

NARRATIVE CONTEXTS, DOCTRINAL REFORM

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THE THEME of doctrinal development has received a great deal of attention in modern Roman Catholic theology. The Second Vatican Council, marked by the spirit of *aggiornamento* and by a return to the scriptural and early Christian sources, affirmed the logic of doctrinal development in an unprecedented way. But since that council the use of a developmental model of doctrinal change has become increasingly infrequent. Theologians like Joseph Ratzinger and Hans Urs von Balthasar have suggested that the promise of the council offered by the "return to the sources" was vitiated by the will to update: Catholic Christian identity in its wholeness has been whittled away and sacrificed for the sake of relevance. Rather than promote further development of doctrines, these theologians have campaigned to retrieve and restore what has been lost of those doctrines already developed.¹

Other Catholic theologians have also expressed misgivings about reading the history of doctrines in terms of development, but for very different reasons. A fundamental concern that unites many is expressed aptly by one observer: "Is a 'linear', 'progressive' view of doctrinal history demanded by the claims of Christian belief, and justified by history?"² For whatever reason, there is growing discomfort among Catholic theologians with the notion of doctrinal development.

A similar shift among Protestant theologians on the theme of doctrinal development can be charted, even if the time-line is different. Certain Protestant theologians in the modern period, Schleiermacher and F. C. Baur being key examples, consciously employed the semantics of "development," adapting organic and dialectical models for interpreting historical change.³ Numerous modern Protestant theologians spoke of doctrinal

¹ Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987) 133–34, 367–93, esp. 389; Hans Urs von Balthasar, "In Retrospect," *Communio* 2 (1975) 197–220, and *A Theology of History* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1963) 136. While the overriding tendency of their work is to describe and explore what has already been judged orthodox, their advancement of specific doctrinal issues should not be ignored (e.g., Ratzinger on a dialogical anthropology and Balthasar on hell).

² Nicholas Lash, *Change in Focus* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1973) 28.

³ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 1988); F. C. Baur, *Ferdinand Christian Baur on the Writing of Church History*, ed. and tr. Peter C. Hodgson (New York: Oxford University, 1969).

development not in an effort to reject the *sola scriptura* principle, but clearly rethinking its meaning. For many reasons—the Catholic decree on papal infallibility is only one factor among many—Protestants began to speak less in terms of doctrinal development and more in the language of hermeneutics: interpreting and retrieving doctrines, as well as the critique, suspicion, and demythologizing of doctrinal formulae. Adolf von Harnack utilized organic and developmental metaphors, but without a linear progressive developmental logic.⁴ More recently, Jaroslav Pelikan and Maurice Wiles have used the phrase “doctrinal development,” but not without acknowledging its limitations.⁵

Why has a developmental model of doctrinal change become increasingly uncommon? During this century, reflection on the historicity and pragmatic import of the doctrinal claims of Christianity has refocused attention on the nature and function of traditions and doctrines. In this context two stumbling blocks for a developmental model of doctrinal change have been detected by a wide array of contemporary theologians, historical and systematic, Catholic and Protestant. First, growing attention to the plurality of traditions within the Bible and throughout the history of Christianity has raised questions about the nature of the unity and continuity of the subject matter of Christian faith implied in theories of doctrinal development. Second, recent interest in accounting for discontinuities within traditions stands in stark contrast with the penchant for continuities often exploited in models of doctrinal development.

The phenomena of plurality and discontinuity and the issues associated with them bear directly upon the narrative configuration of the history of Christian doctrines. This simple claim has immense import for how people approach the traditioning process—not only theologians and church leaders, but all members of the people of God who seek to be faithful to their pilgrim identity. The narrative configurations present in the Bible and in various histories and theologies of history serve to support and transform Christian identity. These plots shed light not only on the tradition but also on the traditioning process. Narrative structures, as these are found in theories of doctrinal change and in histories of dogmas or doctrines, lend credence to certain understandings of what has transpired. They do not simply warrant but also embody judgments

⁴ Adolf von Harnack, *The Essence of Christianity* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1978). Besides the kernel-and-husk image (55), Harnack also spoke of the process of development as comparable to a tree with roots, bark, branches, and blossoms (11).

⁵ Jaroslav Pelikan, *Historical Theology: Continuity and Change in Christian Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), and *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1971) 7–10; Maurice Wiles, *The Making of Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1967), and *The Remaking of Christian Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978).

about what has taken place and what needs to take place in this historical community. Thus narratives serve discursive and rhetorical arguments, defending what has taken place or what needs to occur. As such, they can accentuate continuity and stability, as well as lend credence and plausibility to reform, renewal, and innovations.

