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Reading Scripture and Developing Doctrine

For Christian believers, no one captivates the attention, moves the affections, or stirs the imagination like Jesus of Nazareth. He is the visible display—the perfect icon—of the inexhaustible love and power of an invisible God (Col. 1:15). What we know of this Jesus we have read in the writings of the New Testament. These first-century texts are the gateway to Christ, the "primary sources" on which we base our historical, theological, and practical beliefs about him. Through the theologically flavored biographies, ecclesial missives, and dream-like visions contained within, we can get to know him and get a glimpse of the impact he had on his earliest followers.

Yet nowhere do the texts that reveal him reduce their description of him to a systematic description or an orderly set of facts. Nowhere does the New Testament resemble a question-and-answer catechism. New Testament writers attribute to him many names: "Messiah," "Lord," "Savior," "Son of God," "Son of Man," "King," "the image of the invisible God," "the Head of the church," "the firstborn from the dead," "the Way, the Truth, and the Life," "the Good Shepherd,"

"the True Vine," and many others. But no one of these titles or metaphorical descriptions fully encompasses his significance for Christian belief and practice.

While our words can never exhaust the embarrassment of riches that comes with knowing Christ, believers do need a shorthand way of describing him, a way of talking about him "on-the-go." As an evangelical concerned with sharing the gospel or *evangel* of Jesus Christ, I want to tell everyone I can about his person and work in the most effective way I can. Whether I am preaching a sermon or engaged in personal evangelism, I need a concise way of talking about him that does not feel like an extended seminary curriculum on the historical Jesus and New Testament Christology. As invaluable as that kind of extended treatment may be, I don't always have the time or the patient hearing that such a detailed description would require. I need to "cut to the chase," to get to the main point. I need a way of expressing the historical and theological meaning of Jesus' life and mission for those who do not have a comprehensive background in the religious and political history of early Judaism. In sharing the good news of Jesus, I need to get to the matter of *who* Jesus is and *why* people should care.

So how do I give a contemporary and concise expression to the message of the Bible in terms that they can understand without oversimplifying the complexities and nuances of the historical record or without diminishing the theological richness of the biblical witness? The short answer is *doctrine*. Doctrine (from the Latin term *doctrīna*, meaning "teaching") is *the verbal articulation of Christian beliefs*. Doctrine is an expression of "what we believe" in summary statements, most often appearing in the form of propositional statements.

As New Testament scholar N. T. Wright aptly describes them, the doctrines expressed in Christian creeds and theology function like

"portable narratives." Doctrines are like the biblical story packed in a suitcase, ready to go. They

> consciously tell the story—precisely the scriptural story!—from creation to new creation, focusing particularly, of course, on Jesus and summing up what Scripture says about him in a powerful, brief narrative (a process that we can already see happening within the New Testament itself). When the larger story needs to be put within a particular discourse, for argumentative, didactic, rhetorical, or whatever other purpose, it makes sense, and is not inimical to its own character, to telescope it together and allow it, suitably bagged up, to take its place in that new context—just as long as we realize that it will collect mildew if we leave it in its bag forever.[1]

As the portable expressions of biblical teaching, "doctrines" or "doctrinal formulations" are not synonymous with revealed ideas or the inspired teachings of the Bible.

Biblical authors certainly model the practice of doctrine for us with *biblical doctrine*. Doctrines, as I use the term in this book, are primarily *postcanonical expressions of the content of Christian belief* and *interpretations of Scripture* shaped by particular historical and conceptual frameworks. Though they take their shape and substance from Scripture, doctrinal constructs are not necessarily semantically or conceptually identical to the particular teachings expressed by biblical authors. The Holy Spirit may have "fixed" the meaning or substance of biblical texts in the process of inspiring biblical authors, but the articulation of that substance in postcanonical Christian doctrine is an ongoing process.

