

PASTORAL SCHOOL OF CHICAGO AND MID-AMERICA

DOES DOGMA DEVELOP?

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by

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Approval Sheet

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Abstract

This thesis asks a basic question: does dogma develop? To answer this, the thesis first sets forth what these terms mean. The reason for engaging this topic arises from a difference in how the Orthodox and the Roman Catholics approach this question. For the Orthodox, dogma clearly does not develop. For Roman Catholics, the answer is certainly different. Although the Orthodox Church holds that dogma itself does not develop, it does admit that the forms of expression do change over time. Moreover, the branch of learning that deals with dogma does undergo developments. Finally, the thesis sets out to clarify what remains eternal and changeless and what aspects of the Church are susceptible to change.

Does Dogma Develop?

1. Background of the Topic

The central question that this thesis seeks to answer is the following: is dogma something unchanging and stable, or is it something that changes and develops over time in response to various factors? On the surface it might seem that dogma does develop, since the forms of expression change over time. For instance, the creed promulgated at the First Ecumenical Council (Nicaea, 325 AD) says little about the Holy Spirit; it was later, at the Second Ecumenical Council (Constantinople, 381AD) that this portion of the creed was elaborated and given the final form that the Church has known and used ever since.¹ Does this mean that the dogma concerning the Holy Spirit developed between the First and Second Ecumenical Council? Or, more radically, was the creed formulated in the fourth century a new revelation, something unknown to the Apostles? Moreover, in other areas of the Church we see developments. Ecclesiastical organization changes in response to changing historical circumstances. At first the canons called for the Provincial Council of Bishops to meet twice a year (Apostolic Canon 37; 1 Nicaea Canon 5; Antioch Canon 20; renewed by Chalcedon Canon 19);² but this was changed to once a year on account of barbarian invasions that made it difficult for some bishops to travel.³ Certainly at the time of the Apostles there were not the five Patriarchates (this was solidified only at the Fourth

¹ The Fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon in 451 approved of the creed of “the 318 Fathers of Nicaea and that of the 150 who met at a later time (i.e. At Constantinople, 381).” Henry Bettenson, ed., *Documents of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed., World Classics series (New York: Oxford University Press, 1944), 37.

² Alexander Bogolepov, *The Canon Law of the Time of the Ecumenical Councils*, <http://ecampus.orthodoxtheologicalschool.org/mod/book/view.php?id=1327>.

Ecumenical Council in 451), nor did the liturgy exist in the precise form that it would take in the fourth century and after.

In the face of these apparent changes and developments, different solutions have been proposed. Perhaps the most prominent model to account for these changes is that of Cardinal Newman. John Henry Newman was a nineteenth century Englishman, a leader in the patristic revival, and prominent convert to Catholicism, later being made a Cardinal. His influential work *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*⁴ first formulated this idea of dogma developing over time and in response to various factors. According to Newman's model, doctrine derives from the Apostolic faith, though it may be implicit. In the same manner that ideas develop from the seed of a thought, doctrine develops from the seed of the Apostolic faith. The influence of this work is widespread. It is taken for granted in historical studies of Christian theology, such as Jaroslav Pelikan's magisterial *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*.⁵

Yet the Orthodox Church holds that dogma is eternal and unchanging. It may be hidden from us, as the fullness of the Trinity was before the Incarnation. The Orthodox Church teaches that dogma is the deposit of faith handed down by the Apostles. While new language may arise in response to controversies and challenges, these developments in forms of expression are not developments in the dogmas themselves. Bishop Kallistos describes the Orthodox Church's approach as follows:

³ Trullan Council Canon 8.

⁴ John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, Notre Dame Series in the Great Books (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989).

⁵ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: a History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 1, 5 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971).

Orthodox, while reverencing this inheritance from the past, are also well aware that not everything received from the past is of equal value. Among the various elements of Tradition, a unique pre-eminence belongs to the Bible, to the Creed, to the doctrinal definitions of the Ecumenical Councils: these things the Orthodox accept as something absolute and unchanging, something which cannot be cancelled or revised.⁶

A distinction is made between those things that are unchanging— namely dogma— and those things that do change, such as the external organization and practice of Church life. From the outset this distinction is important since both dogma and ecclesial organization fall under the category of canons. Yet some canons deal with dogmatic matters, such as the Holy Trinity, while others canons deal with more administrative concerns. It is evident, therefore, that the Orthodox understanding of dogma— and more specifically, how dogma is revealed— stands at odds with how other confessions understand dogma.

2. Justification of the topic

It is necessary and desired to present an Orthodox defense of dogma and its unchanging status in order to demonstrate how Orthodoxy understands this crucial issue. Since the idea of development is often assumed in other circles, it is presented as being natural. This is precisely how Cardinal Newman presents it in his influential essay. It seems easy to assume that, just ideas and theories develop and change over time, so too does dogma. This would be the case if dogma were simply ideas and theories about God and salvation. But from an Orthodox point of view, dogma is more than ideas and theories. Dogma is revealed truth and finds its basis in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, who by his incarnation and earthly ministry made manifest the foundations of the faith. As the

⁶ Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia, *The Orthodox Church* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963),

troparion for Theophany declares, “the worship of the Trinity was made manifest” when Christ was baptized in the Jordan. The worship of the Trinity was not made manifest by theological speculation or the development of human understanding of what God is. Instead, the worship of the Trinity was revealed by the Incarnation. The articulation of this belief may change over time, as can be seen in the development of language to express the Church’s beliefs; but a change in language is not a change in dogma.