Two theses are being advanced. First, the contemporary recognition of plurality and discontinuities within the traditioning process renders problematic a linear and cumulative model of doctrinal development. Second, implied in recent discussions about plurality and discontinuity is the more inclusive claim: all theories of doctrinal change (whether the older logical theories drawn from classic rhetoric or Aristotelian categories, the variety of organic theories, or newer models based on scientific paradigm shifts or dependent on recent theories of interpretation) operate with implicit or explicit narrative configurations that have a significant impact on how doctrinal continuity and change are perceived. This latter claim has seldom been treated in discussions of doctrinal change, which tend to focus on criteriological issues regarding the sources, procedures, and explanations for legitimate and genuine doctrinal development. These criteriological issues are crucial, but the role of narrative configurations ought to be judged an essential part of the equation. Historical and theological tasks are intertwined in the imaginative configurational act and in the analysis of Christian narratives.⁶ In what follows I will situate historically the question of doctrinal development, explore the factors contributing to the recent devaluation of the development model, and press the significance of these factors for an adequate contemporary understanding of doctrinal change.

DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT IN CONTEXT

"Doctrinal development" is a relatively recent addition to the theological lexicon. However, to play on a phrase by Gerhard Ebeling, what has in the modern age been called the development of doctrine is the history of the interpretation of the Bible.⁷ This process of interpreting the Bible

⁶ What is being implied here and will become clear as we proceed is that there exists a vital relation between historical reconstructions and theologies of history. Though historical positivists rejected the claims of speculative philosophies of history in an attempt to aim at objectivity in their reconstructions, as recent work on narrative has suggested, classic plots are always used and transformed in order to understand and explain historical transitions whether admitted or not. In the case of theories of doctrinal change and histories of doctrinal history, the plots are not only derived from classic rhetorical models but also from classic theological visions of history.

⁷ Gerhard Ebeling, "Hermeneutik," *Die Religion in der Geschichte und Gegenwart* 3 (3rd ed. Tübingen: Mohr, 1959) 243-44. See Edward Schillebeeckx, "Toward a Catholic Use of Hermeneutics," *God the Future of Man* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968) 6.

begins within the Bible. The biblical testimony is a codified instance of tradition as content and traditioning as process. In the Hebrew Scriptures various elements of the tradition—law, prophecy, wisdom, and psalms—are situated within narratives that are told, retold, and reconfigured as the process of traditioning continues. More recent events, concerns, and problems serve as the impetus for recalling old narratives, refiguring the old, and configuring the new. This process of interpretation does not cease for the Jews within the Hebrew Scriptures: the practices associated with the two forms of midrash, halakah and haggadah, where various rabbinic forms of argument are employed, carry this process onward.

For Christians, the proclamation of salvation through Jesus Christ is given and gained in scriptural narratives. Jewish forms of midrash and Hellenistic modes of argument are intertwined in the NT as the memory of Jesus is recalled and his significance for the identity of the Jesus movement is formed through the shaping and reshaping of arguments and narratives in symbiotic relationship.

As the Jesus movement achieves greater structure in emergent Christianity, a dual movement is perceived: allegorical and typological interpretations generated new spiritual and doctrinal insights from the “dead letter” of the sacred texts and new plots as the process of traditioning continued, while various efforts were made to secure more precise articulations of the Christian faith in terms of the proclamation (*kérygma*), tradition (*paradosis*), and the *regula fidei*. Even as it is assumed that the essential content of this faith identity as revealed is closed, that it has been perfectly encapsulated in the apostolic witness, and that the content of this faith is given, posited, and in some way fixed, there is an open and contested character to what has been deposited.⁸ Consequently, the credal developments of the ecumenical councils are often portrayed as the explicit articulation by the Church of the normed content of faith which has always been believed since the apostolic age.

The history of the understanding of doctrinal change has been investigated from various angles.⁹ Whether it is the various sources (biblical, liturgical, sense of the faithful, etc.), procedures (forms of arguments), or

⁸ On essentially contested concepts, see W. B. Gallie, *Philosophy and Historical Understanding* (2nd ed. New York: Schocken, 1968) 157–91. We cannot think of Christianity without these concepts, but their meaning is contested.

⁹ For standard works see Owen Chadwick, *From Bossuet to Newman: The Idea of Doctrinal Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1957); Yves Congar, *Tradition and Traditions* (London: Burns & Oates, 1966); Wiles, *Making of Christian Doctrine*; Georg Söll, *Dogma und Dogmenentwicklung*, in *Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte* 1/5, ed. Michael Schmaus, Alois Grillmeier, Leo Scheffczyk (Freiburg: Herder, 1971); Pelikan, *Historical Theology*; Jan Walgrave, *Unfolding Revelation: The Nature of Doctrinal Development* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972).

explanations (theories or models) of doctrinal change that are explored, the unity of the faith and the continuity of the tradition have been the overriding concerns, especially for Catholics. In what would become the dominant theological configuration of history, Augustine in *The City of God* provided a theological justification for this concern as he affirmed the “homogeneity” of the age of the Church, spanning the time from Christ to the end of the world, even as he professed that Christians are commissioned “to seek in order to find, and find in order to seek still more.”¹⁰ Although Vincent of Lerins’ belief in the fifth century that official church pronouncements merely expressed what was held “always, everywhere, and by everyone” may have been ignored until the Reformation debates,¹¹ this adage articulates the governing concern with identity and continuity present in the dominant construals of Christian history and doctrines throughout.