Theology, a term derived from the Greek terms *theos*, meaning "God," and *logos*, meaning "word" or "reason," describes the broad category of disciplines committed to explicating these Christian

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1. N. T. Wright, "Reading Paul, Thinking Scripture," in *Scripture's Doctrine and Theology's Bible: How the New Testament Shapes Christian Dogmatics*, ed. Markus Bockmuehl and Alan J. Torrance (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 64.

doctrines or teachings. One such discipline, *biblical theology*—the study of the particular expressions of biblical doctrine found in the Old and New Testaments that gives specific attention to the arguments, historical situations, and nuances of individual units of text—has a crucial and proper role in the church and academy.[2] In addition to biblical theology, there is also a need for *systematic theology*. Systematic theology or constructive theology is a discipline committed to articulating the message of the Christian faith in such a way that it addresses the particular questions and concerns that contemporary hearers may have along the way. Whenever we try to explain a biblical doctrine in our own words or relate it to a new situation, we have moved from biblical doctrine toward postcanonical doctrinal formulation.

While the formal, academic discipline of systematic theology is a later historical development, the habit of developing doctrine in a way that is both orderly and germane to its context is an ancient practice. With their liturgical functions, creeds are by no means "systematic theologies" in the academic sense, but they did emerge as postcanonical attempts to articulate and express the meaning of Scripture for their contemporary audiences. For example, the fathers who penned the Nicene Creed (325/381) and the Chalcedonian Creed (451) proffered their own confessions or "portable narratives" in the fourth and fifth centuries in order to address particular questions pertinent the internal conflicts of the church. These developments were more than products of insatiable intellectual curiosity; they emerged in a context of devotion and prayer. As Thomas F. Torrance observes, "We have found in these centuries

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2. The definitions of "biblical theology" are legion. Where two or three biblical scholars have gathered, there are probably five or six different ways to conceive of the nebulous task that is "biblical theology." A recent, helpful introduction to these various models of biblical theology comes in Edward Klink III and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012).

a continuing tradition characterised by a deep intertwining of faith and godliness, understanding and worship, under the creative impact of the primary evangelical convictions imprinted upon the mind of the Church in its commitment to God's self-revelation through the incarnate Son and in the Holy Spirit."[3]

Yet in order to develop these creedal formulations, the theologians of the fourth and fifth centuries did take on the task of constructive doctrinal development in order to give fuller expression to their understanding of Christian revelation. As R. P. C. Hanson observes in his magisterial study on the Arian controversy of the fourth century, the "theologians of the Christian Church were slowly driven to a realization that the deepest questions which face Christianity cannot be answered in purely biblical language, because *the questions are about the meaning of biblical language itself*."[4] While much of the language of these creeds is puzzling to contemporary hearers with little or no interest in Greco-Roman metaphysics, these portable narratives were quite fitting to the particular intellectual climate in which they grew (a place so culturally saturated with Platonist and Neo-Platonist philosophical presuppositions that it could have been called "the Platonic belt").

The Nicene bishops describe Christ as being God, having the "same essence as the Father" (*homoousios*). They insisted that Jesus is not merely similar to God in his essence (*homoiousios*). Christ is not

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3. Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 44.

4. See R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy, 318-381* (London/New York: T&T Clark, 1988), xxi. Hanson does distinguish between *genuine* doctrinal development and doctrinal distortion. See R. P. C. Hanson and Reginald Fuller, *The Church of Rome: A Dissuasive* (London: SCM, 1948), 102. Hanson and Fuller (1915–2007) write, "Genuine development of Christian doctrine . . . has taken place only in the enunciation of certain formulae necessary to protect the original tradition of the Church from error. These formulae are only *de fide*, necessary to salvation, in as far as points of controversy have been raised to which they could be the only answer if the witness of the Bible to God's revelation in Jesus Christ was to be maintained in its truth."

a created being who has "God-like" qualities. For the Nicene fathers, Christ is the very same God "by whom all things were made," and the person of the Godhead "who for us . . . and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made a human being." In the incarnation, Jesus Christ is the one who "suffered" on the cross for sins and the one who "rose again on the third day." He "ascended into heaven," and he will return "to judge both the living and the dead." The Nicene fathers were trying to sum up the great narrative of the New Testament regarding Christ in a portable way and a way that would address those, like the Arian party, who they felt fundamentally misunderstood and misrepresented the biblical portrait of Christ.

Over a century later, when wrestling through the implications of what it meant for Jesus to be human and divine, the divines at Chalcedon described him as "the one and only Son" who is "truly God and truly man." Christ shares the very essence of God in his divine nature and is truly human in every way according to his human nature, save for the absence of personal sin in his life. Against the Nestorian teaching that divided Christ into two persons or the Eutychian notion that he is a *tertium quid* (i.e., a "third thing") who is neither truly divine nor truly human, these fathers contended that in the Messiah of Israel, divine and human natures are united in one person, without separation or confusion.

