

Development of Doctrine

IS THERE to be no development of doctrine in Christ's Church? Certainly there should be great development. Who would be so grudging towards his fellow-men and so hostile to God as to try to prevent it? But **care should be taken to ensure that it really is development of the faith and not alteration. Development implies that each point of doctrine is expanded within itself, while alteration suggestions that a thing has been changed from what it was into something different.**

It is desirable then that development should take place, and that there should be a great and vigorous **growth in understanding**, knowledge and wisdom of every individual as well as of all the people, on the part of each member as well as of the whole Church, gradually over the generations and ages. But it must be growth within the limits of its own nature, that is to say **within the framework of the same dogma and of the same meaning.**

Let religion, which is of the spirit, **imitate the processes of the body.** For, although bodies develop over the years and their individual parts evolve, they do not change into something different. It is true that there is a great gap between the prime of youth and the maturity of later years, but the people who reach these later years are the same people who were once adolescents. So, although the size and outward appearance of any individual may change, it is still the same person, and the nature remains the same.

The limbs of infants are tiny, while those of young men are large, but they are the same limbs. The man has no more parts to his body than "the little child: and if there are parts that appear with age and greater maturity they are already present earlier in embryo. As a result, it can be said that nothing new is produced in old men that was not already present in an undeveloped form when they were boys.

There is no doubt, then, that this is the correct and legitimate rule for development and the best and most striking order of growth, if the passage of years sees those parts evolve in the adult, which the Creator in His wisdom had prepared in him beforehand when he was a child.

But if the human form is changed into some shape that is not of its own kind, or at least something is added or taken away from the full complement of its members, then the whole body must perish or become a monster or at least be weakened in some way.

It is fitting, then, that **Christian doctrine too should follow these laws of development**, so that with the passage of years it may be strengthened, with time it may make progress and with age it may achieve greater profundity. Long ago our ancestors sowed the seeds of the faith in the field of the Church. It would be quite incongruous and wrong if their descendents were to reap the weeds of error in place of the harvest of truth.

Rather, it is right and fitting that there should be no discrepancy between the final results and the beginning. From the seed that was planted, that is the teaching of the gospel, we should reap a harvest of wheat, that is the doctrine that has developed. So then, when something evolves from those beginnings, as from seeds, it should now be received with joy and cultivated with care.

THE TEXT above is from St Vincent de Lerins in *The Divine Office* vol. III, Friday Week 27, p. 626.

He also gave a "test of Catholicity": *Quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus creditum est*, "What has been believed everywhere, always, and by all".

Compare Blessed John Henry Newman, *The Development of Christian Doctrine*, his convert's act of faith in 1845.

DEVELOPING THE BASICS

THE UNVEILING of God and His plan for man was made by our Lord Jesus Christ. It is called the revelation of the Deposit of Faith.

Some of it is written down in Scripture, more of it is handed down by word of mouth called Tradition.

With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Church has **developed** the contents of the deposit of faith from Scripture and Tradition, yet without contradicting them. This is what is called the Development of Christian Doctrine.

Our special non-Biblical Christian words and phrases are such developments, e.g. incarnation, Catholic, Trinity, consubstantial, transubstantiation, Mass, Eucharist, original-sin, Purgatory, infallible, archangel, character, state-of-grace, grace-of-state.

A good example of a deepening in understanding is **the doctrine of Mary as the second Eve**, from the second century, developed from Genesis 3:20, John 19:26-27 and 1 Corinthians 15:22.

HUMAN FLOWERING NOT AUTOMATIC

MAN IS MADE in the image of a Maker. Since he is not the Creator, but in His Image, even his best is only produced bit by bit.

The descendants of Adam discovered &/or invented &/or developed the simple basic things without which our life on earth would be greatly impoverished:-

- language
- fire
- domestic animals
- the wheel
- the boat.

Some refer to the ancients as cave man, primitive man, and so on, and trace a steady upward progress as though it were inevitable. While it is true that man spends a lot of time with mind and hand to improve his lot, his behaviour has too often gone backwards, spiraled downwards. **Original sin** is the most obvious and logical explanation

of human wickedness.

There is a counter movement to evil upwards towards repentance and virtue: it is best explained by the interventions of the Provident Creator.

The ancient triumphs of language, fire, domestic animals, wheels and boats have been developed and improved down to our own day. And also, down to our day, they have been misused for evil.

Man's misuse of his mind is seen in philosophy and theology — the highest reaches of his thinking. The most crippling, cruel retrogressions in human thought are from philosophers and theologians.

