2022

An Ethics of Doctrinal Emergence: Reading Newman with Augustine and Contemporary Information Theory

Jeffrey John Campbell

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss

Part of the Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons

Recommended Citation
https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss/3916

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License.
Copyright © 2022 Jeffrey John Campbell
LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

AN ETHICS OF DOCTRINAL EMERGENCE: READING NEWMAN WITH AUGUSTINE
AND CONTEMPORARY INFORMATION THEORY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY

BY
JEFFREY JOHN CAMPBELL
CHICAGO, IL
MAY 2022
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the many professors who have conveyed to me the excitement of the world of ideas through their teaching and encouragement. I am grateful to have learned from them and hope that I may learn how to share that excitement with others. It is especially difficult to express the value that I place on the years of thoughtful and inspiring conversation and learning that I have received from the director of this dissertation, Dr. John McCarthy. It is an honor to have his mentorship on this project. Many thanks also to all of the readers on the dissertation committee: Dr. Dickinson, Dr. French, and Dr. Nicholson. I have enjoyed our conversations and have learned so much from each of you. Each of the readers has improved this project through their advice and expertise. Thank you Erich Von Abele for the editing assistance that got me through some stressful moments during the formatting process.

I wish that my dad could have lived to read this essay. He would have enjoyed discussing its contents and I miss not being able to do that. I am most grateful to my mom and the fact that we still can, and do, have many wonderful discussions. Thanks so much mom. Mom has always believed in me, and now I have trouble finding adequate words of gratitude. I would not be writing a dissertation if it had not been for the encouragement and guidance of my parents.

I am grateful to my fiancée, Min Xia, who has been extremely patient and supportive. She has put up with my absence many times while I wrote this dissertation. Min has been a comfort throughout this project. Thanks too for the cheering up that I often receive from my future nieces Serena, Jennifer, and Emily. You are bright young women with promising futures.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION: A RECONFIGURED DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT AND AN EMERGENT ETHICS</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of the Chapters</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Five</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background, Context, and Importance for a New Discussion of Doctrinal Development</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE FROM NEWMAN TO WILES</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Henry Newman</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Lindbeck</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alister E. McGrath</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathryn Tanner</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolfhart Pannenberg</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maurice Wiles</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Concluding Thoughts</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO: AN AUGUSTINIAN RETRIEVAL</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An ‘Augustinian Paradigm’</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Augustine’s Signa-Res Paradigm</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After Hegel</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolfhart Pannenberg</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jon Sobrino</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE: CONTEMPORARY INFORMATION THEORY AS A MODEL FOR DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposal for a Reconfigured Model of Doctrinal Development</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brief Overview of the Structure of the Chapter</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patterns of Information Flow as the Basis for the Biological Sciences</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logical and Computational ‘Foundations’ for the Biological Sciences</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cellular Automata as Models of ‘Rule Evolution’</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of ‘Science’ Section</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lindbeck’s ‘Rule Theory’ and Tanner’s Anthropological Alternative</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concluding Thoughts</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER FOUR: EVOLUTION, DOCTRINE, AND EMERGENT ETHICAL DILEMMAS

The Evolving Doctrine of Sovereignty 156
Brief Interlude: Global Context for the Emergence of Recent Calls for Heightened National Sovereignty 161
The Return of a Darker Form of Sovereignty 186
Evolving Doctrine of Creation 189
Summary of Previous Section: Examination and Evolution of Two Doctrines 214
Some Concluding Thoughts 216

CHAPTER FIVE: ASTROBIOLOGY AND THE FUTURE OF DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT

Brief Summary of the Chapters 219
George Coyne and Some Implications for Future Discussions of Doctrinal Development 222

BIBLIOGRAPHY 238

VITA 261
ABSTRACT

The aim of this essay is to begin the process of a reconfiguration of the theological category of doctrinal development and to integrate an “emergent doctrinal ethics of belief” as an inextricable dimension of this category. Most scholarly writing on doctrinal development has taken place in the wake of the Enlightenment with its focus on epistemology, and doctrine is conceived of as “referencing” a quasi-metaphysical “res.” I attempt to “update” the guiding metaphors of doctrinal development with the goal of moving discussions away from an over emphasis on epistemology and “ossified” notions of doctrine. Information theory, with its unique property of “intangible transformability,” allows for this possibility. Since virtually all discussions of doctrinal development since Newman accept various tropes such as organic or biological growth, it is natural to appeal to more contemporary ideas of biological evolution. Today, new research in the areas of systems biology refer to flows of information and environmentally influenced “rule evolution” as defining features of biological sciences. I suggest that this “rule evolution” may be a helpful corrective to Lindbeck’s “rule theory” of doctrine. Conceiving doctrinal development in terms of information flow describes the way that unexpected ethical dilemmas emerge in the course of time. By appealing to Augustine’s *de doctrina* where the endless play of signification observed in both World and Scripture is limited only by the uncontrollable hermeneutical key of *Caritas*, I suggest that an expanded notion of *Caritas* as an emergent ethics of belief can provide a guardrail for the type of open-ended evolution observed in doctrinal development.
INTRODUCTION:

A RECONFIGURED DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT AND AN EMERGENT ETHICS

The aim of this project is to begin a process of reconfiguring the theological category of doctrinal development with ‘updated’ evolutionary metaphors that includes an ‘emergent ethics of belief’ as an inextricable dimension within that developmental process. Therefore, these two aspects: ‘reconfiguring’ the model of doctrinal development, and integrating an ethical dimension, comprise the thesis of the dissertation. It should not be surprising that a concept that claims that all doctrines must develop should find itself in need of development. What is somewhat surprising, is that previous discussions of the development of doctrine have waxed and waned over the decades, only to be finally dropped as no longer interesting to many theologians or philosophers.

In addition to why a renewed discussion of doctrinal development is important, some may ask why should we think about concepts such as ‘doctrine’ at all, when they are typically portrayed as so rigid and essentializing? Most reflections are now on ‘religious’ ways of living, acting, or speaking, rather than anything like doctrines. Furthermore, since most areas of philosophy, theology, or the social sciences have largely abandoned attempts to articulate something such as ‘essences,’ or unchanging definitions, what is the point of discussing ‘doctrine?’ Much of this will be addressed throughout the project. For now, I would like to express that I too am suspicious of ‘essentializing’ and do not see philosophy’s task as ‘discovering’ such unchanging concepts. There are many legitimate concerns. Some of these
will be examined in later chapters.¹

In *De Doctrina Christiana* (DDC), written more than fourteen hundred years before Newman’s work on doctrine, Augustine stressed that ‘the thing’ that the Christian faith is essentially about, is not necessarily the Bible, nor is it doctrine.² The ‘res’ of the Christian faith is *Caritas*, the double commandment to love God and neighbor. Towards the end of Book I Augustine explains that with *Caritas* a person “has no need of the scriptures except to instruct others” (DDC 1.39.43). This commandment of love becomes the ‘hermeneutical key’ for the Christian faith. Augustine continues by stating that when strengthened by “faith, hope, and love…many people relying on these three things, [may] actually live in solitude without any texts of the scriptures” (DDC 1.39.43). For Augustine—just as God’s love is infinite—God’s revelation too may be open-ended, being limited in meaning only by *Caritas*. Thus, there may be an indefinite number of valid interpretations of scripture. Neither doctrines nor scriptures, nor

¹ As we will see, I view my project as quite similar to Kathryn Tanner’s work in *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1997). My approach uses different metaphors, drawn from evolutionary biology and mathematical and logical ideas from information theory central to the notion of evolution as “flows of information,”—as opposed to some ‘unchanging essence’ underlying entities. Furthermore, the influence on these ideas drawn from Godel and Turing’s incompleteness, undecidability, and open-endedness arise from self-referentiality—it therefore comes as no surprise that there are some “family resemblances” here with certain discussions found in post-structural thought as well. I agree that much philosophy and the social sciences have similar thought. For example, Georg G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (CT: Wesleyan University, 2005); in so-called continental philosophy (outside of more conservative circles, e.g, in France) there is a fair consensus with the notion that concepts are constructed, not discovered. Obviously, there are too many to cite here. To cite one example, see Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* Translated Graham Burchell and Hugh Tomlinson (London, Verso Press, 1994); in Pragmatism we see this direction as well. See Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (MN: University of Minneapolis, 1982); *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (UK: Cambridge Press, 1989); Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics and Praxis* (PA: University of Pennsylvania, 1983); This is a general direction in most hermeneutical thought as well. To cite just one example, we will be looking at Gianni Vattimo in latter chapters. Even in so-called analytic philosophy there is a turn from “essentializing” and metaphysics, at least as traditionally conceived. See Samuel C. Wheeler III, *Deconstruction as Analytic Philosophy* (CA: Stanford University Press, 2000). Especially after Quine, Davidson, and Putnam, the legitimacy of modal logic has been questioned, as well as any strict division between so-called necessary *a priori* propositions versus *a posteriori* contingent assertions. The division between continental and analytic thought may well become more blurred as time goes on.
anything else in the world of creation constitute the ‘res’ of the faith. All of these ‘things’ are signs—representations to be understood in light of Caritas which is the ‘res’ of the faith. In book IV Augustine discusses how best to present this core insight—Caritas, the Christian ‘res’—to people. For Augustine, rhetorical style should aim for plain speech (for example Cicero’s ‘restrained’ style) and yet find ways to exhort the audience (via the grand style of rhetoric) to absorb the message of love, be transformed by it, and be empowered to act on it. Again, for Augustine, neither doctrine nor the Bible are the ‘res’ of faith. The interpretive key for teaching (doctrine) is Caritas. Augustine’s concern was to transform lives to live the Christian faith in service to others. This is his orthopraxy. The faith is not primarily about knowing the right things or defending the correct statements. Rather, it is living according to Caritas and finding the means of aiding others to this insight that most concerned Augustine.