Both of these creeds neatly and tidily express the "raw material" of biblical Christology, and they were also profitable expressions of Christian belief for their particular time and context. Yet they also represent considerable advancements in understandings of Christian ideas developed long after the events of the New Testament. Out of historical carelessness we may be tempted to think that just because these early confessions are ancient (a relative term, I might add) that they were basically contemporaneous with Jesus and the early church.

But to put things in perspective, these creeds, written approximately three to four centuries after the life of the historical Jesus, have a greater time span between them and the life of their subject matter than we do with William Shakespeare or George Washington. It took a lot of time and a lot of thought to formulate clear expressions of what we call historic, orthodox Christian beliefs. As Alister McGrath notes, these formulations "can be seen as the climax of a long, careful, and exhaustive process of theological reflection and exploration." And while early Christians had "always recognized that Jesus of Nazareth embodied God," "the intellectual exploration of what this [recognition] implied took more than three centuries, involving the critical examination of a wide range of intellectual frameworks for making sense of what the church had already discovered to be true."[5]

For some, the realization of the great gulf of time between the writing of the New Testament and the later formation of creeds can be quite unsettling. Some might say that these later church fathers were in no better place to establish the identity of Jesus as God than a twenty-first century person would be establishing the identity of George Washington as America's first monarch. Many would also argue (correctly, to some degree) that this later, creedal language of Christian belief would have been quite alien to biblical authors themselves. On the other side of the spectrum, there are Christians who would deny any genuine historical development at all, who would contend that creeds and confessions formulated along the way at places like Nicaea or Chalcedon did nothing to grow understanding of God's work in Christ but merely gave new expression to clear biblical concepts. For these, there is "no creed but the Bible." The Bible is so self-explanatory and perspicuous that

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5. Alister E. McGrath, *Heresy: A History of Defending the Truth* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2009), 25–26.

any open-minded reader from any cultural or historical context can understand it if they simply heed its words. As Millard J. Erickson astutely observes, not many preachers stand behind their pulpits, read the text, and sit down without giving some kind of explanation.[6] Doctrine, as explanation of the biblical teaching, is an inescapable outgrowth of the faithful proclamation of the written word. Others might admit some degree of development in early Christianity, a making explicit of what was already implicit in biblical texts, and then suggest that the theological task is basically finished. For these, there is no further need for doctrinal construction or re-evaluation, and the only theologian we need to read is (fill-in-the-blank).

These critiques bring us to a larger question and one that will occupy us throughout this study: Is there an ongoing role for contemporary theologians other than *historical theology*, the rehearsal of theological formulations from the past? Can evangelical theology retain its commitment to the normative supremacy of Scripture and simultaneously provide new and constructive solutions for issues unforeseen by ancient authors—issues like abortion, climate change, cloning, drone warfare, gay marriage, gender reassignment surgery, gun control, internet pornography, nuclear proliferation, online gambling, overpopulation, and stem-cell research? These are questions related to the so-called "problem of doctrinal development."

The Historical Phenomenon of Doctrinal Development

New Testament writers repeatedly warn their readers about doctrinal downgrades and religious or philosophical trajectories that would lead believers away from the Christ proclaimed by the apostles. With

6. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3d. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), 74.

a figure of speech drawn from Greek athletic contests, Jude pled that his audience would "carry on the fight" for the "faith which was once and for all delivered to the saints" against the devices of antinomian teachers who infiltrated the church (Jude 3–4). John warned of teachers who possessed the spirit of antichrist and who rejected the truth revealed to them (1 John 2:18–24; 4:1–6). Paul likewise admonished Galatian and Corinthian Christians for exchanging the gospel proclaimed by the apostles with a contrary gospel of their own devices (Gal. 1:6–9; 2 Cor. 11:3–4). The same kind of plea appears throughout the Pastoral Epistles: "Maintain the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me. . . . Protect the good thing that was entrusted to you" (2 Tim. 1:13–14; cf. 1 Tim. 6:20a). The first followers of Jesus were insistent that their message was pure and without the corruption of "cleverly fabricated myths" or the pretense of "personal interpretation" (2 Pet. 1:16, 21). Concern for maintaining a faithful, unadulterated gospel message has been with the Christian tradition since its inception.