These distinctions between development in expression and the unchanging nature of dogma, if not expressed clearly, lead to a misunderstanding of the Orthodox Church’s understanding of the Faith. If dogma develops, then it would be possible to introduce innovations in the faith; according to this line of thought, the central authority of the Papacy or the Immaculate Conception could be construed as natural developments of the Apostolic faith. Indeed this is precisely what Cardinal Newman sets out to prove. So one central reason for explicating the Orthodox position on the development of dogma is apologetic.

Orthodox theologians have addressed this topic before. In the writings of St. Irenaeus of Lyons and St. Gregory of Nazianzus one finds the foundations of the Church’s teaching on the “deposit of faith.” In modern literature on the subject, the topic is addressed, although indirectly in the context of larger discussions. The purpose of the present work, therefore, is to present a succinct exposition of this topic. This thesis does not claim to argue anything new; rather, its purpose is to express what the Church has taught on this topic in a concise discussion. The hope is that this thesis will provide an overview for those who desire to know how the Orthodox Church views dogma in relation to how it is understood in Roman Catholicism as well as in contemporary scholarship.

The need for an examination of this topic is clearly demonstrated in the following statement by Fr. Andrew Louth. In his introduction to Fr. John Behr's book *The Way to Nicaea*, he writes the following:

Christian theology is not the development of Christian doctrine (Orthodox theologians ought to have more problems with that idea, a fruit of Romanticism, popularized by Cardinal Newman, than they often seem to): We can never pass beyond the apostolic confession of Christ. Rather the formation of Christian theology is the result of sustained, and prayerful, thinking and meditation by those who sought to grasp what is entailed by the Paschal mystery.⁷

The point raised by Fr. Andrew Louth as an aside deserves more attention. This thesis will demonstrate why Orthodox theologians ought to resist the model of dogma developing; but it will also show how other types of changes do take place. In other words, this thesis sets out to show what changes and what remains eternally the same. Fr. Andrew Louth draws a subtle distinction between the concept of doctrine developing and theology developing. Fr. John Behr's book *The Way to Nicaea* addresses the issue from a historical point of view and shows how "thought does not exist apart from thinkers."⁸ The purpose here is not to present a historical account. Instead, this thesis attempts to answer Fr. Andrew Louth's call to resist the model of development by formulating a brief exposition of this important matter. It is the hope of the author that the thesis will provide a concise answer for those interested in knowing what the Orthodox Church has said on this topic.

⁷ Andrew Louth, "Foreward," in *The Way to Nicaea* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), xii.

⁸ Ibid.

3. Definitions

Before proceeding any further, it is necessary to establish some definitions. Dogma and doctrine often get used interchangeably, but I favor the use of dogma since it is more specific. The following section will set forth how we should understand terms such as dogma, doctrine, and development.

Dogma. Fr. Michael Pomazansky offers a good discussion of this term.⁹ He notes that for the ancient Greeks *dogmata* (plural form of *dogma*) could apply equally to philosophic concepts and legal directives and decrees. To elaborate on Fr. Michael's discussion, let us look more closely at how this term *dogma* was used in antiquity. The word had a variety of applications: from simply 'opinion' to a more legal sense, i.e. 'decrees.' The word *dogma* (δόγμα) comes from the verb δοκεῖν, which means "to think, suppose, imagine" and additionally "to have or form an opinion."¹⁰ In Greek philosophy *dogma* meant "opinion or belief"; that is, an opinion formed about a matter. Yet the word also has a more legal usage, meaning "decision, judgment" and "public decree, ordinance." The two senses of this word at first seem contradictory, since dogma is often viewed now as the opposite of private opinion. But the two are related. The legal sense of "decree, ordinance" arises from the consensus of a governing body. Opinions and beliefs are in the domain of an individual, but when a council agrees upon an opinion or belief, it becomes a decision and subsequently an ordinance. Fr. Michael Pomazansky quotes Acts 16:4 as an illustration of this: "And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees (*dogmata*) for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem". The decrees (*dogmata*) carried

⁹ Michael Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology: A Concise Exposition*, trans. Seraphim Rose (Platina, CA: Saint Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1994), 24.