During the late seventeenth, and throughout the eighteenth-century, philosophy and theology were forever altered in emphasis. The Enlightenment’s focus on epistemology and the accompanying goal of discovering ‘correct methodology’ emerged with the era’s ‘turn to the self.’ More specifically for our concerns here, it should be noted that all of the authors writing about doctrine or doctrinal development from Newman onwards have composed their works within a culture that emphasized precisely these ‘Enlightenment’ concerns. So, for example, reflections upon ‘doctrine’ usually appear focused on issues of epistemology, and an almost ‘quasi-metaphysical’ sense that the propositions of doctrine represent the ‘res’ of the religion. (Remember, for Augustine, the ‘res’ of the faith is Caritas). Similarly, many authors seem to

---

suggest that doctrines are to be primarily understood as statements that, if correct, would correspond or refer in some way to some ‘res.’

One can see how this ‘after-the-Enlightenment’ view of doctrine is at odds with Augustine’s concerns. For Augustine, the first three books of De Doctrina are not primarily books delineating epistemological ‘rules,’ nor are they his description of ‘sign theory,’ as we will see in the second chapter. Of course, conditions have changed considerably since the late Roman Empire. One example would be to recognize that in Newman’s era, the category of history was emphasized more than earlier centuries. This recognition of history is central for this discussion. Furthermore, in this project I suggest ‘updating’ Newman’s organic metaphors of development and change by utilizing Darwinian categories, or more specifically, by drawing upon current understandings of information theory that are shedding much light on contemporary biology. The value of this is to take advantage of the non-essentialist, non-teleological character of evolution. In short, evolution has no need for ‘res,’ essences, or substances as traditionally conceived. Evolution is about ‘flows or streams of information.’

My hope is to move doctrinal development away from the epistemological, quasi-metaphysical notion of doctrines as having a ‘res,’ and towards the type of open-ended, undecidability, and incompleteness that one finds in contemporary understandings of evolution and the mathematical and logical underpinnings in those disciplines. By thinking notions of doctrinal evolution as in some ways analogous to the ‘information flows’ of biological evolution, we will be able to consider the concepts of ‘complexity’ and ‘emergence’ as inherent elements of any evolving doctrinal tradition as well. This allows an explicit turn to viewing doctrinal
development through the lens of ethics and Caritas.³ Towards this end, the final two chapters of this work will look at the ethical dimensions of this type of ‘reconfigured’ doctrinal development (or perhaps in some way, a ‘retrieval’). By analyzing the unforeseen and complex development of two doctrines—sovereignty in monotheism, and the doctrine of creation—we will see how ‘negative’ effects ‘emerge from the evolutionary complexity of these traditions,’ thereby opening a space for ethical reflection that could not have been predicted from the outset. The final chapter balances this ‘negative’ sense of an ‘ethical dilemma emergence’ discussed in the penultimate chapter, with a more ‘positive’ emphasis on how this category of a reconfigured doctrinal development may be interpreted within an ‘integrated’ ethical dimension or focus. The following section provides a brief overview of the content of the chapters. This will be followed by some reflections on the background and context of the project.

**Overview of the Chapters**

**Chapter One**

The literature review is to be found in Chapter One. A brief discussion of how doctrinal development was understood prior to John Henry Newman comes from Owen Chadwick’s *From Bossuet to Newman* and Jaroslav Pelikan’s *Development of Christian Doctrine*.⁴

---


The focus of this review chapter, however, will be an explication and discussion of the key ideas regarding the category of development of doctrine. Newman, of course, provided the modern metaphors and conceptions of the process. After pondering Newman’s model, which set much of the tone for subsequent discussions on the subject, we will look to Kathryn Tanner, George Lindbeck, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Alister McGrath, and Maurice Wiles. We will also refer (at times) to works on the subject by Jan Hendrik Walgrave, Nicholas Lash, Charles Bent, and Bernard Lonergan. The notion of doctrinal development in these works may be understood as primarily concerned with issues of orthodoxy, or the ‘irreformability’ of doctrine, as well as questions regarding what criteria may be established so as to set limits to the process. We will also note how—as thinkers writing in the wake of the Enlightenment—the emphasis of their writing is also upon epistemology, semiotics, and doctrine as ‘referencing’ a quasi-metaphysical ‘res.’ I suggest that although these thinkers differ greatly on the process of development—organic growth, dialectic, deductive, paradigm shifts, and so on—many work within a framework that considers doctrine as essentially propositional (with the exception of Wiles, who, I will argue, views doctrines within something of a coherence theory of truth. Lindbeck is also committed to a notion of a coherence theory within his cultural-linguistic model. He is ‘probably’ [this ‘probably’ will become clear in Chapter One] appealing also to a type of correspondence theory of truth, although this is contested by McGrath as we will see. Tanner is working within a postmodern or perhaps post-structural framework).
Chapter Two

Although discussions of ‘doctrine’ are dealing with only one dimension of religious attitudes or other religious phenomena, it is nevertheless an important one. Doctrines are about beliefs, and beliefs have consequences. Using Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana* as a heuristic device or ‘paradigm’ we can see how doctrine tends to be viewed with an overly epistemological/ quasi-metaphysical ‘res’-like focus. The other key idea here is that although there are many ways of ‘mapping’ the concept of doctrine, most articulations assume that doctrines do ‘have’ a ‘true res,’ however distant this infinite truth may be from our limited finite minds. This heuristic model will be used to examine two theologians whose thought are, in a sense, ‘inversely related’ to one another. Wolfhart Pannenberg and Jon Sobrino both utilize a dialectical approach to history, although the former represents the Hegelian idealist tradition, while the later writes from a perspective also shaped by the social sciences and experience drawn from Central and South America. By looking at Pannenberg’s notion of doctrine as essentially ‘hypotheses’ with an eschatological verification and comparing this with Sobrino’s view of the ‘res’ of religion being one of attending to the marginalized poor—to “Take the crucified people down from the cross”5—I suggest that although very different notions of the ‘res’ are present in these thinkers, Sobrino’s vision is closer to Augustine’s conception of *Caritas* as the ‘res’ of the Christian faith.

Chapter Three

The goal of this chapter is to ‘update’ the guiding metaphors of doctrinal development with the hope that we may begin to move discussions of ‘doctrine’ *away* from an over-emphasis

---

on epistemology and ossified notions. Basically, all discussions of doctrinal development after John Henry Newman accept his tropes of organic, botanical, or biological development. I am suggesting a move away from teleological and essentialist notions of some underlying, unchanging, and enduring ‘res’ or essential core, and instead adopting Darwinian concepts as more appropriate to reflection on doctrinal change. Contemporary developments in systems biology, genetics and evolutionary biology speak of ‘streams,’ ‘patterns,’ ‘clusters,’ or ‘flows’ of information—not some underlying enduring substance or essence. Therefore adopting these metaphors for doctrinal development may assist our goal of moving this theological category away from the over-emphasis on matters of epistemology and what I have called an almost ‘quasi-metaphysical’ res to doctrine, and towards a kind of ‘weak thought’ in which doctrinal development and change may avoid the ‘strong thought’ assertions of ossified propositions of doctrine—assertions that are violent in their intransigence—both ‘soft and harder’ forms of violence.