The semantics of “development,” though undoubtedly implied in and fueled by the polemical debates surrounding the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura*, are clearly beholden to modern modes of discourse. If we focus on Catholic thinkers and recall Johann Sebastian Drey’s *Vom Geist und Wesen des Katholizismus* (1819), John Henry Newman’s *An Essay on the Development of Doctrine* (1845), Alfred Loisy’s *L’Evangile et l’église* (1902), and Maurice Blondel’s “Histoire et dogme” (1904), we find that a developmental model of doctrinal change arose as the Newtonian and Enlightenment mechanistic view of the world was displaced by the romantic appreciation of organic life processes. With important variations, this is also true for modern Protestant thinkers. As modern philosophers ushered in the time of the new (*Neuzeit*), often at the expense of the wisdom of the ages and at times naively ignoring the potential for future crises, theologians responded by adapting organic (and dialectical) models.¹² For some these models provided primarily or solely a retrospective defense for what had developed, while for others they also served as a prospective model for generating further develop-

¹⁰ R. A. Markus uses the term “homogeneous” to characterize the age of the Church in *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (London: Cambridge University, 1970) 31, 41. Also see Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Mystery of Continuity: Time and History, Memory and Eternity in the Thought of Saint Augustine* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1986) esp. 90–105. The quotation from Augustine is cited by Nicholas Lash in his article “Dogmas and Doctrinal Progress” in *Doctrinal Development and Christian Unity* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1967) 3.

¹¹ See Karl Rahner and Karl Lehmann, “Kerygma und Dogma,” *Mysterium salutis* 1, ed. J. Feiner and M. Löhrer (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1965) 642–43.

¹² For a recent discussion of the time-consciousness of modernity, see Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge: MIT, 1987) 1–50.

ments.¹³ Disease, corruption, and death were ignored by a few who used organic models; some theologians banished negative factors as external threats beyond the borders of faith, whereas others viewed them as an integral part of the process. While the Second Vatican Council did not adopt any 19th-century romantic or 20th-century idealist and existentialist version of doctrinal development, it explicitly embraced linear and progressive implications at work in certain organic developmental models: "the Church constantly moves forward toward the fulness of divine truth until the words of God reach their complete fulfilment in her."¹⁴ The theory of development as it was often employed among modern Catholic theologians accentuated unity, continuity, and stability, defending or paving the way for change interpreted as growth and accumulation. But recently questions have emerged.

PLURALITY OF TRADITIONS

Diversity within the unity of faith has always been recognized through the history of Christianity.¹⁵ But it has only been quite recently that this has been spoken of in terms of plurality. The recognition of plurality throughout the traditioning process is the product of modern and post-modern insights. The critique of traditions by Enlightenment thinkers was joined with the liberal virtue of tolerance. This tolerance often implied indifference to specific religious traditions and authorities, but it was associated with a passionate interest in human emancipation.¹⁶ The indifferent tolerance promoted by the Enlightenment may contrast with the romantic cultivation of empathy, evident in Herder's efforts to understand and appreciate individual cultures, races, and peoples, but both fostered a new appreciation of a plurality of beliefs.¹⁷ This insight is further nurtured and reaches a plateau with the quest for historical objectivity: in historical-critical analysis tolerance and empathy are combined with von Ranke's conviction that every age must be interpreted in its immediacy to God in order to present history *wie es eigentlich gewesen*

¹³ John Henry Newman in *An Essay on Development* (but not in later works) is retrospective, stressing those doctrines that have already been developed, whereas in Friedrich Schleiermacher's *Brief Outline of Theology* his organic model emphasized the prospective as well as the retrospective.

¹⁴ *Dei verbum* 8.

¹⁵ Yves Congar, *Diversity and Communion* (Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-third, 1985); Ladislav Orsy, *The Church: Learning and Teaching* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1987).

¹⁶ John Locke, *A Letter concerning Toleration* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1955); Immanuel Kant, "What Is Enlightenment?" in *Kant: On History*, ed. L. W. Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1957).

¹⁷ Johann Gottfried Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784-1791); abridged tr. *Reflections on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1968).

ist.¹⁸

The historical-critical study of the Scriptures in particular served to challenge the unity and coherence of doctrinal development by showing a plurality of traditions within the Bible.¹⁹ To reconstruct the plurality of *Sitze im Leben* in the Scriptures entails isolating various voices, groups, and positions and charting the histories of texts in terms of authors, editors, and communities. The results of the historical-critical method not only shook accepted notions of biblical inspiration and revelation, but also raised questions about historical theology and dogmatics.²⁰

Still, the tolerant, empathetic, and scientific scrutiny of the various voices in the Scriptures and throughout the history of Christianity was not in the strict sense initially perceived in terms of plurality. The problem was treated in terms of individuality; at least this is the way the issue is posed in Germany by Schleiermacher and Drey, F. C. Baur and Johann Adam Möhler, and by the legions influenced by Hegel.²¹ Denouncing the atomistic collection of singulars, the seriatim form of the historical chronicle, leading Catholic and Protestant thinkers at the beginning of the 19th century strove to find the basic ideas or "essence" that had developed in various epochs under various forms.²²

Only during this century has the problem of individuality been discussed in terms of plurality. Of singular importance in the historical area was the appearance in 1934 of Walter Bauer's *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum*.²³ Bauer argued that there was a diversity of belief during the first two centuries of Christianity. Most disturb-

¹⁸ Leopold von Ranke, *Geschichte der romanischen und germanischen Völker*, preface to the first edition: *Werke* (Leipzig, 1874) 33–34:7; *The Secret of World History: Selected Writings on the Art and Science of History*, ed. and tr. Roger Wines (New York: Fordham University, 1981) 159.