¹⁰ H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, and H. S. Jones, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

by the Apostle Paul were established by the Council of Jerusalem. They were not opinions of one particular person, but the consensus reached by the Council. The letter from the council, according to Acts 15:25, contains the phrase “it seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord. . .” Two things are worth noticing here—first, that they were in agreement and in one accord. Next, the phrase “seemed good to us” is related to the word *dogma*; both have the root $\delta\omicron\kappa\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu$. Ancient Greek legal decrees began with the phrase “it seemed good to the council.”¹¹ Subsequently, ecclesiastical councils begin with a similar formula, “it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us. . .” So opinion is not completely unrelated to dogma. The difference is, as Fr. Michael Pomazansky discusses, catholicity, the “single and common catholic *consensus*, guided by the Holy Spirit.”¹² A belief or opinion, when it is held in common by the catholic consciousness of the Church becomes more than an opinion. The council affirms the truth of the opinion— it affirms that the belief is in accord with Scripture and Apostolic tradition— and then it becomes dogma.¹³ So the Church holds a special place for dogma. Although the word first meant a philosophical tenet and later referred to legal decrees, its meaning in the Church, while related to these earlier meanings, takes on a new significance as dogma refers to the central matters of the faith. Dogma is not invented or discovered but revealed.

¹¹ Carl Darling Buck, *The Greek Dialects* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 193.

¹² Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, 35.

¹³ Compare the following from Afanasiev: “. . . The absolutely immutable character of dogmas is not conditioned upon by their being enacted by Councils and accepted by the Church, but because they are an expression of absolute truth. Their formulation by Councils and their acceptance by the Church are but the solemn witness of their truth. They express not what is temporary but what is eternal. . .” Nicholas Afanasiev, “Canons and Canonical Consciousness,” trans. Alvia Smirensky, *Put'* 39, <http://ecampus.orthodoxtheologicalschool.org/mod/book/view.php?id=1326&chapterid=461>.

Doctrine, meanwhile, can refer to anything that is taught. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines doctrine as follows: “2. That which is taught. a. In the most general sense: Instruction, teaching; a body of instruction or teaching. b. esp. That which is taught or laid down as true concerning a particular subject or department of knowledge, as religion, politics, science, etc.; a belief, theoretical opinion; a dogma, tenet.”¹⁴ Since doctrine has such wide applicability, it seems better to use dogma in its more refined use and let doctrine refer to the wider sphere of any set of instruction or teaching.

Development at first may seem obvious, but the word is of relatively recent coinage in English and emerges from a specific scientific context. It only begins to be used in English (from the French) in late 18th century. The word is closely tied to ideas of evolution as they were being formulated in the 19th century. In fact the *Oxford English Dictionary* gives as one of the meanings the following: “b. Of races of plants and animals: The same as *evolution*; the evolutionary process and its result. development theory or hypothesis (Biol.): the doctrine of Evolution; applied especially to that form of the doctrine taught by Lamarck (died 1829).”¹⁵ Thus ideas of “development” and “evolution” were in the air at this time, even before Darwin wrote his famous work on this subject. It is worth pointing this out in order to understand better the underpinnings behind Cardinal Newman’s work on the development of doctrine. Moreover, it is important to realize that the idea of development is culturally specific; it arises within the context of broader intellectual movements of the 19th century. It would be a mistake, therefore, to assume this theory of development was natural or even discussed in this particular way at all times.

¹⁴ J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, eds., *The Oxford English Dictionary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), s.v. "Doctrine".

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, s.v. "Development".

4. Problem Analysis

What is at issue may be summarized as follows. The Orthodox Church adheres to the idea that the fullness of the faith was given to the Apostles, as stated in the Epistle of St. Jude: “. . . the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (verse 3). By holding to this view, the Orthodox Church is at odds with the theory of the development of doctrine, which is an underlying assumption amongst other confessions and within much scholarship. Orthodox theologians address this issue, but often indirectly as they are discussing other matters.

The first problem is to demonstrate why Cardinal Newman’s model of development presents problems for the Orthodox. Perhaps the greatest challenge here is that his model is presented as being ‘natural’ and he draws analogies to the various ways that we see things develop in nature or in thought. So it is necessary, again, to make distinctions; yes, ideas may develop and change, just as living organisms develop and change. But dogma is not just a set of ideas. While the Church is a living organism, its source, the Holy Trinity, is not liable to change.

Fr. Nicholas Afanasiev frames the problem as follows when he asks “But how should we understand and to what should we attribute the unalterable in the Church? Is everything in the Church changeless and in what sense is the Church herself changeless?”¹⁶ As he explains in his article, the Church is in the world, and the world changes; so how does the Church adapt? Some things pertain to the changing world, others to that which is eternal: “there must be in the Church not only that which is unalterable, but also that which changes;

along with the eternal, that which is temporal. Where then is the eternal and temporal in the Church, where is the dividing line between them, and what are their interrelationships?”¹⁷ This stands as the second problem—discerning what is unchanging and what is liable to change.

5. Review of literature related to the topic

Since this question of whether dogma develops arises from Newman’s essay on the topic, his work will be the place to start. The present section will present in brief the various approaches to the topic, while the following section will use these sources to address the problem.

As Ian Ker notes in his foreword to *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, Cardinal Newman’s work has been the last word on this subject in Catholic circles: “no other theologian has yet attempted anything on the same scale or of similar scope.”¹⁸ Cardinal Newman’s goals are not unrelated to the goal of the Orthodox theologian, as he sets out to show that Christianity is indeed historical, representing the faith of the Apostles. This Apostolic faith was not immediately corrupted or subject to decay.¹⁹ In the context in which he wrote—a defender of Catholicism amidst a strongly Protestant country—Cardinal Newman goes to great lengths to reveal the “very religion which Christ and His Apostles taught in the first.”²⁰ Yet he does not skim over the apparent difficulties; as he notes, “there

¹⁶ Nicholas Afanasiev, “The Canons of the Church: Changeable or Unchangeable,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 11, no. 2 (1967): 54-68.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, xxv.