We will see that evolution does proceed by ‘rules’ such as the information in the genome, the DNA ‘triplet codon’ for amino acid expression, or the ‘update rules’ governing the evolution of Cellular Automata. But in all these cases—and this is crucial to my project—these ‘rules’ evolve over time. Rules are ‘state dependent”—they interact with the environment and are both affected by and in turn affect the environment. This ‘state dependent rule evolution’ may be used to critique George Lindbeck’s assertion of a ‘rule theory of doctrine.’ Contrary to Lindbeck, and

---

in keeping with my Darwinian analogy of rule evolution, I assert that doctrines as rules may evolve over time quite naturally through interaction with the environment. Furthermore, they may be ‘edited’ intentionally just as a biologist might ‘edit’ some gene expression.\(^7\)

Finally, I argue that Kathryn Tanner’s critique of post-liberalism—which certainly covers Lindbeck’s position—is quite close to what I am suggesting as a reconfigured doctrinal development.\(^8\) She is using what she refers to as postmodern anthropological categories, and I am appealing to Darwinian metaphors and the underlying notions of incompleteness, undecidability and open-endedness, but I suggest that the projects are similar. *Just as Sobrino is closer than Pannenberg to Augustine’s vision, Tanner is closer than Lindbeck.* Tanner’s insistence that all Christian material is already “borrowed material,” is precisely the same idea that I am attempting to express albeit with evolutionary metaphors instead of concepts from post-structural social sciences.\(^9\) She suggests that what makes ‘Christian identity,’ is not the ability to provide exact answers or orthodox statements. For Tanner—and I am in agreement with her here—what allows us to speak of these shifting boundaries as ‘Christianity,’ is in part that Christians tend to ask certain similar questions, think with similar ‘motifs’ such as ‘dying and rising,’ ‘love of neighbor,’ and so on, and discuss the ways in which one is best able to live this

---

\(^7\) I am thinking of Lindbeck’s “rule theory” of doctrine. Lindbeck argues that doctrines are like rules of a game, or grammar to a language. In this way he hopes to avoid thinking of doctrine as either referring to anything objective or as expressing some inner experience. Doctrines, for Lindbeck, are basically hermeneutical or nomological rules that are neither true nor false. Lindbeck argues that most doctrines are immutable rules, and it is this point that I am primarily disagreeing with, as can be seen by my attempt to articulate an ‘evolving notion of doctrine as rule,’ or, as stated above, “state dependent ‘rule evolution.’” This will be examined further in Chapter Three.


\(^9\) Tanner, 114.
way of life.10 Where Tanner uses the term ‘motif,’ I am thinking of doctrine, and yet the parallels are quite similar. (For Tanner, ‘motifs’ may change, be altered or even dropped. Likewise, I am suggesting that ‘rules’ may similarly evolve or be edited). And this is also a further illustration of my suggestion for thinking in less dogmatic ways or with ‘weaker thought.’

To my mind, using the non-essentialist language of evolution provides a move away from the over-emphasis on seeking the correct epistemology, sign theory, or some quasi-metaphysical ‘res’ of doctrine. Tanner, if I am following her correctly, is thinking similarly (although not referring specifically to doctrine or doctrinal development, but rather a ‘task’ for all Christians) albeit using language of postmodern cultural anthropology.

Chapter Four

In Chapters Four and Five I turn to the ethical interpretations of doctrine. Chapter Four analyzes the ‘negative,’ or critical side to this ethical reflection while Chapter Five attempts to provide a ‘positive’ suggestion for how an idea of development of doctrine might include an ethical dimension. So, Chapter Four continues to articulate further implications for a model of doctrinal development that accepts ‘Darwinian’ metaphors or analogies: especially the key ideas of ‘information flow,’ complexity, emergence, or downward causation. We may view the phenomena of ‘complexity’ and ‘emergence’ everywhere, from flocks of birds to traffic jams. We may also see how complexity leads to unpredictable ‘behaviors’ that emerge quite unexpectedly from a process of development. The complex, and potentially unintended consequences that may emerge from such a process of development (or a tradition) may ‘open up’ dangerous ethical consequences that could not be observed or expected from the apparently

10 Tanner, 124.
simple innocuous beginnings. It is in this way that I suggest that we may find ourselves in a situation of an ‘emergent crisis point’ that ‘opens up’ the space for an ‘ethics of belief.’ Therefore, in this chapter we will ponder and analyze the unexpected emergent and top/down effects brought about in the ‘doctrine of sovereignty in monotheism’ and the ‘doctrine of creation.’ I will be arguing that from innocuous beginnings, unpredictable and complex developments may arise, producing quite unexpected ‘emergent features’ that then produce top/down effects. Effects that were unforeseeable from the outset, but that in current circumstances may demand a re-consideration. In precisely this way, a kind of ‘ethics of belief’ may emerge from doctrinal developments. We observed that doctrines do emerge, evolve, and may be intentionally ‘edited’ in Chapter Three. Now with this notion of an ‘emergent ethics of belief’ within the process of doctrinal development, we may ask if a doctrine should be altered or reconsidered. It is my suggestion that we adopt a reconfigured category of doctrinal development so as to take seriously the changing ‘one world’ that we all inhabit.

**Chapter Five**

In the final chapter I will attempt to articulate how the notion of *Caritas*—the hermeneutical key for Augustine for the purposes of doctrine or teaching—can be integrated into this reconfigured sense of doctrinal development. This chapter will discuss some possible directions for understanding the ethical aspect of doctrinal development. In keeping with the Darwinian metaphors employed in this project, I am suggesting that we adopt a ‘Teleonomic Caritas’ as the ‘limiting’ principle for development of doctrine. In evolutionary biology, scientists such as Douglas J. Futuyma and Ernst Mayr have expressed that evolution happens in a
teleonomic rather than a teleological manner. In short, whereas teleology deals with final end goals, causes, and ideas of some innate essential direction present within an organism, teleonomy acknowledges that certain ‘rules,’ conditions, specific physical and environmental contexts, phenotypic constraints, or phylogenetic constraints, all act as limiting principles to evolutionary development. For example, an evolutionary biologist would not appeal to teleology but rather natural selection to explain the evolution of an oak tree. And yet teleonomic limits ensure that an acorn will grow into an oak tree and not a frog. This does not suggest, however, that the genetic ‘rules’ that govern the development of the acorn cannot, over fundamentally long periods of time, evolve and allow the eventual emergence of a new ‘speciation event.’ Rules that govern evolution may themselves evolve although there are limiting aspects to this development. In this way, I suggest that the kind of open-ended, undecidability, and incompleteness associated with the evolution of doctrine or more broadly Christianity, does not have to be viewed as a nihilistic open-ended absurdity that may evolve into anything whatsoever—(if that conclusion seems to be the direction at the end of Chapter Three). Rather, it is the notion of a ‘teleonomic Caritas’ that is, in a sense, ‘un-deconstructable,’ and provides a limiting influence to the otherwise undecidability and open-endedness. Perhaps one way to express what I am trying to say in appealing to the evolutionary paradigm and the logical ‘foundations’ of incompleteness, is that one needs to “throw away the ladder, after he (sic) has climbed up it.” Indeed something like this is necessary so that my attempt to avoid the quasi-metaphysical ‘res’ of doctrine does not


itself turn into a new metaphysics. Inspired by Gianni Vattimo, I am therefore suggesting a ‘weakened,’ ‘ironically held,’ or ‘twisting’ of metaphysics, rather than an outright attempt at ‘overcoming’ metaphysics completely. Such ‘weak thought’ is required to get past the impasses of the ‘res’ and the overemphasis on epistemology in an attempt to reconfigure doctrinal development with an ethical lens. The chapter will conclude with a reflection on the future of doctrinal development by drawing upon George Coyne’s “The Evolution of Intelligent Life on Earth and Possibly Elsewhere: Reflections from a Religious Tradition.” This will also open up some possible avenues for developing the work presented here in some new directions.

Background, Context, and Importance for a New Discussion of Doctrinal Development

In any case, the early twenty-first century is a very different world than the late nineteenth or mid-twentieth century situations in which previous discussions of doctrinal development have primarily occurred. I would suggest that the quite different context in which we do currently find ourselves provides important conditions for re-opening discussions regarding this somewhat neglected category. For example, Christianity must finally begin to acknowledge that it is only one of many ‘religions’ in this rapidly changing world. Data collected between 2018 and 2019 from the Pew Research Center shows that sixty-five percent of

---

13 Claiming to have moved totally “beyond metaphysics,” can surreptitiously become a new metaphysics. It is better, to my mind, to acknowledge this danger, as I believe Vattimo is doing with the notion of *Verwinding* rather than an *Uberwinding*. For a clear presentation of Vattimo’s use of these two terms see “Nihilism and the Post-Modern in Philosophy,” in *The End of Modernity* (MD John Hopkins Press, 1988), 164-181.

U.S. adults identify as Christian which represents a twelve percent decrease since 2008-2009.\(^\text{15}\) At the same time, those who self-describe as atheist, agnostic, or ‘nothing in particular,’ comprise twenty-six percent of the population. In 2009, that number stood at seventeen percent.\(^\text{16}\) Importantly, Christians comprise only a little more than thirty-one percent of the global population.\(^\text{17}\) Furthermore, worldwide, the data shows that “roughly one-in-six people around the globe (1.1 billion, 16%) have no religious affiliation. This makes the unaffiliated the third-largest religious group worldwide.”\(^\text{18}\) Therefore, to my mind, any new discussion of doctrinal development should take account of the rapidly changing religious demographics, as well as the reality that the world is growing smaller, while global immigration/emigration and communication are increasing.