While distortion of the apostolic proclamation always has been cause for alarm, the ongoing development of doctrine has been a fixture of the Christian tradition since the first century. Simply stated, doctrinal development is the ongoing task of advancing the teachings of the Christian faith. The term "doctrinal development" can describe (1) the ongoing process of reconstructing and reordering doctrines into *systematic theologies* that offer both conceptual clarity and internal consistency. This common practice, as John B. Webster observes, is a post-apostolic, postcanonical enterprise shaped by a desire to develop a comprehensive understanding of unorganized New Testament teaching that is predominately *ad hoc* or situational in nature.[7]

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7. John B. Webster, "Introduction: Systematic Theology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, ed. John B. Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance, 1–18. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Development may also describe (2) attempts to *contextualize* or "translate" the substance of Christian teaching for new settings and new cultures. On occasion, and of central concern for the present study, development means (3) the introduction of new *theological concepts and expressions*. These developments, which go beyond the verbal and conceptual bounds of previously received revelation, are attempts to amplify or shed new light on established ideas and themes. All three of these uses of development are interrelated and can be difficult to distinguish.

The biblical canon itself is a witness to these kinds of historical developments, either in making explicit what is implicit in previous texts, shifting theological emphases, mutating older beliefs, or in some cases, introducing completely new ideas. While an inspired, revelatory act of God, the Bible is itself a collection of historically situated documents, and the beliefs of biblical authors were themselves shaped by their time and place in history. A few things are worth noting when looking at these historical developments. First, several crucial theological developments in Second Temple Judaism set the stage for the New Testament: the rise of apocalypticism, the expansion of eschatological beliefs about afterlife and judgment, a more developed understanding of the spirit world of angels and demons, a more explicit commitment to monotheism, and the expansion of the synagogue model. Second, the New Testament itself is a witness to several developments within the framework of Jewish belief, including (1) the new emphasis on God as Father, (2) the concept of the threefoldness of God, (3) the inclusion of Gentiles under the rubric of the people of God, (4) and the decentralization of Torah,[8] and (5) the new centrality of resurrection belief.[9]

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8. Ian Howard Marshall, *Beyond the Bible: Moving from Scripture to Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 48–50.

Other developments or shifts appear within the early Christian movement itself. Even with broad similarities between the teaching of Jesus and his followers, the earliest disciples of Jesus move their explicit focus away from his kingdom of God motif in the gospels to the kerygma about the crucified and risen Lord.[10] When it became apparent to some late first-century Christians that the Lord's return may not happen in their lifetime, they began formulating distinctively Christian praxis and gave new attention to the codification of their doctrines.[11] One might call these instances of intracanonical developments evidence of "progressive revelation" within the canon,[12] but the pressing difficulty, especially for evangelicals like myself committed to the material and formal sufficiency of Scripture,[13] is that the normative tradition of the faith community continued to grow even after this unique period of divine revelation was complete.[14]

9. For example, in his *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), N. T. Wright identifies at least six Christian "mutations" of Jewish resurrection belief. Wright notes several Christian "mutations" of antecedent Jewish resurrection belief: (1) the centrality of resurrection belief for Christians, (2) the explicit description of the resurrection as immortal physicality, (3) the universality of resurrection belief, (4) the division of the resurrection into two stages (1 Cor. 15:23), (5) its metaphorical association with baptism (Rom. 6:4–5), and (6) the resurrection of messiah. Following his dialogue with John Dominic Crossan (b. 1934) at the 2005 Greer-Heard Point-Counterpoint Forum in New Orleans, Wright added a seventh mutation: "collaborative eschatology." See also N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2008), 45–46; cf. Robert B. Stewart, ed., *The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan and N. T. Wright in Dialogue* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 26–27, 31–32.

10. Marshall, *Beyond the Bible*, 50–52.

11. See Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, trans. William Montgomery (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1910), 21. As Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965) states, "The main problem of primitive dogmatics was the delay of Parousia." For an examination of this change of practice and doctrine following eschatological shifts in early Christianity, see R. P. C. Hanson, *The Continuity of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Seabury, 1981), 34–50.

12. For a critical, evangelical treatment of this theme, see Daniel B. Wallace, "Is Intra-Canonical Development Compatible with a High Bibliology?" (paper presented at the Evangelical Theological Society Southwestern Regional Meeting, Dallas, TX, March 1, 2002).