¹⁹ Ibid., 4.

²⁰ Ibid., 5.

are in fact certain apparent variations in its [the Church's] teaching, which have to be explained."²¹ He continues by observing that "there are to be found, during the 1800 years through which it has lasted, certain apparent inconsistencies and alterations in its doctrine and its worship, such as irresistibly attract the attention of all who inquire into it."²² The "attention of all who inquire into it" are of two camps: the skeptics who find every inconsistency and thus conclude that there was no historical Christianity but merely later inventions; and those who advocated that the Bible alone, not tradition, is the source of faith. While Cardinal Newman may share in common with Orthodox theologians the need to defend tradition, his methods lead to different conclusions. As will be shown, his goals are not entirely identical as he seeks to defend developments within Catholicism.

A work that is deeply indebted to Cardinal Newman's is Pelikan's *The Christian Tradition*. Pelikan's work sets out to demonstrate how doctrine developed. As he states, the relation between believing, teaching, and confessing also implies that both the subject matter and the source material for the history of the development of doctrine will shift, gradually but steadily, as we trace it through the history of the church.²³

The wealth of research contained in these volumes is a great resource. Pelikan's approach is more historical than theoretical, as his concern is with the history of doctrinal formulation. His more recent work, *Credo*,²⁴ focuses specifically on the history of creeds; this book begins with an argument that continuity and change are not mutually at odds.

²¹ Ibid., 7.

²² Ibid., 9.

²³ Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: a History of the Development of Doctrine*, 1:5.

²⁴ Jaroslav Pelikan, *Credo: Historical and Theological Guide to Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

Fr. Michael Pomazansky's *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* offers a concise yet thorough presentation of dogma, its sources, and its meaning for the Church. He draws heavily upon the Fathers, in particular St. Gregory of Nazianzus. As a handbook to theology, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* aims to present an overview rather than an in-depth analysis of this particular question of development. Fr. Seraphim Rose, the translator of *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, includes in his translation an appendix with a discussion of the development of doctrine. While he repeats much that Fr. Michael Pomozansky says within the text, Fr. Seraphim Rose raises this issue to argue against the teachings of Sophiology.

On the topic of whether the canons are liable to change, Fr. Nicholas Afanasiev (1893-1966), a professor at St. Sergius Institute in Paris, provides two important contributions. His two articles on the Church's canons most directly related to the present discussion are: "Canons and Canonical Consciousness" originally published in *Put'* 39(1933),²⁵ and "The Canons of the Church: Changeable or Unchangeable" first published in Russian in *Zhivoe Predanie* and reprinted in *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*.²⁶ His influence can be seen in the writings of Fr. Alexander Schmemmann in particular, and one notices his ideas on tradition and creativity recurring in the works of many twentieth and twenty-first century theologians, especially those with some connection to the St. Sergius Institute in Paris. Take for instance the following claims about creativity and tradition. Fr. Nichols Afanasiev writes of how one should approach the canons with a "combination of tradition and creativity, and tradition is the fulcrum for our creativity and a guarantee that even our creativity will not end with us."²⁷ Meanwhile, Bishop Kallistos writes of how "True Orthodox fidelity to the past must always be a *creative* fidelity; for true Orthodoxy can never rest satisfied with a barren 'theology of

²⁵ Afanasiev, "Canons and Canonical Consciousness."

²⁶ Afanasiev, "The Canons of the Church: Changeable or Unchangeable."

repetition’, which, parrot-like, repeats accepted formulae without striving to understand what lies behind them.”²⁸ In a similar vein, Fr. John Behr claims that “Tradition, like canon, is not a paralyzing constriction, but a stimulus for fruitful reflection, requiring us to think creatively.”²⁹

Fr. Georges Florovsky was part of a return to the Fathers and provides a defense of Tradition. Although “tradition” often sounds cold and lifeless, Fr. Georges Florovsky presents it as living and vibrant. His influence can be seen in the works of Bishop Kallistos Ware and Fr. John Behr. *The Orthodox Church* by Bishop Kallistos clearly sets forth the teachings of the Orthodox Church, and his work addresses this question of development as he discussed the beliefs of the Church. Sounding very much like Fr. Georges Florovsky, he points out that “Tradition, while inwardly changeless (for God does not change), is constantly assuming new forms, which supplement the old without superseding them.”³⁰ Fr. John Behr’s work, which is very much in the tradition of Fr. Georges Florovsky and Bishop Kallistos, approaches the question from a historical stance (see above for further discussion).

6. Application of Orthodox principles and or solution to the topic/problem

Why Cardinal Newman’s model proves inadequate. It becomes clear why Cardinal Newman’s model does not cohere with an Orthodox understanding of dogma when we look at where his model leads. The primary purpose of his essay is to defend historical Christianity— a goal that we certainly share. Yet there is a secondary purpose in Cardinal

²⁷ Afanasiev, “Canons and Canonical Consciousness.”