If the message of *Gaudium et Spes* was one of encouraging the Church to explicitly recognize itself as truly global and not merely western, then I would suggest that a new way of thinking about development of doctrine is needed.\(^\text{19}\) This new approach should include a few

---


\(^\text{16}\) “In U.S. Decline of Christianity.” Generational gaps also suggest larger shifts in American religiosity. “Eight-in-ten members of the Silent generation (those born between 1928-1945) describe themselves as Christian (84%), as do three-quarters of Baby Boomers (76%). In stark contrast, only half of Millennials (49%) describe themselves as Christians; four-in-ten are religious “nones,” and one-in-ten Millennials identify with non-Christian faiths.” Also interesting here, see Ryan P. Burge, *The Nones: Where They Came From, Who They Are, and Where They Are Going* (MN; Fortress, Press, 2021).


\(^\text{18}\) “Global Religious Landscape.”

\(^\text{19}\) The Vatican II “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,” *Gaudium et Spes* (GS) 7 Dec. 1965, starts with the dignity of human beings as the point of intersection between the world and the Church (GS, esp. paragraphs 1-3, 12-18). The document recognizes that the profound changes, upheavals, interconnections, and transformations occurring in the world are simultaneously experienced in all aspects of social, economic, moral, and religious phenomena (see esp. GS, 4-10). Some of the global transformations recognized are the emergence of
elements: (1) It should be open to an explicitly comparative theological perspective in terms of doctrinal formation and development. Christianity is only one of many religions in the world.\textsuperscript{20} (2) It should recognize that we live after the time of Darwin.\textsuperscript{21} Previous discussions of doctrinal development seem to operate with a pre-Darwinian set of categories including teleology and an assumption of some internal ‘essence’ underlying all significations or representations. But the idea that there is some ‘res’—some ‘thing’—some unchanging absolute truth underlying our ‘doctrinal representations,’ may be part of the problem. Does an assumption of a ‘res behind’ doctrines lead to exclusiveness, divisions, and even violence? Are doctrines even the main ‘res’ of any ‘religion’? Can we ‘move away’ from this over-emphasis on epistemological and quasi-metaphysical ‘res’ views of doctrine? Briefly, I would suggest that if philosophers and theologians are concerned to avoid the pitfalls associated with onto-theology, or the notion of attributing ‘Thingness’ to God, then we should ask, “why should we attribute to doctrine that

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{20}See for example the document from Vatican II, \textit{Nostra Aetate, Declaration on the Relations of the Church to Non-Christian Religions}, 28 Oct. 1965.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{21}In Chapter Three I will suggest ‘updating’ metaphors in an “after Darwin” fashion. We may adopt metaphors of mutation, symbiosis, punctuated equilibrium, allopatric or sympatric speciation events, cladistics, etc. And centrally to my mind, the underlying basis for biological sciences is information. Crucially, for this project, evolution is about flows, streams, clusters, or patterns of information—but not “essences.” And if we consider doctrines as ‘rules,’ we must see them as ‘rules’ that evolve, emerge, and can be intentionally “edited.” I suggest that if the ethical situation warrants it, we must be prepared to “edit the genome” of the doctrinal ‘rule.’ Doctrines, like everything else, are subject to evolution. In short, in Chapter Three we see that doctrine may be altered and evolve completely; in
\end{quote}
which we would not attribute to God?” (3) It should recognize that an ethical dimension within a development of doctrine is vital. Our era is on ‘the other side’ of many cultural shifts that have not figured into previous discussions of doctrinal development. It is my hope that a “reconfigured doctrinal development with an ethical dimension,” may be of use in integrating and working towards acknowledging them. The aim is to begin articulating a notion of doctrinal development that accepts ‘Darwinian’ metaphors, with the key idea of ‘information flow,’ instead of ‘essences,’ as best describing doctrine. And by simply extending the implications of a more ‘Darwinian’ form of doctrinal development, the concepts of complexity, emergence, and downward causation may allow for the recognition of situations where a doctrine may lead to an ‘emergent crisis point,’ thus opening up the space for an ‘ethics of belief.’ In such a ‘space,’ we may then feel inclined to ‘edit the genome’ of our doctrine, if unintended consequences have emerged from the ‘tradition,’ or process of doctrinal development that are no longer morally acceptable. Thus, as discussed earlier, Chapter Four will examine some ‘emergent’ ethical dangers from within doctrinal development whereas Chapter Five will provide some more ‘positive’ and possible directions that a reconfigured doctrinal development might look like in the early twenty-first century.

Chapter Four we see ‘emergent’ situations when we ask whether doctrines should change. In this way, I see Chapter Four as coming full circle to the issues raised in this Introduction.
CHAPTER ONE
A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE FROM NEWMAN TO WILES

A cursory look at the history of the Christian faith would very likely leave one with an impression that doctrine has never been a static concept. Development of doctrine is a category that cannot be denied. The main questions that theologians have typically asked regarding this fact are these: How may one distinguish between authentic or corrupt developments? Are there any limits to the process itself? Is there any framework, ‘theory,’ or paradigm for understanding how such development occurs? Did revelation end with the deposit of faith at the close of the Apostolic era, or is there in some sense an ‘ongoing’ revelation? How may one determine the difference between new understandings of what was implicit in the original deposit versus an assertion of an entirely new revelation?

Determining what authors should be included in a literature review is itself an act of interpretation. Just as any writing of history involves not only attention and attempts at fidelity to both (necessarily interpreted) ‘facts,’ as well as a choice of narrative style, the simple act of deciding who is to be included in a review will inevitably shape the terms of the debate.¹ Therefore, I feel obligated to provide a brief word on some possibilities that were excluded from this chapter. For example, Bernard Lonergan who looked to the similarities of ‘method’ within both science and theology, wrote a treatise on doctrinal development that is thoroughly

---

dialectical in process with a faith in a critical realist epistemology. For Lonergan, method “is a normative pattern of recurrent and related operations yielding accumulative and progressive results.” This assumption of an ‘accumulation’ or progression of doctrinal results may be questioned by ‘instrumentalist’ or ‘community consensus’ based approaches such as one finds in the notion of ‘paradigm shifts.’ According to this view, new models emerge over time that are not necessarily closer to reality but are considered more adequate than alternative models, as judged by their fruitfulness, coherence, ability to stimulate new research and so on. Taken to an extreme—and this is controversial, and also outside the scope of this essay—different paradigms may be incommensurable. In doctrinal development, a mild but roughly analogous approach to this will be examined in this chapter when we turn to Maurice Wiles. Ernst Troeltsch, the theologian of the ‘History of Religions’ school, proposed a thoroughly historicist approach to doctrine in which the ‘idea’ of Christianity encounters new cultures or situations and becomes applied in unique and valuable ways relevant to that context. The notion of any unvarying ‘idea,’ however, is something controversial as postmodern theorists have demonstrated. This type of critique will be examined further when we turn to Kathryn Tanner.

So, the question remains as to why I chose to include the theologians that we do find here in this chapter. The authors that have been included in this review were chosen according to three concerns. One, some of them have projects that are similar to my own goals. Two, some of

---


---
them were chosen as a contrast to my own goals. Three, all of them are important thinkers for any discussion of doctrinal development. And all of them are deeply impressive thinkers that were a pleasure to study.

**Literature Review**

**John Henry Newman**

There are many theologians who laid the initial groundwork for a theory of doctrinal development—J.S. Drey, J. A. Mohler, J.E. Kuhn from the University of Tubingen to name a few. G.W.F. Hegel and the re-introduction of Trinitarian thought for the purpose of delineating a world-history provides another important moment. But it was John Henry Newman who put forth the category of doctrinal development that appears in virtually all contemporary discussion on the topic. So, it is to the Roman Catholic convert from Anglicanism that I will start this literature review.