¹⁹ For a short treatment and bibliography, see Edgar Krentz, *The Historical-Critical Method* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975).

²⁰ Ernst Troeltsch, "Über historische und dogmatische Methode in der Theologie," *Gesammelte Schriften 2* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1913) 729–53.

²¹ The writings of G. W. Leibnitz (1646–1716) on monads and their relation to composite bodies and larger wholes is clearly important for this German tradition.

²² The debates between Möhler and F. C. Baur and between Harnack and Loisy about the Christian identity relative to the proper configuration of the history of doctrines take place with the assumption of a rectilinear understanding of history. Both debates can be viewed, however, in terms of the problems posed by a plurality of narrative configurations and the nature and limits of doctrinal continuity and discontinuity. It should be recorded that discussions of the essence of Christianity are not self-evidently and by their nature guilty of reductionism, as is occasionally suggested. Each use of this category deserves separate scrutiny and evaluation.

²³ Vol. 10 in the series *Beiträge zur historischen Theologie* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1934); tr. *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, ed. R. A. Kraft and G. Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).

ing was his claim that what later became the orthodox position was not antecedent to heretical positions: heresy is not always a deviation from a prior norm. Bauer also judged that the move to unity was not always to the more widely accepted position. The debate surrounding Bauer's thesis has not subsided.²⁴ Still it cannot be denied that his work pushed the problem of plurality to the forefront of historical and theological efforts in an unprecedented way.²⁵ His work has proved to be an impetus for re-examining and reconfiguring lost and marginalized aspects in the earliest testimony of faith.²⁶

In short, "historical reason has altered our view of the apostolic age."²⁷ For Robert Wilken this means that the old presentation of the apostolic age as whole, perfect, or complete is no longer viable and we now approach the documents from the apostolic age and find incompleteness, openness, and newness. "Christianity does not begin with any one idea about the meaning and significance of Jesus." And "[w]hat we call the apostolic writings, i.e., the New Testament, and the chief testimony from the early history of Christianity, are not the first form or expression of the Christian faith" but a "random selection" of the earliest and later materials.²⁸ While the apostolic witness remains normative, for many it can no longer be considered archetype, but a prototype of graced exist-

²⁴ See *ibid.*, Appendix 2: "The Reception of the Book," by Georg Strecker and Robert A. Kraft; Daniel J. Harrington, "The Reception of Walter Bauer's *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* during the Last Decade," *Harvard Theological Review* 73 (1980) 289-98; Thomas A. Robinson, *The Bauer Thesis Examined: The Geography of Heresy in the Early Christian Church* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 1988). H. E. W. Turner treats Bauer's thesis in his defense of the classic theory of orthodoxy against Harnack, Werner, and Bultmann: *The Pattern of Christian Truth: A Study in the Relations between Orthodoxy and Heresy in the Early Church* (London: Mowbray, 1954).

²⁵ See Helmut Koester, "GNOMAI DIAPHOROI: The Origin and Nature of Diversification in the History of Early Christianity," in James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971); James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of the Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977); Raymond E. Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* (New York: Paulist, 1984).

²⁶ Concern with the plurality of traditions in emergent Christianity has received further impetus from new discoveries at Nag Hammadi and Qumran, as well as by new editions of deuterocanonical works and the pseudepigrapha. A new generation of scholars is refining old plots and constructing new ones in an effort to represent the rise of Christianity more clearly.

²⁷ Robert L. Wilken, *The Myth of Christian Beginnings* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971) 159. Compare Ratzinger, *Principles* 133-52.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 160. Perhaps there is another conclusion than the one drawn by Avery Dulles that Wilken has an "antipathy to all norms" reflective of an "unacceptable historical positivism." Rather, Wilken finds a plurality of norms and consequently a need for an ongoing conversation about what constitutes the abiding essence or idea of Christianity. See Dulles' review in *TS* 32 (1971) 510-11.