²⁸ Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia, *The Orthodox Church*, 206.

²⁹ John Behr, *The Way to Nicaea*, *The Formation of Christian Theology 1* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 6.

Newman's work, which is to justify developments within the Catholic Church. These developments, things such as the primacy of the Pope and the Immaculate conception, are doctrines that certainly divide us. Take for instance the following claim which is a crux in his argument: "And it is a less difficulty that the Papal supremacy was not formally acknowledged in the second century, than that there was no formal acknowledgment on the part of the Church of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity till the fourth."³¹ His argument is that the absence of something in the early Church does not indicate that the thing is foreign to the Church. So although there is no proclamation of papal authority in the first centuries, this does not discount it as being an innovation. According to Newman, this is no different from there being an absence of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit until the councils of the fourth century.

Newman's argument is nuanced and cannot be easily dismissed. It presents a challenge since there are aspects of his argument that agree with Orthodox theology. For example, he acknowledges that the faith originates with the Apostles— except they might not have fully understood it: "Thus, the holy Apostles would without words know all the truths concerning the high doctrines of theology, which controversialists after them have piously and charitably reduced to formulae, and developed through argument."³² Orthodox theology would accept the claim that the fullness of the faith ("all the truths concerning the high doctrines of theology" in Cardinal Newman's words) was handed down to the Apostles, and that these beliefs were given a more complete articulation at the time of the Ecumenical Councils.

³⁰ Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia, *The Orthodox Church*, 206.

³¹ Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, 151.

³² *Ibid.*, 191-2.

To explain how the Apostles could have had all the truths of theology, while also being unaware of things such as Papal Supremacy, Cardinal Newman claims that there is implicit and explicit knowledge. All of the later doctrines are implied within the doctrines held by the Apostles. It takes time for ideas to develop fully. What is implied becomes explicit in time. He explains this further by stating that

the highest and most wonderful truths, though communicated to the world once for all by inspired teachers, could not be comprehended all at once by the recipients, but, as being received and transmitted by minds not inspired and through media which were human, have required only the longer time and deeper thought for their full elucidation.³³

Frequently Newman uses analogies to nature, comparing this idea of development to the “germination and maturation of some truth or apparent truth on a large mental field.”³⁴

Eventually Cardinal Newman’s model takes him to a justification for papal supremacy. Where then is the divergence? His defense of development relies on the assumption that these developments were natural, the outgrowth of what was there implicitly from the beginning:

It has now been made probable that developments of Christianity were but natural, as time went on, and were to be expected; and that these natural and true developments, as being natural and true, were of course contemplated and taken into account by its Author, who in designing the work designed its legitimate results.³⁵

³³ Ibid., 29-30.

³⁴ Ibid., 38.

³⁵ Ibid., 75.

According to this manner of thinking, the rise of papal supremacy is likewise natural: “This is but natural, and is parallel to instances which happen daily, and may be so considered without prejudice to the divine right whether of the Episcopate or of the Papacy.”³⁶ The difficulty with defending these developments as being *natural* is that it suggests that things are the way they are simply because it was *natural*; thus there could not have been any other way.

But such a reliance on what is natural runs into problems. Newman goes on to say that the accruing of power by the Papacy was natural, just as it is the natural course of things for centralized government to develop:

A political body cannot exist without government, and the larger is the body the more concentrated must the government be. If the whole of Christendom is to form one Kingdom, one head is essential; at least this is the experience of eighteen hundred years.³⁷

This monarchist view assumes that political bodies will always tend towards greater centralization, that it is the natural course of history for monarchies to gather greater power. But history shows that these supposedly natural developments can also devolve; great empires can accrue great central authority, only to later dismember and break into many smaller states. More problematic is the notion that the Church is comparable to such bodies. Political bodies rise and fall; they are not divinely instituted like the Church.

Cardinal Newman relies too much on a view that sees Christianity as an idea, as something that exists in the mind: “If Christianity is a fact, and impresses an idea of itself on

³⁶ Ibid., 149.

³⁷ Ibid., 154.

our minds and is a subject-matter of exercises of the reason, that idea will in course of time expand into a multitude of ideas, and aspects of ideas.”³⁸ What seems to be missing in his discussion is a sense of the Church as being something more than a set of ideas or another political institution.

The strongest argument against Cardinal Newman is found in the writings of the second century Father, St. Irenaeus of Lyon. In his work *Against the Heresies* he argues that the Faith remains the same, no matter where it exists or in what language it is expressed. In *Against the Heresies* (1.10.2) he uses the following examples:

The Church, as we have said before, though disseminated throughout the whole world, carefully guards this preaching and this faith which she has received, as if she dwelt in one house. . . . But just as the sun, God’s creation, is one and the same throughout the world, so to the light, the preaching of the Truth, shines everywhere and enlightens all men who wish to come to the knowledge of the Truth. Neither will any of those who preside in the churches, though exceedingly eloquent, say anything else (for no one is above the Master); nor will a poor speaker subtract from the tradition. For, since the faith is one and the same, neither he who can discourse at length about it adds to it, nor he who can say only a little subtracts from it.³⁹

St. Irenaeus presents the faith as something without change, even as it takes different forms. Though it exists in different languages, even different levels of language, it is like the sun, being of one source and the same throughout.