13. I.e., the need for no other revelation than that which is preserved in Scripture. Material sufficiency denotes the sufficiency of the content of Scripture for knowledge of God and the Christian life.

Christian history is a witness to the ongoing development of postcanonical doctrine. Thus far, I have used the word "canon" only as a general term to describe the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament and the twenty-seven of the New.[15] The notion of canon

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14. The precise nature of revelation (particularly special revelation) has been another contentious issue in the area of theological prolegomena, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A traditional evangelical defense of God's revelation as supernatural, propositional self-disclosure and intervention in the affairs of humanity can be found in Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, ed. Samuel G. Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948), 71–102. Yet more can be said about what this self-disclosure constitutes and how it functions. See also John Baillie, *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956); Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, vol. 3, *God Who Speaks and Shows: Fifteen Theses, Part Two* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999); and Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992), 3–115. Avery Dulles (1918–2008) identifies five basic models of revelation in nineteenth- and twentieth-century theologies: revelation as propositional doctrine, as modeled by evangelicals like Carl F. H. Henry (1913–2003); revelation as history as seen in the works of biblical theologians like George Ernest Wright (1909–1974); revelation as the inner experience to which Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher (1768–1834) testified; revelation as dialectical presence in Karl Barth (1886–1968) and Emil Brunner (1889–1966); and revelation as new awareness in the works of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955). Much of the modern debate over revelation hinges on a false dichotomy made between revelation as personal encounter and revelation as propositional revelation. As many evangelicals under the influence of contemporary speech-act theory have argued, special revelation does not have to be either personal or propositional. It can be *both* personal *and* propositional. See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "God's Mighty Speech-Acts: The Doctrine of Scripture for Today," in *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture*, ed. P. E. Satterthwaite and David F. Wright (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 143–82, esp. 178–80; Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 216–221; and Michael Scott Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims along the Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 115–26. An extensive treatment of revelation is beyond the scope of the present study, but many of these themes will appear in the discussion of the nature of Christian doctrine. Sufficient for the present discussion is the common acknowledgment among Christians that God's revelation of himself in Christ has been preserved supernaturally through the activity of the Holy Spirit in the inspired texts of the Old and New Testaments. Furthermore, I assume that the closure of the canon and the traditional criteria for canonicity (apostolicity, orthodoxy, catholicity, and antiquity) mean that this process of inscripturation is complete. Without this assumption, the historical development of doctrine poses no real "problem."

15. In so doing, I do not mean to indicate that every biblical author possessed a "canonical consciousness," that all of these authors were aware of the fact that they were in process of inscripturating the word of God, which, for them, was primarily the inspired, living, oral message of God. This may have been the case for some (e.g., 2 Pet. 3:15–16), but, as Ben Witherington III observes, the move from an understanding of the word of God as the spoken proclamation of God to Scripture as the written word of God was itself a doctrinal development that took some time to transpire. See Ben Witherington III, *The Living Word of God: Rethinking the Theology of the Bible* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 1–14;

as an authoritative list of books was an even later development, and much like the development of other early dogmas, this codification of the canon required some prodding from heretical factions along the way.[16] In the same way that believers eventually gave formal articulation to their beliefs about Jesus after long, creative contemplation and reflection on Scripture, it seems that, as Bruce Metzger observes, the church "did not create the canon, but came to recognize, accept, affirm, and confirm the self-authenticating quality of certain documents that imposed themselves as such upon the Church."[17] To be clear, when I use the term "postcanonical doctrinal developments," I am referring to all historical developments in Christian teaching after the unique period of apostolic revelation ended at the close of the first century, not simply doctrines that emerged after the fourth-century solidification of the canonical list.

New situations in the centuries that followed writing of New Testament books demanded innovative formulas, expressions, and even new conceptual tools. Second and third century Christians faced formidable threats from religious philosophies like Gnosticism, which utilized characters and vocabulary familiar to readers of Scripture, but in ways very different from their canonical counterparts. In many ways, it was heresy—not orthodox belief—that gave birth to the practice of systematic theology. Early Christian apologists felt an obligation to offer formal responses to the complex philosophical and theological systems advocated by these religious groups. These apologists even employed vocabulary and concepts borrowed from

idem, "The Truth Will Win Out: An Historian's Perspective on the Inerrancy Controversy," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 57/1 (March 2014): 22–24.

16. Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 75–112. Metzger identifies three basic non-orthodox groups that spurred on the orthodox development of the canon: Gnosticism, Marcionism, and Montanism.

17. Ibid., viii.

Greco-Roman philosophy to defend the Christian tradition from opponents deemed heretical or hostile to the faith.[18]

Even with Trinitarian, christological, and pneumatological dogma virtually settled for the larger Christian tradition in the creeds formulated at the ecumenical councils of Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431), and Chalcedon (451), theologians would devote the next millennium to formulating doctrines of creation, providence, salvation, the church, and last things. Doctrinal development did not stop with the first four ecumenical councils. Christians still wrestle through issues like these today, debating one another over the meaning of pertinent biblical texts. Even the Protestant reformers who contended for the supreme authority of Christian Scripture continued to formulate their own confessions and distinctive doctrines, often relying on extra-biblical patristic and medieval formulations of doctrine in the process.[19]

If history is any indication, postcanonical doctrinal development is an inevitable reality in the Christian theological tradition. But such development can also serve as a significant threat to the identity and continuity of the received tradition. Can theology present new expressions of belief and remain faithful to the unique authority and sufficiency of the Bible? More practically, can the contemporary

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18. Anticipating Jewish and Christian objections to this use of philosophical concepts, Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–215 C.E.) argues that Hellenistic philosophy "came into existence . . . for the advantages reaped by us from knowledge" (*The Stromata* 1.2) and provides a "preparatory culture" for Christian doctrine (*The Stromata* 1.5.4). Clement calls Plato's dialogues "divinely inspired" (*The Stromata* 1. 8) and describes Aristotle as "assenting to Scripture" (*The Stromata* 1.17). Following the second-century Syrian philosopher Numenius, Clement believes the works of Plato were historically dependent upon the Law of Moses (*The Stromata* 1.23) and that Greek philosophers in the Socratic school were guilty of "plagiarizing . . . dogmas from the Hebrews" (*The Stromata* 1. 21).

19. For an example of this unconscious acceptance of extrabiblical dogmatic formulations, see Martin Luther, "On the Councils and the Church," trans. Charles M. Jacobs and Eric W. Gritsch, in *Luther's Works*, vol. 41, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 95–106; Dennis Ngien, "Chalcedonian Christology and Beyond: Luther's Understanding of the *Communicatio Idiomatum*," *The Heythrop Journal* 45 (2004): 54.

systematic theologian address current crises and still maintain continuity with biblical faith? The theologian who takes up the so-called *problem of doctrinal development* assumes that God has once and for all revealed himself through the medium of human language in Scripture and must by some means explain how Christian doctrines, which purport to be grounded in this revelation, continue to grow or develop even after the epoch of canonical revelation is closed. As Jan Hendrik Walgrave aptly observes, "No one who accepts both presuppositions can possibly get round the problem" when faced with the facts of development in history.[20]

The Nature of the Theological Problem

Extensive, critical reflection on the problem posed by postcanonical development is a more recent feature in the history of Christian thought, sparked largely by the rise of historical consciousness in the nineteenth century. Among the first to produce a systematic theory of development was the Anglican Oxford Movement leader who eventually became a Roman Catholic cardinal, John Henry Newman (1801–1890), and other Catholic theologians quickly followed suit. Reasons for Roman Catholic attention to development are clear. First, extra-biblical traditions play a crucial, normative role in the formation of distinctive Catholic doctrines such as the doctrine of purgatory or the perpetual virginity of Mary.[21] Second, many

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20. Jan Hendrik Walgrave, *Unfolding Revelation: The Nature of Doctrinal Development* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 6.

21. Matthew explicitly states that Joseph did not "know" Mary until (*heós*) the birth of Jesus (1:25). However, the second-century apocryphal gospel *The Protoevangelium of James* (also known as *The Birth of Mary*) is an ascetic apology for Mary's ongoing sexual purity. According to this text, Mary is not the mother of Jesus' brothers and sisters but their stepmother. Joseph is a widower who is several years Mary's senior—so much older that he is concerned that his fiancée-ward will be perceived as his daughter (*Prot. Jas.* 9:2). According to this text, Mary's virginity is preserved even in the birth of Jesus. The author graphically depicts the midwife Salome—who initially doubts Mary's virginity and purity—testing Mary by inserting her finger in her birth