As Newman was undergoing a spiritual journey that would eventually lead to his joining the Catholic Church, questions surrounding the issue of doctrinal development were paramount in his mind. Newman asked whether the obvious historical ‘difference’ in Catholic doctrine over the years were ‘corruptions’ or authentic additions and elaborations? By what criteria might one know? It was plainly the case that the decrees at Nicaea or the Definition pronounced at Chalcedon were a result of ‘development”—but unless this is rejected, or considered as unwarranted accretions, what reason could one have for asserting that development stopped in 451? Why could not development continue through the years? What grounds exist for stating that

---

the Creed of Pius IV or the Council of Trent were not authentic developments?\textsuperscript{5} The dictum of Vincent of Lerins that states “Christianity is what has been held always, everywhere and by all” cannot resolve the issue. As Neman explains the difficulties with this dictum:

It admits of being interpreted in two ways: if it be narrowed for the purpose of disproving the catholicity of the Creed of Pope Pius, it becomes also an objection to the Athanasian; and if it be relaxed to admit the doctrines retained by the English Church, it no longer excludes certain doctrines of Rome which that Church denies. I cannot at once condemn St. Thomas and St. Bernard, and defend St. Athanasius and St. Gregory Nazianzen.\textsuperscript{6}

Furthermore, Newman realized that the dictum of Vincent of Lerins had never been applied everywhere, always, and at all times. Newman cites as one example the ante-Nicene council of Antioch, convened in the mid-third century, which decided to denounce the usage of the term ‘homoousion’—which was reintroduced at Nicaea.\textsuperscript{7} In fact, many of the ante-Nicene theologians and bishops appeared to have adhered to a subordinationist Christology. Referring to many of the theological writings of the ante-Nicene era, Newman states the following:

…the creeds of that early day make no mention in their letter of the Catholic doctrine at all. They make mention indeed of a Three; but that there is any mystery in the doctrine, that the Three are One, that They are coequal, coeternal, all increate, all omnipotent, all incomprehensible, is not stated, and never could be gathered from them.\textsuperscript{8}

Having exposed the inadequacy of the Lerins’ dictum, and having rejected the disciplina arcana, Newman realized new metaphors were needed. The idea of development required looking at the questions historically. And to do this Newman adopted metaphors of organic growth to do justice to the reality of change in doctrinal history.


\textsuperscript{6} Newman, \textit{Essay}, 11-12. He also rejects the notion that a disciplina arcana could account for the emergence of later additions to doctrine. In short, doctrinal development continues well past the time in which such a concept would be at all plausible. See Newman, \textit{Essay}, 27-29

\textsuperscript{7} Newman, \textit{Essay}, 16.
However, before turning to his theory, perhaps we should begin by noting that Newman’s, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (or, *Essay* in this study) is an extended historical piece, whereas his last of the University Sermons, “The Theory of Developments in Religious Doctrine” emphasizes what we might call, ‘psychological’ notions in that it focuses on issues of ‘faith and reason’ as well as epistemological concerns. Therefore, to my mind, we should read the former through the lens of the later. The concepts Newman first mentions in these sermons shed direct light onto the ‘hermeneutic,’ or perhaps, we might say, ‘communal epistemology,’ that lays behind the notion of development in his Essay. Following this brief excursus, we will turn to Newman’s, *An Essay in Aid of A Grammar of Assent* (or, Grammar), where we will have occasion to define Newman’s epistemological ideas a bit further before describing how they fit into his *Essay*.

Newman first laid out his early ponderings on epistemological topics in relation to the issue of ‘faith,’ in his eighth sermon, “Implicit and Explicit Reason,” at Oxford University. This dichotomy between knowing something ‘implicitly,’ and knowing it in an ‘explicit manner,’ will become key to grasping Newman’s epistemology. The basic thought may be explicated with numerous examples such as how a child loves his mother or father very deeply and yet lacks the ability (at a young age) to put this feeling into adequate wording. Or another example might be

---

how a farmer may know and be able to predict weather changes yet be unable to express the exact justification for her assertion. Newman suggests that a child, or perhaps an adult too busy to reflect, may have an ‘impression’ of ‘revealed faith,’ as an inward or implicit understanding, and yet be unable—at least ‘right now’—to express or justify precisely what they do in fact ‘know’ implicitly. As Newman explains:

...as the inward idea of divine truth... passes into explicit form by the activity of our reflective powers, still such an actual delineation is not essential to its genuineness and perfection. A peasant may have such a true impression, yet be unable to give any intelligible account of it... But what is remarkable at first sight is this, that there is good reason for saying that the impression make upon the mind need not even be recognized by the parties possessing it. It is no proof that persons are not possessed, because they are not conscious of an idea.

When Newman uses the term, ‘idea,’ he does so in a very specific sense. Perhaps the most comprehensible explication of this term comes from Owen Chadwick. Chadwick explains that “idea does not mean the notion which an individual may form of an object, but the object itself as it is capable of being apprehended in various notions.” Now, ‘notional apprehension,’ for Newman, refers to the way in which the mind may abstract from concrete reality. A notional apprehension, therefore, is what is involved in thinking or speaking in general terms. A

11 Chadwick, From Bossuet to Newman, 152. Newman suggests the Biblical example of Mary who, upon hearing the pronouncement of the angel, “kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.” Newman is commenting on how Mary received revelation, and “pondered” them in faith. Newman explains how this is an early example of how great ideas take time to be processed and understood. “The Theory of Developments in Religious Doctrine,” 312-313.


13 Newman explains “the idea which represents an object or supposed object is commensurate with the sum total of its possible aspects, however, they may vary in the separate consciousness of individuals; and in proportion to the variety of aspects under which it presents itself to various minds is its force and depth, and the argument for its reality,” 34 in Newman’s, Essay.

14 Chadwick, From Bossuet to Newman, 149.
‘real apprehension,’ on the other hand, refers to the experience of a particular concrete or individual reality. When a theologian speaks of God, she necessarily does so notionally. But, for Newman, it is possible to speak of a ‘real assent’ to a proposition such as ‘God exists,’ because it is based on ‘conscience,’ and conscience is understood as a real apprehension. Similarly, ‘faith’ for Newman, is based on a real apprehension whereas theology is necessarily based on the notional. Thus, doctrines are understood notionally. As Jan Walgrave explains these distinctions of Newman’s:

Faith, then is an assent to dogma, but an assent grounded in a real apprehension of the heavenly things to which the human forms of dogmatic language point. As such, the object of assent is the real, apprehended in the notional.

Now, Newman’s use of the term, ‘idea,’—in addition to the aspects just mentioned—coincides with Newman’s use of the term, ‘real apprehension.’ With this terminology and understanding at hand, it may be stated that the ‘idea’ in the Essay is God’s Revelation to the Church. This Revelation is infinitely deep, and as a real idea, “there is no one aspect deep enough to exhaust the contents of a real idea.” Additionally for Newman, the reasoning process

---

15 Newman, Grammar of Assent, 32-48 for discussion of “assent considered as apprehension.” See pages 49-92 for “notional and real assent.”


17 Although Newman acknowledges that real and notional apprehension may be considered as distinct from one another, he denies that they are actually separate. The same is true for faith (religion) and doctrine (theology):“We are now able to determine what a dogma of faith is, and what it is to believe it. A dogma is a proposition: it stands for a notion or for a thing; and to believe it is to give the assent of the mind to it, as it stands for the one or for the other. To give a real assent is an act of religion; to give a notional, is a theological act. It is discerned, rested in, appropriated as a reality, by the religious imagination; it is held as a truth, by the theological intellect.” From Newman, Grammar of Assent, 93.


19 Walgrave, Unfolding Revelation, 300.

20 Newman, Essay, 35.
is not to be reduced to a mere logical deductive procedure. Newman’s illative sense—a type of *phronesis*—involves the whole of the person, involving ‘probabilities in cumulation,’ experience, and many other avenues by which one may arrive at belief. In an important passage, Newman explains something of this reflecting and mulling over of ‘the idea’: “An idea under one or other of its aspects grows in the mind by remaining there; it becomes familiar and distinct, and is viewed in its relations; it leads to other aspects, and these again to others.”

So, for Newman, faith is an assent to the real, but is pondered in its many notional aspects. And for Newman, the idea must be a living idea. It must not be hardened, or ossified, or it will be left in the past within a constantly changing world. A Living idea must change in order to be faithful to its intent. Again, Newman expresses this best:

> 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. This may be called the *Theory of Development of Doctrine*.

The idea received by the ‘mind’ of the Church is pondered, considered from different angles, applied in various ways, compared with other knowledge, entered into dialogue with other knowledge, and gradually, new implications, understandings, and additional insights emerge.

I think it is important to note that any attempt to compose an historical account—especially one where there is a dearth of facts such as in the case regarding the first four centuries of doctrinal history—is a construction in which the author must formulate a ‘pattern’ or

---


‘narrative.’ Thus it is accurate to state that Newman is bringing a Roman Catholic narrative to his particular account. The specific ‘view’ that Newman settled upon relies upon the illative sense and his trust in ‘informal inferencing.’ More precisely, Newman utilizes a cluster of “probabilities in cumulation,” to argue in chapter two of the Essay that there is an “antecedent argument” that doctrine indeed develops and that the Church is an “infallible developing authority.” Newman is convinced God exists, and the fact that God exists and is perfectly Good, entails that God would provide one revelation. And there is an ‘antecedent probability’ that an ‘infallible authority’ would be provided by God to ensure accurate interpretation of that revelation. The infinitely rich revelation received in the deposit of faith entails that the Church continually develop (notionally) doctrines to strive towards more and more adequate representations of that ‘idea,’ in the mind of the Church. According to Newman, the Catholic Tradition is the best candidate for providing the historical narrative to account for the doctrinal development he perceived over the course of his study. As Chadwick describes it “To Newman a combination of probabilities multiplied probability and turned it into a moral certainty. To the Roman theologians, when they came to criticize his theology, this language seemed perilous, as


25 Chadwick, From Bossuet to Newman, 144-146.


27 Newman, Grammar of Assent, 252.


29 For more on this section of the second chapter of the Essay see Chadwick, From Bossuet to Newman, 149-156. Also, Nicholas Lash, Change in Focus: A Study of Doctrinal Change and Continuity. (London: Sheed and Ward, 1973), 87-91.
though it removed all certainty from the judgment whether one church was the right church.”