ence.²⁹

Besides rendering suspect any homogenized view of the apostolic age or the age of the Church, historical theology has also yielded insight into the variety of theological tropes and narrative structures developed throughout Christian history drawn within eschatological horizons. The rediscovery of apocalyptic narrative patterns in the NT by Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer generated wide-ranging studies of the various eschatologies and theologies of history present in the NT and beyond.³⁰ Oscar Cullmann's and Hans Conzelmann's treatment of "salvation history" in Luke-Acts and in the NT generally also raised questions about nonapocalyptic narrative structures.³¹ Following Schweitzer's thoroughgoing eschatology, Martin Werner pressed the question about the relation of an apocalyptic interpretation of history to the formation of Christian doctrine. But his insight is marred by the misleading assumption of a rectilinear plot and by consequent blindness to the contemporaneous plurality of interpretations of history within the NT witness and in emergent Christianity.³²

The recent appreciation of plurality throughout the history of Christianity may have its deep roots in modern philosophy and critical historiography, but it has been further nurtured by recent (often called

²⁹ This formula has been advanced by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, e.g. *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983) 26–36. Nicholas Lash finds a similar claim in the documents of the Second Vatican Council (*Change in Focus* 16–17).

³⁰ See, e.g., John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1984); on Augustine, Markus, *Saeculum*; for Eusebius and his heirs, Glenn F. Chestnut, *The First Christian Histories* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1977). Bernard McGinn treats a spectrum of narrative motifs in "The Development of Christian Theologies of History" and specifically examines Joachim in relation to Aquinas' and Bonaventure's treatment of history in *The Calabrian Abbot: Joachim of Fiore in the History of Western Thought* (New York: Macmillan, 1985).

³¹ Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time* (3rd ed. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964); Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1961). Salvation-history models, like models of doctrinal development, have been criticized for similar and different reasons; see Henning Graf Reventlov, *Problems of Old Testament Theology in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 86–110; Gerhard Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 97–115, 157–60; Jürgen Moltmann, *The Theology of Hope* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1975) 69–76; Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1973); Edward Farley, *Ecclesial Reflections: An Anatomy of Theological Method* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982) 28–30, 155–57; Peter Hodgson, *God in History: Shapes of Freedom* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989) 11–50.

³² Martin Werner, *The Formation of Christian Dogma* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1957). This book was originally published in German in 1941, with a second edition in 1954.

postmodern) philosophies. Heidegger's critique of the correspondence theory of truth and his recovery of a disclosure model of truth served to accentuate the plurivocity of language. Work on symbol, metaphor, and narrative shed further light on the generative capacity of language to disclose a multiplicity of meanings and provide innovative insights.³³ Recent critical theorists from Germany, reacting against the controlling logic of the Enlightenment, have stressed the need to evaluate the diversity of ideologies and interests at work in cultural and political life and in the sciences and to give expression to the marginalized and lost voices and traditions in history.³⁴ Most recently, French poststructuralists like Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida recast the modern virtue of tolerance in a manner more akin to the postmodern experience of plurality in terms of difference and otherness.³⁵

There are weighty reasons for questioning the implications of such postmodern philosophies as they pertain to the issues of doctrinal unity and change,³⁶ as well as to the more general domains of epistemology.³⁷ But these works have left a lasting imprint on the nature of the questions we now must face concerning the written traces, minority traditions, and voices from the past and in the present. At the minimum, their work pleads for an openness to new narrative configurations that can call into question, modify, as well as help us to rediscover old plots.³⁸

³³ E.g., Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon, 1969); *The Rule of Metaphor* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1977); *Time and Narrative* (3 vols. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1984, 1985, 1988); and Hadyn White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1973), and *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1978).

³⁴ E.g., Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Boston: Beacon, 1971).

³⁵ E.g., Emmanuel Levinas, "The Trace of the Other," and Jacques Derrida, "Difference," in *Deconstruction in Context: Literature and Philosophy*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1986) 345-59, 396-420.

³⁶ Comparing F. C. Baur and Peter Hodgson can be instructive here. For Baur, the rationalist and romantic concern with individuality failed to account for the inner development of leading ideas as they unfolded dialectically in history. The whole was sacrificed for the part. For Hodgson, the radical relativism of certain postmodern thinkers can threaten rather than nourish the communicative praxis of traditioning. Similar concerns are also expressed by David Tracy and Jürgen Habermas. See Hodgson, *God in History*; David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987).

³⁷ For Derrida's response to often-raised criticisms, see *Limited Inc* (Evanston: Northwestern University, 1988) 111-60.

³⁸ Further study of deconstruction and its relation to rabbinic forms of interpretation may shed further light on aspects of the traditioning process in Christianity. See, e.g., Susan Handelman, "Jacques Derrida and the Heretic Hermeneutic," in Mark Krupnick, ed., *Displacement, Derrida and After* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1983) 98-129; *Midrash and Literature*, ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman and Sanford Budick (New Haven: Yale