³⁸ Ibid., 55.

³⁹ Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against the Heresies*, Ancient Christian Writers 55 (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 49-50.

St. Irenaeus continues in the next section (1.10.3) by showing how various expressions of the faith do not change the doctrines themselves:

The fact that some know more by virtue of their intelligence, and some less, does not come about by their changing the doctrine itself . . . It does come about, however, by bringing out more fully the meaning of whatever was said in parables and adapting it exactly to the doctrine of the Truth. [. . .] The reason is that, as was said previously, the entire Church has one and the same faith throughout the whole world.

Here it is emphasized that doctrine itself does not change; there is nothing implicit to be developed later as a natural growth from seed to plant. Instead, what happens is that the meaning of the faith is brought out more fully. Fr. John Behr, commenting on this passage from St. Irenaeus, observes that “It is clear, then, that for Irenaeus ‘tradition’ is not alive, in the sense that it cannot change, grow or develop into something else. The Church is to guard carefully this preaching and this faith, which she has received and which she is to preach, teach, and hand down harmoniously.”⁴⁰ Fr. John notes that W. W. Harvey, the editor of Irenaeus’ *Against the Heresies*, (which came out twelve years after Newman’s essay) added the following footnote to the passage from Irenaeus quoted above: “At least here there is not reserve made in favour of any theory of development. If ever we find any trace of this dangerous delusion in Christian antiquity, it is uniformly the plea of heresy.”⁴¹ Harvey clearly sets St. Irenaeus in opposition to Cardinal Newman and reminds us that in the early Church development would have been seen as tantamount to innovation—and innovation always stood on the side of the heterodox.

⁴⁰ Behr, *The Way to Nicaea*, 38.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 38, note 55.

One result of Cardinal Newman's approach is that it justifies changes by what is natural and not in accord with the intertwined sources of Scripture and Tradition. Orthodox theology teaches that the Church confirms the truth of dogma by its accord with the "mind of the Fathers", to use Fr. Georges Florovsky's phrase. This means that the Church aims "to find a precise form for the expression of the truths of the Faith as handed down from antiquity."⁴² Fr. Michael Pomazansky states that we cannot go deeper into the faith than the Apostles; subsequently, there is no new revelation of dogmatic truths. He writes,

Therefore, any attempt that is made— whether by individuals or in the name of dogmatic theology— to reveal new Christian truths, or new aspects of the dogmas handed down to us, or a new understanding of them, is completely out of place. The aim of dogmatic theology as a branch of learning is to set forth, with firm foundation and proof, the Orthodox Christian teaching which has been handed down.⁴³

We need a way to determine if a teaching is in line with the Apostolic tradition, or if it is a new development. The criterion that Cardinal Newman uses does not prove adequate. There must be a standard other than "what is natural" by which to measure whether something is an innovation or whether it is in accord with the faith once handed down to the Apostles.

Fr. Georges Florovsky explains that it is not enough to cite Scriptural proof-texts, since one needs "to grasp, as it were,— in advance, the true pattern of Biblical revelation, the great design of God's redemptive Providence, and this could be done only by an insight of

⁴² Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, 41.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

faith.”⁴⁴ This faith that unlocks the key to Scripture is “not an arbitrary and subjective insight of individuals—it was the faith of the Church, rooted in the Apostolic message, or *kerygma*, and authenticated by it.”⁴⁵ The measuring stick—that is, the canon or *regula fidei* in the words of St. Irenaeus—is not simply an appeal to Scripture or to antiquity. It is an appeal to what the Church has confirmed and authenticated by witnessing that it is in accord with tradition. Speaking of the appeal to the Fathers and the transition from the simple preaching of the apostles to the more nuanced dogmas of the councils, Fr. Georges Florovsky writes of how this is “still the same ‘simple message’ which has been once delivered and deposited, once for ever, by the Apostles. But now it is, as it were, properly and fully articulated. The Apostolic preaching is kept alive in the Church, not only merely preserved.”⁴⁶ Therefore the teaching of the Fathers is “a constant and ultimate measure and criterion of right faith.”⁴⁷ The means of determining what is in accord with the Apostolic faith is in the end an appeal not to “abstract tradition, to formulas and propositions. It is primarily an appeal to persons, *to holy witnesses*.”⁴⁸

Dogma is more than a history of ideas. Doctrine, as a set of abstract concepts and ideas, could be seen as developing. But doctrine is the ideas set forth, not the living experience of theology. Examined as cold, lifeless compendia of theories and formula, one could study the changes and developments of a body of ideas called doctrines.