GENUINE HUMAN DEVELOPMENTS

Language

GRAMMAR is about words, the basics of language. Words can be grouped as various parts of speech — **nouns** for naming things, verbs for doing actions. Grammar grows and develops, enriching language with **adjectives** and **adverbs**, to qualify nouns and verbs.

Nouns developed further by adding an 's' for more than one, for plurals. They add an 's' for the possessive case, when they own something. Nouns led to pronouns, hence 1st, 2nd, 3rd person.

Verbs have developed all sorts of extras, enrichments: 'tenses' for time, and 'voice' and 'mood', and variations for 'person', especially in the verb 'to be'. See *Handouts n. 3, Grammar in Rhyme*, p. 2.

Learning another language, especially Latin, helps us with our English.

Doing Sums

SOME READERS are allergic to doing sums — akin to those who cannot eat food with gluten.

So what is said here is said obliquely, painlessly, by surprise attack, like ripping off a bandaid too fast for it to hurt, or sticking in the needle when the patient is - not looking, lest mind-over-matter make him faint. (Such psychosomatic blackouts used happen with young soldiers of 18 who were getting an injection, because their mates had "strung them along" with a yarn that the needle was curved like a huge fish-hook!)

For this reason, no pictures — although 'pictures are worth a thousand words'. Alas, even a whiff of a maths diagram sends some folk into a tizzy. And there is no jargon in bold to cause anguish before it is read.

Honest Fudging — by Stretching Definitions

Fudging is boys playing marbles: they crib their hand across taws. Or running races, they 'beat the gun'. Fudging! it's like the creep-quality of the old penetrating oil on a rusty bolt (before WD-40, and later). Or the Salami Principle of *wheedling* as practised by small children and second hand car salesmen: give 'em an inch and they take a mile.

Like Shakespeare's Seven Ages of Man, most of us advanced upward in our schooling, from "first, second, third" (the ranking numbers, called ordinals) to plain numbers "one, two, three" (called cardinals).

Addition came next, with things like apples and lollies. Subtraction followed. It helped with money.

Multiplication was really repeated addition, but done more readily by learning "times tables". Division was harder, actually repeated subtraction.

Then we got into fractions, best taught by dividing cakes or watermelons (especially where real samples were used as classroom incentives), and then special sorts of fractions, such as percentages and decimals. Fractions have simply extended the definitions of division and of subtraction.

In our overly schooled age, negative numbers were inevitable. They were tolerable if taught in terms of stepping forwards and backwards — or up and down the stairs, or using a credit card. Again, we **extended the definition**, and we are so used to it we did not realize we had entered an imaginary world.

Another mystery so easily missed is "square". It's a noun means *a shape* of some object, but also a verb meaning *an operation* done to a number. Square the number three and get nine. And nine little squares the same size can be packaged into one big square with three smaller squares along each side and one in the middle. We have **extended the definition**.

The less fervent maths pupils evaded indecencies like indices or powers of numbers other than two. Though at a pinch they could cope with something to a power of three or four. Negative and fractional indices **extended the definitions** of indices, and sure strained the friendship, though not really more difficult than conjurors pulling rabbits out of hats. Many pupils might do better with a conjuror to teach them.

The simplest calculators have a square root key — though what ordinary folk use it for is hard to fathom. Square-rooting is harder than squaring, yet both depend on **extending the definitions** of multiplying, just as multiplying itself extends the definition of adding. After you learn to walk, you learn to run, then hop, step and jump, pedal a bike and tread pedals in a car.

Building on, not contradicting, old ideas

Redefining upwards to suit our plans is not subjectivism, rather, good planning. A vital limitation is not contradicting something prior. Contradictions are the "no no", a sure sign of falsehood. **Extended definitions should be consistent with the early ones**, even while transcending them.

EVANGELIZING, CATECHETICS, THEOLOGY

THE PREACHING of St Peter and St Paul in *Acts of the Apostles* (the Adventures of the Apostles) is very much Evangelization, that is, proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ and His Kingdom, and call-ing listeners to repentance, faith, Baptism and morals. The two epistles of St Peter and the early epistles of St Paul e.g. 1 & 2 Corinthians are more developed, more detailed. They are catechetical writing.

St John's Gospel and St Paul's captivity epistles (Ephesians etc) are more theological: faith seeking understanding, relating the mysteries one to another and to the ultimate end of man.

That is a Development of Doctrine in the New Testament, cf. St Paul on 'the Body of Christ'.