Karl Rahner, Bernard Lonergan, and Edward Schillebeeckx in different ways were among the first theologians to examine the dilemma of plurality and its importance for configuring the history of doctrine and theology. Rahner in the early part of his career wrote about the historicity and development of dogmas while he affirmed the dogmatic heritage.³⁹ In Heideggerian fashion the early Rahner sought to think what remained unthought in the tradition and so through a radical reinterpretation—rather than a critique of previously pronounced dogmas—sought to break out of the hegemonic control of “Denzinger theology.” But after Vatican II Rahner held up the issue of pluralism as “a new problem,” “a genuine ‘quaestio disputata’” that confronts the Church and theology. This new problem required a new openness to what had remained forgotten, hidden, and suppressed in the telling of dogmatic history.⁴⁰ The question of pluralism emerged, in Lonergan’s estimation, with the shift from the normative classicist view of culture to an empirical one. The problem did not call for abandoning a model of development, but for a deeper appreciation of the dialectical processes involved.⁴¹ For Schillebeeckx, however, recent historical-critical and hermeneutic work shed light on the plurality of interpretative frameworks throughout the history of Christianity and consequently rendered talk of development problematic. Schillebeeckx called for the construction of new and more complex plots in order to understand the traditioning process and to appreciate the untapped resources of the past and the present.⁴²

In the current situation, then, we have a new appreciation of the plurality of traditions that have informed and continue to shape Christian identity. Moreover, we have a new sensitivity to the variety of narrative configurations—within eschatological horizons—found in the biblical witness and recalled in liturgy and in creeds. Theologians have often played off of the variety of biblical metaphors and narratives, and other

University, 1986); John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1987).

³⁹ See Karl Rahner, “The Development of Dogma” (1954), *Theological Investigations* 1; “Considerations on the Development of Dogma” (1957), *ibid.* 4; also “History of the World and Salvation-History” (1960), *ibid.* 5; “Observations on the Concept of Revelation” (1964) in *Revelation and Tradition* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966) with Joseph Ratzinger.

⁴⁰ “Pluralism in Theology and the Unity of the Creed in the Church” (1969), *Theological Investigations* 11; “Yesterday’s History of Dogma and Theology for Tomorrow” (1977), *ibid.* 18.

⁴¹ See *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), and *Doctrinal Pluralism* (Milwaukee: Marquette University, 1971).

⁴² See *The Understanding of Faith: Interpretation and Criticism* (New York: Seabury, 1972); *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (New York: Crossroad, 1979); *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord* (New York: Crossroad, 1981); *The Church with a Human Face* (New York: Crossroad, 1985).

non-Christian narrative strategies as well, in order to generate new historical configurations in response to the concerns of their times. The same is true today. Neither a rectilinear configuration of doctrinal development nor a closed model of salvation history can adequately account for this plurality; certainly they cannot suppress questions about disputed doctrinal issues.

DISCONTINUITY AND REFORM

The question of doctrinal discontinuity and reform seems to be more pernicious than that of plurality. The problem of the one and the many has been with us a long time. So without too much difficulty we can think of a unity amid a diversity of forms. A plurality of traditions can suggest that there are new thoughts that have not been thought, new insights to be gained, new perspectives to be learned from. The truth can be symphonic.⁴³ But to admit that there has been discontinuity or there is a need for a reform is to acknowledge that there is dissonance, that the newly-heard insight conflicts with the accepted position, that the recovery of a forgotten or repressed truth cannot be simply augmented to the previously held position, but that a conflict must ensue.

Protestant theologians have had considerably less difficulty than Catholics in arguing that there are historical discontinuities and in articulating the need for reform in terms of change or reversal rather than simply in terms of spiritual renewal, rejuvenation, or growth. Luther's *sola fide* was a principle of reform against what he judged improper developments. This principle derived its authority from the principle *sola scriptura*. While Luther drew from a wide range of biblical passages, his "working canon" or "canon within the canon" selected focal traditions from among a plurality of biblical traditions as the basis of his critique of subsequent developments.⁴⁴ Luther's use of apocalyptic metaphors and narrative structures also played a crucial role in his understanding of reform and his interpretation of history.⁴⁵

⁴³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Truth Is Symphonic: Aspects of Christian Pluralism* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987).

⁴⁴ Ratzinger exhibits the traditional Catholic repugnance for the older and new Protestant quest for the core of the gospel. He links various conservative and progressive attempts to identify this core with archeologism and is vexed by the problem of discontinuity as treated by Ernst Käsemann in "The Problem of the Historical Jesus," *Essays on New Testament Themes* (London: SCM, 1964). See *Principles* 96, 101, 142, 148-52, 157, 181-82.

⁴⁵ See Robin Bruce Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis: Apocalypticism in the Wake of the Lutheran Reformation* (Stanford: Stanford University, 1988). Luther's apocalypticism must be interpreted in relation to *sola fide*, *sola scriptura*, and the two-kingdoms doctrines.

The reform idea has a long history in many contexts,⁴⁶ but the critique of doctrines and the call for reform have not been solely based on forgotten minority or underdeveloped traditions. The possibility of the genuinely new serving as the basis for critique and reform is a hallmark of modernity. Deists and rationalists criticized ecclesial doctrines and sought to break with the positive or concrete aspects of Christianity in order to glean a pure and unassailable moral and rational faith that would not compete with the new insights of critical reason. Beginning with Schleiermacher and Drey, mediating, correlationist, and revisionist theologians of various stripes have attempted to acknowledge new insights and respond to scientific advances and changing political, economic, and cultural situations, without simply capitulating to cultural and scientific demands. This resulted in the centrifugal quest for further doctrinal developments and the centripetal search for the essence of Christianity. The search for an essence or basic idea of Christianity has been impelled by the desire for a critical norm to evaluate the doctrinal heritage.⁴⁷ Thus reform can mean doctrinal change called for by new insights gained by contemporary experience and reflection, praxis and discourse.