Newman, however, felt confident that the moral probabilities added up to the sense that the Roman Catholic Church was the location of legitimate doctrinal development. As Newman put it: “Did St. Athanasius or St. Ambrose come suddenly to life, it cannot be doubted what communion he would take to be his own.”

The second portion of Newman’s text deals with the ‘notes,’ the criteria that he proposes be utilized when attempting to determine whether a given doctrinal development is ‘authentic,’ or a ‘corruption.’ Again, it was Newman’s contention that it was the Roman Catholic Church that best explained and embodied the necessary development of doctrine. The first note of a genuine development is the ‘preservation of type.’ Newman’s emphasis seems to be on the notion that the underlying type or essence is continuous: An egg turns into a bird, not an oak tree. (As a brief aside and continuing the organic metaphor: Is a speciation event ever possible?) Newman notes that to the ancient Roman authors such as Tacitus, Pliny, and Suetonius, Christianity was a ‘new’ (and thus suspicious on that ground alone) ‘superstition,’ not unlike the mystery cults associated with Mithras, Cybele, Isis, or Adonis. To the ‘proper’ Roman mind, ‘superstition’ such as what would be found in any of these ‘mysteries’ seemed weak and ultimately antithetical to the Roman spirit. In an interesting turn, Newman asserts that Christianity has always been liable to accusations like these. In short, Catholicism has endured such accusations throughout the centuries—and so there has been a preservation of type.

_____________________

30 Chadwick, From Bossuet to Newman, 148.
31 Newman, Essay, 97-98.
Reminiscent of Tertullian or Irenaeus, Newman continues the claim that there is a preservation of type in Catholicism that was absent in the Manicheans, Donatists, Nestorianism, Monophysites, and so on.

I will make only two quick comments regarding this ‘note.’ If this criterion is held ‘too rigidly,’ by which I mean, if each doctrine must have a demonstrable preservation of its ‘type’—would this not be close to denying any significant development at all? If it has changed (or developed in some meaningful sense), how can one firmly assert whether it is the ‘same’ type or not? If it is the same in a clear and non-controversial way, has it really developed? Without getting too far ahead in this text—we will look at these type of issues in greater detail—I suggest that we move away from any hint of any enduring or underlying ‘type,’ or ‘essence,’ that mitigates against any meaningful sense of the term ‘development.’ Perhaps instead, we might adopt the language of ‘information flow.’ Information has the almost intangible—almost quasi-metaphysical (?)—sense of transformability. ‘Information,’ is not anything, yet it may take on a multitude of forms—marks on a page, laser pulses, radio waves, electron flow—and as binary digits, information may be transmitted by multiple physical means. The information is intangible—almost nothing—but it is meaningful.

In any case, Newman’s second note is his insistence on a continuity of principles. This note, is an ingenious way to articulate the way in which doctrines develop and change and yet the underlying principles, such as sacramentalism, faith, theology, and so on are in a sense, immutable. Caritas, may be a principle of love that guarantees the dignity of every person. This principle cannot change, even if any individual doctrine regrading social ethics may. The third note of the assimilative power of living doctrine is crucial in ascertaining what has happened
historically in doctrinal development.\textsuperscript{34} Like a plant that absorbs ‘foreign’ nutrients, light, water and so on in order to grow and develop, so too must a living idea interact and use ‘borrowed material’ from its environment.\textsuperscript{35} ‘Logical sequence,’ the fourth note Newman employs is potentially confusing.\textsuperscript{36} It is not, for example, ‘logical,’ in the traditional sense of ‘deductive.’ What Newman intends with this phrase is to provide a glimpse of how certain apparent ‘additions’ to a doctrine ‘make sense,’ and have a ‘logical’ reason for their existence. One quick example: doctrines of purgatory and confession became new branches sprouting from the doctrine of baptism. The fifth and sixth notes seem designed to ensure an enduring core to any doctrinal development.\textsuperscript{37} Later doctrines are implications that were anticipated and then preserved within the process of development. But is it not the case that there is always some kind ‘connection’ or ‘relation’ with what comes before, and what follows after, any doctrinal formation? Unless there is some absolute rupture that has virtually nothing to do with the prior context (and how would this be?) there will always be some type of similar thread or aspect found in what precedes and what follows any historical occurrence. Finally, the last note, which Newman refers to as ‘chronic vigor,’ suggests that a living faith survives through time and opposition.\textsuperscript{38} I agree, although there is always the possibility that any institution has survived

\footnotesize

\textsuperscript{34} Newman, \textit{Essay}, 355-382.

\textsuperscript{35} Perhaps absorb has the wrong connotation. I think the notion of ‘symbiosis’—in some situations, or in other contexts, Kathryn Tanner’s phrase “borrowed materials” is much better. We will see her use of this phrase later in this chapter and throughout this work because I consider it quite important to the goal of this project.


\textsuperscript{37} Ibid, 400-436.

\textsuperscript{38} Newman, \textit{Essay}, 437-444.
through time due to issues of power as well as due to its ‘intrinsic vigor.’ (Although the Church’s early survival was certainly precarious for a time, and yet it did survive). This is merely a comment on the strength of the criterion and not meant as a critique of the Church. Furthermore, the reason many in the Church turn to critical theory or any critical hermeneutic is precisely to guard against the abuse of power that may arise throughout its long history.

One question that arises time and again when looking over Newman’s theory is the one posed by virtually every commentary I have read. The question may be framed something like this: To what extent can one claim that new developments—developments that arise from an ‘unconscious or implicit’ knowledge—are not actually new revelations? By what criteria may one judge between a developed ‘new’ understanding of what was originally received of the idea, although not fully perceived in its origin, on the one hand, and an actual new revelation or new doctrine on the other? Newman would likely assert that ‘the idea’ revealed to the Church is much too large to be fully understood immediately, or from the outset. And therefore, it is precisely the ‘thinking process’ in the mind of the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, that finally allows the Magisterium to make authoritative pronouncements. But questions remain. Does doctrinal development ever end? How can one be sure that new understandings prompted by the Spirit will not occur in the future regarding a doctrine that seems settled now, in this present context? Newman suggests that the “doctrine of Original Sin” was in a state of “gradual progress, not completed until the time of Augustine and Pelagius” at which time it was “fully

---

39 Owen Chadwick asserts that the notion of an “ongoing revelation” is likely in Newman’s thought. Nicholas Lash and Jan Hendrick Walgrave deny this claim. See Chadwick, From Bossuet to Newman, 157,160,195. Lash, Changes in Focus, 91-95. Walgrave, Unfolding Revelation, 293-314, especially see pages 306-309 on this issue.
This certainly implies that doctrinal development does come to a definitive end, for Newman. And approaching the matter from the opposite angle, Maurice Bevenot has questioned whether the notion of doctrinal development might not legitimately include the notions of ‘pruning,’ implying the sense of reversing a given development. Continuing the biological metaphors, could a doctrine go extinct? Could there be a speciation event? The fear of using too many biological metaphors or talk of doctrinal evolution is typically due to concerns of a religion evolving into something else entirely. These issues will arise again in this work. A further consideration on Newman’s work leaves one wondering if the ‘notes’ for distinguishing authentic versus corrupt developments might not be understood to defend Eastern Orthodox as well as Roman Catholic developments. In fact, as alluded to above, would it not be possible for anyone, from whatever tradition, to find some thread of continuity between what precedes and what follows any point in history? And as Maurice Wiles points out, when we attempt to distinguish between authentic versus corrupt developments of growth in something biological, we have other examples to look to—something lacking in our view of Christian history. As Wiles puts it:

…we only know what is latent in the seed because we have a host of specimens which we have been able to observe. It is on this basis that we are, for example, able to identify some growths as malformations. But there is only one Christian history. The concept of development as such does not therefore provide any criteria for distinguishing between true and false developments."


Newman’s text is a brilliant approach to a serious issue. I am grateful that he had the courage to write it at a time when the suggestion of a theory of doctrinal development was quite controversial. Newman’s theory is not a unified theory of development, but no one final say on development could ever be the final word. Doctrinal development must itself develop.

