealing with this idea came to discover that it implied that indulgences, merits, purgatory, prayers, and masses for the dead should be believed in. But it could be argued that death is the punishment that deals with the debt. The Bible says that is what death is for (Romans 6:23). And it could be that God will be strict and instead of sending you to purgatory he will miraculously and secretly amplify your last agony at the point of death to pay off the debt in full. And it could be that we can't help the souls in Purgatory. Newman was lying. And when religion is full of mystery – it cannot explain an all-good God allowing evil to happen despite having the power to stop it - what sense does it make to say that the debt of penance infers these things for what it infers may be beyond our grasp of logic and inconceivable to our human earthly logic?

Newman knew that if the early Church taught salvation through the blood of Jesus and that anybody who is a sincere Christian and accepts Jesus as Lord and Saviour is in this Church which is an invisible communion that that was enough to identify it with Protestantism for that is Protestantism reduced to its bare essentials. Even Catholics have an invisible true Church like that the Protestants believe in so it is nonsense to point to an organisation and call it the true Church for it could be run by secret apostates. Yet Newman needs an impeccable organisation to make his system work and to prove that the

system directs one to faith in the visible Roman Catholic Church. See the point? Jesus said that the Church would never be destroyed but the Vatican could apostatise meaning that those who are true to the Church as it used to be would be the true Church though they no longer have an infallible head. The Church says that infallibility belongs to the Church as a whole though it is only exercised through Episcopal councils of the Church so a break-off of laypeople could then function as infallible if they are the true faith. So pointing to an organisation like Newman did as the holder of the true developments does not work for he is begging the question: he assumes the Catholic hierarchy are the guardians of the faith which need not be right. The Catholic Church has been frequently accused of apostasy by its own. Even by Newman's standards, the Church must have left the faith and the true Church in the middle of the nineteenth century when it made the Immaculate Conception a dogma for it is neither in early tradition or implied by it. The Development of Dogma idea suggest that a new dogma can occur to a school in the Church and if the Church won't exalt that dogma to dogma-hood then the school can leave the Church and do it itself and become the true Church. Church means a teaching body and community. The idea of a true Church is impossible to accept for parts of the Church will have greater closeness to the truth than will the official heads for there are many things not definitively settled. The section will be a truer Church or body of teaching than the mainstream Church.

The Lion Concise Book of Christian Thought gives a good refutation of Newman's views. I repeat them here with my own observations.

The first problem is that Newman never justified the developments adequately and ignored the fact that the early Church could have been mistaken say in the matter of penance following forgiveness doctrine which denied that God is generous with his forgiveness. It could be said the doctrine was heretical though the Church accepted it and should have known better for it was not an offshoot or anything of its doctrine that God was love and mercy and generosity themselves but contrary to it.

Second, Newman does not think about the Eastern Orthodox claim to be the true infallible Catholic Church even though its system is older than the Catholic one. Catholics will say that perhaps it did not develop enough so the oldness proves nothing. But it is itself-sufficient and that is the refutation of the Catholic reply. If the Church has a sufficient system for getting revelation from God and being a Church of God why should it need to develop into a papal system?

To make the Church the one that has the divine guidance to say what scripture means could and will lead to the Church stopping the Bible from being able to speak for itself. The Church becomes the real authority and the Bible is its subject. It is just like the New Testament doctrine that the Old Testament must be read the Christian way. Without the New Testament our interpretation and understanding of the Old will be radically different. If the Catholic Church officially decides that John 6 is all about the transformation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus and uses its infallibility to see that then we are not allowed to wonder if the doctrine is really taught by the scripture at all. Newman even said that just as the Old Testament has no authority except as interpreted by the New Testament which is the supreme authority giving the Old only a relative authority so the New Testament has only a relative authority because the Church and the pope have the power to decree what it means by the power of the Holy Spirit in them. This is blasphemous. It is a mistake for a Catholic to go to the Bible to prove the papacy when the book is no good without the pope for that is seeing the Bible not as it is or might be but as the pope says it should be seen.

Apparently, the only trace of a development of doctrine in the early Church was its recognition of the view that that ordinations administered by heretics were valid (page 57, Roman Catholic Claims).

The Catholic Church was not revealed lock, stock and barrel by Jesus and the apostles which everybody admits therefore all its new doctrines are not developments but corruptions and should be discarded