⁴⁴ Georges Florovsky, “The Function of Tradition in the Ancient Church,” in *Bible, Church, Tradition: an Eastern Orthodox View* (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1972), 76.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁴⁶ Georges Florovsky, “St. Gregory Palamas and the Tradition of the Fathers,” in *Bible, Church, Tradition: an Eastern Orthodox View* (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1972), 107.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Georges Florovsky, “Patristic Theology and the Ethos of the Orthodox Church,” in *Aspects of Church History* (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1975), 17.

Pelikan's approach is to study the changes and development of the historical records of doctrinal formulation. Though based on Cardinal Newman's work, Pelikan does not have as an agenda defending the rise of papal authority. That being said, there are moments in Pelikan that at first seem contrary to Orthodox thinking. Speaking of the dogma of the Holy Trinity, he says the following: "This is not intended to say that a doctrine, once formulated, stops developing and becomes fixed; not even the dogma of the Trinity has stood perfectly still since its adoption and clarification."⁴⁹ But it would be too hasty a judgment to claim that this approach is directly in contrast to Orthodox positions, since, as will be shown, Orthodox theologians do allow that one may discern a historical sequence to the emergence of dogma.

There is a place for the study of the *historical sequence* of dogmatic theology. In Fr. Michael Pomozansky's *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, he explains the ways in which the development of doctrines can be discussed without doing harm to an understanding of dogma as being changeless. Works such as an *Essay in Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* by Bishop Sylvester "set forth the thinking of the Fathers of the Church in an historical sequence." Fr. Michael explains that

one must understand that such a method of exposition in Orthodox theology does not have the aim of investigating the 'gradual development of Christian teaching'; its aim is a different one: it is to show that the complete setting forth, in historical sequence, of the ideas of the holy Fathers of the Church on every subject confirms most clearly that the Holy Fathers in all ages thought the same about the truths of the Faith.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: a History of the Development of Doctrine*, 1:5.

⁵⁰ Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, 42.

Fr. Michael Pomazansky makes an important distinction here. While there is no “gradual development” of dogma, one can see a historical sequence to the ideas of the Fathers. He goes on to say that theology is not just repetition, and new circumstances require new explanations—even if those new explanations are ones from the past that have been forgotten: “Theology naturally takes into consideration the inquiries of each age, answers them, and sets forth the dogmatic truths accordingly. In this sense, one may speak about the development of dogmatic theology *as a branch of learning*. But there are no sufficient grounds for speaking about the development of the Christian teaching of faith itself.”⁵¹

In an appendix to Fr. Michael Pomazansky’s *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, Fr. Seraphim Rose returns to the issue of the development of dogma. Fr. Seraphim’s main purpose in this essay is to offer a critique of Sophiology, and to do this he first addresses the idea of development. He highlights the ambiguity present in the terminology as he asks “Does one understand ‘development’ as the uncovering of something already given, or as a new revelation?”⁵² He is emphatic in stating that certain things do not change or develop: “Christian teaching and the scope of Divine Revelation are unchanging. The Church’s teaching of faith does not develop, and the Church’s awareness of itself, with the course of centuries, does not become higher, deeper, and broader than it was among the Apostles.”⁵³ Fr. Seraphim Rose points out that Russian theologians of the 19th century discussed this issue differently depending on the audience: with Protestants they defended development as a way to defend the Church’s councils; with Roman Catholics they denied development to oppose new dogmas, in particular the dogma of papal infallibility. Yet Fr. Seraphim also acknowledges that there are certain types of development. He comments that “we do not at

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., Appendix 357.

all deny every kind of development in the sphere of dogma. What, then, is subject to development in dogmatics?” First, he notes that the quantity of dogmas develops: “One cannot deny that thanks to such dogmatic definitions the content of faith has become more clear in the awareness of the people of the Church and in the Church hierarchy itself”⁵⁴ Secondly, theological learning develops: “But theological learning (as opposed to theology proper) is an outward subject in relation to the spiritual life of the Church . . . Dogmatic theology as a branch of learning can develop, but it cannot develop and perfect the teaching of the Church.”⁵⁵ In summary, the branch of learning that examines the history of dogma may develop, but dogma itself does not develop.

Thus we are now in a better position to understand the distinctions between what changes and what remains unchanging. One further task remains. We still need an explanation of how it is that a dogma can seem unknown until a particular point in history without viewing this as a development of the kernel of some earlier idea. St. Gregory of Nazianzus addresses this specific question when he was defending the dogma of the Holy Spirit. In his fifth theological oration (Oration 31.26), he first explains how God reveals truth to us by degrees. In the old covenant, God the Father is made manifest, but the Son was less manifest. Then, “the new covenant made the Son manifest and gave us a glimpse of the Spirit’s Godhead.”⁵⁶ God reveals the fullness of the Trinity in stages to condescend to

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., Appendix 361.

⁵⁵ Ibid., Appendix 362.

⁵⁶ Gregory of Nazianzus, *On God and Christ: The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius*, trans. Frederick Williams and Lionel Wickham, Popular Patristics Series (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), 137.

our weakness: “this was, I believe, the motive for the Spirit’s making his home in the disciples in gradual stages proportionate to their capacity to receive him.”⁵⁷

St. Gregory goes on to explain more fully why these teachings came about gradually.