George Lindbeck

In his text, *The Nature of Doctrine*, George Lindbeck outlines a tripartite classification of doctrinal types. The first proposal, the ‘cognitive-propositional’ type, is the view of doctrine probably held by Neo-Scholasticism (think of the ‘theology of the manuals’ for example), and was also typical of Protestant Orthodoxy (such as Francis Turretin or Charles Hodge and the ‘Princeton theology’), and is currently adhered to in some forms of conservative Evangelical theology such as may be found in the texts of Wayne Grudem. A ‘cognitive-propositional’

---

approach interprets the main function of doctrine to serve “as informative propositions or truth claims about objective realities.” 44 This approach to doctrine quite naturally coincides with a correspondence or representational theory of truth. In terms of ecumenical goals, a cognitive-propositional approach cannot according to Lindbeck, avoid “doctrinal reconciliation without capitulation.” 45 In other words, if a doctrinal statement is thought to correctly define some theological reality, then there seems to be no way to find agreement with another denomination’s statements, let alone a different religion’s doctrinal assertions. It would not even be likely that discussion could take place under such a rigid way of conceiving doctrine. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that many thinkers that accept this approach to doctrine are often uncompromising in a situation of intrareligious or interreligious dialogue.

The second approach to doctrine Lindbeck calls the ‘experiential-expressive’ type. This type of doctrine is ‘non-discursive,’ and may be understood as an approach that prefers symbolic language as the best means to express an inner experience. Or in other words, this perspective attempts to convey deeper ‘existential orientations.’ 46 According to Lindbeck, this perspective on doctrine promotes an unhelpful possibility: An experiential-expressive view allows for the doctrinal formulation to change, while the inner experience remains the same. In other words, the same inner experience may be expressed in a different manner. This type of doctrinal construction, therefore, permits “at least the logical possibility that a Buddhist and a Christian might have basically the same faith, although expressed very differently.” 47 Lindbeck claims that

44 Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine, 2.
Schleiermacher is the prime example of this type of doctrinal expression. This assertion is (rightly, to my mind) challenged by Alister McGrath, who explains that Schleiermacher described the Christian experience as an deep inner-awareness of redemption dependent upon the work of Jesus. The ‘pre-reflective’ sense of ‘absolute dependence’ is, for Schleiermacher a universal phenomenon, but it is always already mediated through the specific cultural-religious belief system, which ‘shapes’ any religious experience by that system (or tradition). When this doctrinal perspective is considered in this light, it sounds suspiciously similar to Lindbeck’s preferred model, the ‘cultural-linguistic,’ approach to doctrine.

According to Lindbeck, doctrines neither refer to an objective reality (the cognitive-propositional approach) nor are they mere ‘significations’ of some inner experience (the experiential-expressive type). Doctrines are hermeneutical rules. Or, in other words, they are essentially nomological rather than epistemological. So, if one considers the category of ‘doctrine’ as analogous to ‘rules’ of a game or ‘grammatical rules’ of a language, then it would be a mistake to ask whether such ‘rules’ are true or false. Rules are what direct and guide the legitimate ‘play’ or maneuvers within a game or within a language, and as such, it would be a categorical mistake to ask if the rules themselves are true. As Lindbeck explains:


50 It should be noted that the metaphor of doctrine as ‘grammar’ to a language should take into account the fact that grammar itself evolves and changes over time. We will examine this issue and the question of “rule evolution” in greater detail in Chapter Three of this text. See Max Plank Institute for the Science of Human History. “The ‘Myth’ of Language History: Grammar Changes Faster Than Vocabulary,” ScienceDaily. ScienceDaily, 2 October 2017. www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/10/171002161239.htm
Just as grammar by itself affirms nothing either true or false regarding the world in which language is used, but only about language, so theology and doctrine, to the extent that they are second-order activities, assert nothing either true or false about God and his relation to creatures but only speak religiously, i.e., when seeking to align oneself and others performatively with what one takes to be most important in the universe by worshipping, promising, obeying, exhorting, preaching.\(^{51}\)

The cultural-linguistic approach to religion that includes this ‘rule theory’ considers doctrine to serve this ‘regulative function.’ Doctrines—and this is really essential to the post-liberal or narrative theological perspective—shape experience and channel thinking by providing the rules by which theologians may construct theology and the faithful may guide their lives and actions. As Lindbeck puts it:

Church doctrines are communally authoritative teachings regarding beliefs and practices that are considered essential to the identity or welfare of the group in question. They may be formally staged or informally operative, but in any case, they indicate what constitutes faithful adherence to a community…A religious body cannot exist as a recognizably distinctive collectivity unless it has some beliefs and/or practices by which it can be identified.\(^{52}\)

A ‘rule theory,’ Lindbeck suggests, is precisely the way that theologians of the Patristic era thought about doctrine. When Athanasius argued for the usage of the concept of ‘\textit{consubstantiality},’ for example, Lindbeck claims that his intention was to use this metaphysical term as nothing more than a ‘nomological rule.’ As Lindbeck explains, “the theologian most responsible for the final triumph of Nicaea thought of it, not as a first-order proposition with ontological reference, but as a second-order rule of speech.”\(^{53}\) Doctrines conceived as rules, therefore, allow for different theological constructions. Theologians may formulate these categories in multiple ways, the only stipulation being that their representations follow the pre-

\(^{51}\) Lindbeck, \textit{The Nature of Doctrine}, 55.

\(^{52}\) Lindbeck, \textit{The Nature of Doctrine}, 60.

established ‘rules.’ Whether formulated as Bonhoeffer’s ‘Man for Others,’ or Barth’s ‘Humanity of God,’ the “basic rules for its use remain the same.”

Lindbeck insists that doctrine should not be understood as a monolithic category. Doctrines, for example, may be considered, ‘unconditionally necessary,’ in which case they cannot be altered without thereby changing some fundamental aspect of the Christian life. An example of such a permanent doctrine, Lindbeck explains, would be the “law of love.” It is, and has always been, a central feature of the Christian existence that the love of God and neighbor are absolute and fundamental to the faith. Some doctrines, however, may be considered as “conditionally essential.” Lindbeck suggests that the Christian attitude towards war exemplifies this type of doctrine. Throughout the variegated history of Christian societies, the attitude towards war has oscillated between ‘Just War,’ to ‘Realist’ approaches, as well as to adopting positions of ‘Pacifism.’

‘Conditional doctrines,’ according to Lindbeck, are either permanent or temporary. If considered as permanent, then such a doctrine will be continually applicable. However, doctrines that are considered conditional and temporary—such as in the changing history of Christian attitudes towards sexual ethics—can be altered if proper Biblical exegesis determines that the

54 Lindbeck., 68-69. According to Lindbeck the Christological rule Athanasius formed was “whatever is said of the Father is said of the Son, except that the Son is not the Father,” Lindbeck, Nature of Doctrine, 80.

55 Lindbeck, Nature of Doctrine, 71.

56 Lindbeck, 71.

57 Lindbeck, Nature of Doctrine, 71.

58 Lindbeck, Nature of Doctrine, 71.

59 Lindbeck, Nature of Doctrine, 71.

60 Lindbeck, Nature of Doctrine, 71.
context in which the moral claims originated is no longer valid in light of an increase in contemporary knowledge and experience.\textsuperscript{61} So, whereas Lindbeck claims that temporary doctrines may also be “reversible”—such as in his example regarding the issues surrounding war—other temporary doctrines are simply “irreversible.”\textsuperscript{62} Finally, Lindbeck discusses one further category of doctrine which he refers to as “accidentally necessary.”\textsuperscript{63} This type of doctrine signifies those which have been adhered to for such a long time that it would be difficult to attempt to alter it, although there is no pressing reason why it might not be altered. An example of ‘accidentally necessary’ doctrines, according to Lindbeck, would be “postbiblical liturgical developments such as Sunday and Christmas celebrations.”\textsuperscript{64} The idea that Lindbeck has in mind here, is the possibility of replacing types of ontological dualisms such as one finds in Greek thought. Doctrinal formulations such as “the immortality of the soul,” on the other hand, are to be considered “conditional, temporary, and reversible.”\textsuperscript{65} For Lindbeck it would certainly be legitimate in the light of current neuroscientific research, to adopt new theories of consciousness that could be argued to coincide to some extent with ancient Hebrew beliefs in mind and body.\textsuperscript{66}

Viewed in the light of this ‘rule theory,’ Lindbeck insists that the credal or definitional statements from Nicaea or Chalcedon “represent historically conditioned formulations of

\begin{enumerate}
\item Lindbeck, \textit{Nature of Doctrine}, 71.
\item Lindbeck, \textit{Nature of Doctrine}, 71.
\item Lindbeck, \textit{Nature of Doctrine}, 72
\item Lindbeck, \textit{Nature of Doctrine}, 72.
\item Lindbeck, \textit{Nature of Doctrine}, 72.
\item Lindbeck, \textit{Nature of Doctrine}, 73.
\end{enumerate}
doctrines that are unconditionally and permanently necessary to mainstream Christian identity.”