Modern criticisms of a propositional approach to revelation and experiential, symbolic, and historical reformulations changed dramatically how doctrinal continuity and discontinuity were understood.⁴⁸ These more supple and complex models of revelation left ample room for the critique of specific dogmatic statements, while appreciating and affirming their intended meaning.⁴⁹

Most recently, philosophical attention to the critique of traditions and historical discontinuities has provided further impetus and conceptual resources on this issue, while raising not a few troubling questions. The

⁴⁶ See Yves M.-J. Congar, *Vraie et fausse réforme dans l'église* (Paris: Cerf, 1950); Gerhard B. Ladner, *The Idea of Reform: Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1959); John W. O'Malley, "Reform, Historical Consciousness, and Vatican II's Aggiornamento," *TS* 32 (1971) 573-601, and "Developments, Reforms, and Two Great Reformations: Toward a Historical Assessment of Vatican II," *TS* 44 (1983) 373-406.

⁴⁷ See Ernest Troeltsch, "What Does 'Essence of Christianity' Mean?" in *Ernst Troeltsch: On Religion and Theology*, ed. and tr. R. Morgan and M. Pye (Atlanta: John Knox, 1977). Also see Lash, *Change in Focus* 132, on this centripetal movement in Lubac and Rahner; and on the general issue, Stephen Sykes, *The Identity of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

⁴⁸ Peter Eicher, *Offenbarung: Prinzip neuzeitlicher Theologie* (Munich: Kösel, 1977); Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (New York: Doubleday, 1983).

⁴⁹ See Paul Misner, "A Note on the Critique of Dogmas," *TS* 34 (1973) 690-700; J. P. Jossua, "Immutabilité, progrès ou structurations multiples des doctrines chrétiennes?" *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 52 (1968) 173-200.

hermeneutics of suspicion, as articulated by Paul Ricoeur, can include a wide range of critical questions about the limitations of traditions as these are posed by modern and postmodern critical theories. But Ricoeur urges that suspicion and critique be held within the arc of reappropriating the truth claims of the tradition, so that questions of discontinuity are always couched in an attempt to affirm and retrieve the world of the text.⁵⁰ The theory of paradigm shifts offered by philosophers of science has been used to interpret revolutionary changes in the history of theology and doctrinal history with more attention given to discontinuity and reform amid continuity.⁵¹ Without a doubt, however, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida have raised the most disturbing questions about the Western hegemony of linearism that unites archeology, teleology, and eschatology.⁵² Their works relentlessly question the quest for continuity by attending to discontinuities and alterity: history is configured as labyrinth and disfigured as tragedy. History displays the alliances forged between knowledge and power without a guiding purpose or the endless play of graphic differences.

The reformed, modern, and postmodern formulations of the problem of discontinuity are taken up and refocused with Latin American and feminist liberation theologies. Liberation theologians are among the most recent and outspoken proponents of doctrinal reform in Roman Catholicism.⁵³ Their ethical critique of culture has been accompanied by a call for doctrinal reform, most vociferously debated in ecclesiology, but also in Christology, anthropology, and theology of God.⁵⁴ The work of these theologians for doctrinal reform springs from contemporary social situ-

⁵⁰ Ricoeur insists that one must grant the importance of deviations from traditions and the duty of criticizing dead ends within traditions, but that this can and should be done from within traditions. What must be resisted is the schism of utopian expectations from experience informed by tradition. This can only be done by striving to discover "forgotten possibilities, aborted potentialities, repressed endeavors in the supposedly closed past." Ricoeur's discussion of the transformation of the apocalyptic paradigm and its import for generating new plots has manifest theological significance: *Time and Narrative* 2:14–28, esp. 23–26; 3:207–40, esp. 227, 235.

⁵¹ *Paradigm Change in Theology*, ed. David Tracy and Hans Küng (New York: Crossroad, 1988).

⁵² Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (New York: Pantheon, 1972); "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1977); *Power/Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1980); Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1974) 115.

⁵³ In the present context liberation theologians are not the only ones raising the issues of doctrinal reform. Rahner, Schillebeeckx, and Küng have raised similar issues.

⁵⁴ E.g., Leonardo Boff, *Church: Charism and Power. Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1985); Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*; also Schillebeeckx, *The Church with a Human Face*.

ations of oppression, but it also relies upon the historical reconstruction of emergent Christianity and the entire history of Christian discourse. Thus, while they have been inspired by new experiences and new insights gained by contemporary social practices and modes of discourse, they have also sought to recover forgotten, lost, and marginalized traditions in relation to dominant traditions and from among the plurality of traditions. Although liberation theologians have configured history utilizing historical and social-scientific methods, their reconstructions are theological as well. Like Luther and other reform-minded thinkers, they have employed tropes and narrative motifs from prophetic and apocalyptic traditions. Their use of these eschatological traditions and theologies of history is selective, but they are drawing from these traditions because of their ability to theologically justify or account for discontinuities more adequately than the dominant (Eusebian and Augustinian) ways of emplotting Christian history.