The passage deserves quoting in full:

You see how light shines on us bit by bit, you see in the doctrine of God an order, which we had better observe, neither revealing it suddenly nor concealing it to the last. To reveal it suddenly would be clumsy, would shock outsiders. Ultimately to conceal it would be a denial of God, would make outsiders of our own people. Let me add to these remarks a thought which well may have occurred to others already, but which I suspect of being a product of my own mind. The Savior had certain truths which he said could not at that time be borne by the disciples, filled though they had been with a host of teachings. These truths, for reasons I well may have mentioned, were therefore concealed. He also said that we should be taught ‘all things’ [Jn 14:26; 16:13] by the Holy Spirit, when he made his dwelling in us. One of these truths I take to be the *Godhead* of the Spirit, which becomes clear at a later stage, when the knowledge is timely and capable of being taken in, when after our Savior’s return to heaven, it is, because of that miracle, no longer an object of disbelief (Oration 31:27).⁵⁸

Although dogma may be revealed gradually, this does not mean that dogma itself develops. Development presupposes growth and change from one thing to another. But St. Gregory does not argue that the fullness of the Holy Spirit develops from earlier teachings. Instead,

⁵⁷ Pelikan discusses the same passage in *Credo*, but my conclusions differ from his.

⁵⁸ Gregory of Nazianzus, *On God and Christ*, 138.

he shows that there were inclinations, or rather brief glimpses. The light of truth emerges gradually, but light does not develop from anything other than its source, the sun.

Theology, expressed in the dogmas of the Church, is more than a set of concepts or ideas. It cannot be divorced from Divine Revelation. Theology exists within the sphere of living, breathing humans who have imperfect knowledge and language that is only capable of so much. Doctrines may be formulated in human categories, but ultimately theology is matter of revelation.

Dogmas are eternal, other parts of Church life change. At this point it is clear that dogmas remain unchanging, although their revelation may happen gradually. Moreover, the study of dogma as a branch of learning does develop. But what about the other aspects of the Church that seem to develop, such as the canons that deal with the Church's administrative structure? Fr. Nicholas Afanasiev explains this when he says that "dogmas are absolute truths and canons are applications of these truths for the historical existence of the Church. Dogmas do not concern temporal existence, while canons are temporal" Thus the two deal with different sphere. Here Fr. Nicholas seems to already have in mind a distinction between dogmatic canons—what he simply calls dogmas—and those canons that deal with administrative matters. Dogmas concern the eternal realm of divine truth— matters such as the Holy Trinity. Canons, though, deal with the application of that truth to present needs. Fr. Nicholas Afanasiev explains further that "the truth that canons express is absolute, but the content of canons is not this truth itself, but the mode through which this truth must be expressed in a given historical form of the Church's life. Canons express the eternal in the temporal."⁵⁹ Historical changes, such as the incursions of barbarians, can lead to changes in

⁵⁹ Afanasiev, "The Canons of the Church: Changeable or Unchangeable."

the canons, since they are historically situated. Canons that deal with ecclesiastical structure and Church life are liable to change; but the underlying principles, founded on the dogmas of the Church, remain unchanged.

7. Conclusion

To appreciate fully the Orthodox view on the unchanging nature of dogma, one must embrace what seems paradoxical. Divine truth is ever the same, but we live in a changing world. It seems contrary to our lived experience that anything would remain eternally the same. Moreover, the Church, as a living organism, seems liable to grow and develop. But dogma is not a human creation, though it is formulated in human language.

In *Hymn of Entry*, Archimandrite Vasileios gives one of the most eloquent depictions of how some things change but some things remain unchanged:

Communication of the patristic word, the word of the Holy Fathers, is not a matter of applying their sayings to this or that topic with the help of a concordance. It is a process whereby nourishment is taken up by living organisms, assimilated by them and turned into blood, life and strength . . . Thus the living patristic word is not conveyed mechanically, nor preserved archaeologically, nor approached through excursions into history. It is conveyed whole, full of life, as it passes from generation to generation through living organisms, altering them, creating ‘fathers’ who make it their personal word, a new possession, a miracle, a wealth which increases as it is given away. This is the unchanging change wrought by the power that changes corruption into

incorruption. It is the motionless perpetual motion of the word of God, and its ever-living immutability. Every day the word seems different and new, and is the same.⁶⁰

Diving revelation of the central truths of the faith are an “unchanging change.” As these changeless truths get passed down from one person to the next, the “unchanging change” inhabit new organisms, giving them new life. The word of God is always the same, yet it moves from teacher to disciple and in this way grows. Dogma is eternal, but the Church is a living organism that finds renewal in returning to the unchanging tenets of the faith. As Bishop Kallistos observes, the sense of permanence is often what attracts people to Orthodoxy: “the thing that first strikes a stranger on encountering Orthodoxy is usually its air of antiquity, its apparent changelessness.”⁶¹

⁶⁰ Archimandrite Vasileios of Stavronikita, *Hymn of Entry: Liturgy and Life in the Orthodox Church*, trans. Elizabeth Brière, Contemporary Greek Theologians 1 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998), 35.

⁶¹ Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia, *The Orthodox Church*, 203.

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