Liberation theologians have been charged with using the Bible for their own purposes—the charge leveled against the Reformation critique and reform. They have also been targeted as the latest manifestation of the hubris unleashed by the liberal vision of freedom—the accusation raised against the modern source of critique and reform associated with the Enlightenment and with liberal Protestant and Modernist Catholic theology. In addition, they have been accused of radical historicism and of reducing church and society to dynamics of power—like proponents of Marxist and some postmodern theories of discourse and society.⁵⁵ While no theology is beyond critical assessment, these three criticisms fail to acknowledge or address the underlying *quaestio disputata* of doctrinal discontinuity and reform.⁵⁶ For many Catholics and Protestants, it is no longer adequate to speak of doctrinal change in terms of homogeneous evolution.⁵⁷

CONCLUSION

We have traced a wide range of factors leading to the current devaluation of the developmental model of doctrinal change. To some, this attention to plurality and discontinuity within doctrinal history will seem to instantiate the most recent and sinister wave of rampant historicism, radical relativism, and portend the reduction of past judgment and

⁵⁵ These criticisms have been developed by, among others, Joseph Ratzinger; see, e.g., *Principles* 369–93; *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics* (New York: Crossroad, 1988) 255–75.

⁵⁶ John W. O'Malley has raised this issue in terms of the rhetoric of reform (see n. 46 above).

⁵⁷ For discussion of F. Marin-Sola's *L'Évolution homogène du dogme catholique* (2 vols. Freiburg, 1924), see Lash, *Change in Focus* 119–54, and *Newman on Development* (Shepherdstown, W.Va.: Patmos, 1975) 46–79.

decisions to power strategies. While these concerns are legitimate, acknowledging plurality and discontinuity in doctrinal history need not mean the disregard of truth and moral claims as these have been made and carried on in the past, nor undercut ecclesial communion. Instead, such insights into plurality and discontinuity (first thesis), and the role of narrative in doctrinal history (second thesis), call for expanding the conversation that is the traditioning process.⁵⁸

Expanding the conversation requires permitting and nurturing the exchange between various traditions, between old and new voices, between the standard bearers and the marginalized. If this greater conversation has been cut short at times because of orthodox rigidity, it has also been hindered by the fragmentation wrought by specialization in theological education. Expanding the conversation requires, as well, reconceiving historical theology and reaffirming its importance for fundamental, systematic, and moral theology. Historical theology is not one more distraction, but can serve by examining in myriad contexts the redemptive or destructive interplays among Christian discourse, theory, and praxis. To expand the conversation of the traditioning process entails being receptive and obedient to the voice of God as the Christian community critically reappropriates what has been received, judiciously discerns the spirits past and present, and remains open to the new. In these tasks *aggiornamento* and historical theology cannot be severed.

Configuring doctrinal history anew can serve the traditional criteria of the *lex orandi*, the *sensus fidelium*, and the reception of doctrines by the community, just as it has helped show the historical logic of ecclesial pronouncements, whether Catholic or Protestant. Articulating doctrinal narratives can serve the traditioning process not only by depicting what has transpired from the vantage point of the official formulae, but also by asking what voices have been forgotten or disregarded in the process, and what developments and potential reforms or reversals may find their support in the distant or the recent past. While judgments must be made about which configurations of doctrinal history are more or less adequate, new plots and trajectories should not be ruled out merely because they raise further questions about previous plots and patterns used to understand doctrinal history.

It cannot be denied that with Augustine Christians perennially groan under "the existential burden of discordance" that rends individual and communal life asunder. Consequently, with Augustine we seek a "con-

⁵⁸ Conversation or communication has been a focal point in Hans Georg Gadamer's and Jürgen Habermas' philosophy. David Tracy has underscored its importance for theological concerns, while liberation theologians have insisted on the need for expanding the conversation.

version to continuity,” where “concordance can mend discordance” in the Christian narrative display.⁵⁹ This quest for the continuity and concordance that reflects the unity of the Christian faith cannot be abandoned, even if it is only eschatologically realized. However, continuity and concordance can become a most insidious ideology if norms are rigidly imposed and the new is ruled out without ample discussion and adequate justification, just as plurality and discontinuity can lend support to division, discord, and a minimum of cognitive and moral resolve. There is no need to reject the valid insights about the centrality of continuity and unity plumbed by the developmental model, but there is a pressing need to rethink the variegated process of traditioning in ways that can do justice to the multiform, tensive, and labyrinthine aspects of ecclesial history and pilgrim existence.

⁵⁹ For “conversion to continuity,” see Pelikan, *The Mystery of Continuity* 2; the other citations are from Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1:31.