In short, for Lindbeck, doctrines may be “historically conditioned,” and the creeds retain their “continuing value” only insofar as they are authentic representations of what he refers to as “regulative principles.” These principles are “monotheism, historical specificity, and Christological maximalism.” Furthermore, as Lindbeck asserts:

[The] Nicene and Chalcedonian formulations were among the few, and perhaps only, possible outcomes of the process of adjusting Christian discourse to the world of late classical antiquity in a manner conformable to regulative principles that were already at work in the earliest strata of the tradition. These creeds can be understood by Christian and non-Christian alike as paradigmatically instantiating doctrinal rules that have been abidingly important from the beginning in forming mainstream Christian identity.

But should we consider these ‘regulative principles’ to be truly ‘unconditionally and permanently necessary?’

To my mind, it seems that no doctrine (or underlying ‘principle’ which seems to me to be subject to the same critique) could have unconditional necessity. There seems little reason to

67 Lindbeck, Nature of Doctrine, 82.

68 Lindbeck, Nature of Doctrine, 82. Lindbeck uses “‘principle’ and ‘rule’ interchangeably” in this discussion: see endnote 8., p.94.

69 Lindbeck, Nature of Doctrine, 82. These ‘principles’ or ‘rules’ are explained as first: the principle of ‘monotheism,’ second, the “principle of historical specificity: the stories of Jesus refer to a genuine human being”…Third, “Christological maximalism: every possible importance is to be ascribed to Jesus that is not inconsistent with the first rules,” 80.

70 Lindbeck, Nature of Doctrine, 81.

71 We will return to this issue in Chapter Three. For now, it should be noted that there is the question of whether Lindbeck’s principle of “Christological Maximalism” was indeed universally held in the earliest communities. There may well have been a variety of “high” or “low” conceptions of Christology in the early Church. For a good study covering “adoptionism” within Jewish Christianity and the early differences between the Nazarenes and the Ebionites see Ray A. Pritz, Nazarene Jewish Christianity (Leiden: Brill, 1988). Studies from the liturgy of the era show people praying “to Christ” and also “through Christ.” See Rebeca Lyman, “Lex Orandi: Heresy, Orthodoxy, and Popular Religion” in The Making and Remaking of Christian Doctrine: Essays in honor of Maurice Wiles Edited by Sarah Coakley and David Palin (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1993), 131-142
think that Christological formulations utilizing Greek metaphysical concepts such as \textit{homoousion} were necessary developments. Regarding this I am inclined to mention a statement Maurice Wiles made in his work on doctrinal development when he explained that:

\begin{quote}
...the historical processes of doctrinal development seem as unlikely to lead to infallible decisions as the oral transmission of gospel material to lead to an infallible record of the life of Jesus. The element of human fallibility is present in the bishops and theologians of the early Church as evidently as it is in the persons of the apostles and evangelists. We have as much reason in the one case as in the other to believe either that that fallibility was totally suppressed or that it was incapable of reflecting enough of the inspiration of the divine Spirit to provide us with valuable guidance for the Church’s life.\textsuperscript{72}
\end{quote}

Criticisms of Lindbeck’s ‘regulative’ or ‘rule theory’ of doctrine have been levied from the theological ‘left’ and ‘right.’ Therefore, at this point in the chapter, I will briefly explicate Alister McGrath’s ‘rightwing’ critique of Lindbeck. This will provide a segue into McGrath’s theory of doctrinal development and criticism. At this point, we will be in a better position to ponder Kathryn Tanner’s criticisms that are especially relevant to both Lindbeck and McGrath (and indeed most so-called Postliberal or ‘Yale school’ theological views of doctrine).

McGrath devotes an entire chapter of his text on doctrine to Lindbeck’s theory of the same. In short, McGrath appears to be advocating a hybrid of elements from both the ‘cognitive-propositional’ and ‘cultural-linguistic’ typologies for his understanding of doctrine. Other than the brief defense of Schleiermacher as being incorrectly identified with the ‘experiential-expressive’ model, McGrath’s comments on this type of doctrine is largely negative. McGrath asserts that Lindbeck’s critique of the ‘experiential-expressive’ model that advocates a “ubiquitous private prreflective experience underlying all religions appears to be fair and

accurate.\textsuperscript{73} The greatest reservation expressed by McGrath concerns Lindbeck’s treatment of the “cognitive-propositional” model. McGrath agrees that a “crudely realist approach to theological statements,” such as that criticized by John Robinson’s target of God as an “elderly man located at an unspecified point in the stratosphere” is largely on target.\textsuperscript{74} But who is really making claims like this? If we reject any ‘cognitive-propositional’ understanding of doctrine, McGrath asks, how can we distinguish between “the radically different interpretations of the statement ‘This is my body’ (Matthew 26:26) found in Luther (it is literally true), Zwingli (it is a form of metaphor) and Calvin (it is metonymical)?”\textsuperscript{75} A ‘cultural-linguistic’ understanding that advocates something like Wittgenstein’s meaning arising from usage would, presumably, not be able to distinguish between these interpretations of the Eucharist. McGrath argues that cognitive and propositional assertions, such as utilized in the Medieval era were much more sophisticated than Lindbeck allows. It was taken for granted in this era that propositions have cognitive content, but this in no way diminished the many subtleties that a given statement may exemplify. Cognitive theories in the Medieval era (not to mention Patristics such as Origen and Augustine) assumed allegorical, moral, and spiritual readings of propositions. Tropes such as metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony are assumed and are not in any way simple propositions, although they must correspond to some extramental or “external referent.”\textsuperscript{76}

To my mind, McGrath is confusing the ‘cognitive’ content with the ‘propositional referent.’ In short, this seems to be a blurring of the complex questions involving ‘meaning and


\textsuperscript{74} McGrath, \textit{Genesis of Doctrine}, 18.

\textsuperscript{75} McGrath, Genesis of Doctrine, 18.
reference.’ Yet it is clear that McGrath is primarily concerned with preserving the ‘external referent’ in theological statements. This is in fact the central criticism that McGrath directs to Lindbeck’s ‘cultural-linguistic’ theory of doctrine. We noted Lindbeck’s assertion that ‘doctrine’ be considered a ‘second-order’ rather than a ‘first-order’ language. For example, doctrines are analogous to ‘rules’ in a game or ‘grammar’ in a language. And in this sense, Lindbeck asserts that doctrines make “intrasytematic rather than ontological truth claims.” This is the crux of McGrath’s reservation with the model. For McGrath, there needs to be an ‘extra-linguistic reality’ to which doctrine statements may refer. Moreover, McGrath takes issue with the apparent lack of any description in Lindbeck’s text as to the historical origins or ‘genesis’ of doctrine. As far as McGrath is concerned, doctrine in Lindbeck’s account, is a linguistic-system that, “like Melchizedek—has no origins. It is just there.”81 Grounding doctrine in an ‘origin’ for McGrath means looking to the life and event of Jesus of Nazareth. Thus, we will turn to McGrath’s account before examining Tanner’s critique that may be applied to both Lindbeck and McGrath.

Alister E. McGrath


77 See Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 55, 66. “For a rule theory, in short, doctrines qua doctrines are not first-order propositions but are to be construed as second-order ones: they make, as was said in the final section of the previous chapter, intrasytematic rather than ontological truth claims,” 66 (italics mine.) And again, Lindbeck explains, “Just as grammar by itself affirms nothing either or false regarding the world in which language is used, but only about language, so theology and doctrine, to the extent that they are second-order activities, assert nothing either true or false about God and his relation to creatures, but only speak about such assertions,” 55.


79 McGrath, *Genesis of Doctrine*, 33. Also see 27-34.

Although we have just examined a good deal of McGrath’s text insofar as he dedicates the entire second chapter to criticism of Lindbeck, the following explication lays out McGrath’s ‘positive’ theory of doctrinal development. Therefore, we may see that in his text, The Genesis of Doctrine, Alister E. McGrath provides both an historical and methodological approach to the origin, development, and criticism of doctrine. The method is ‘foundationalist,’ being grounded in the New Testament witness to the history of Jesus, which McGrath explicitly asserts must serve as the sole legitimate basis for any ‘genesis,’ or subsequent ‘critique,’ of doctrine. The narrative history of Jesus is both the source of all doctrine and the hermeneutical lens for judging or critiquing any doctrine. For McGrath, Jesus is the “primary explicandum of Christian faith.” And in a couple of phrases that seem reminiscent of Schleiermacher, McGrath explains that the narrative history of Jesus of Nazareth is the “fundamental impulse to contemporary doctrinal reflection,” and the collective Christian memory of him is the “generative event of the Christian faith.”

---

81 McGrath, Genesis of Doctrine, 34.

82 Alister E. McGrath, The Genesis of Doctrine: A Study in the Foundation of Doctrinal Criticism, (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1997). McGrath briefly describes “four theses” of doctrine on page 37: (1) it functions as a social demarcator. (2) Doctrine is generated by and subsequently interprets the Christian narrative (3) Doctrine interprets experience (thus, doctrine does act as Lindbeck’s “cultural-linguistic” model argues, it is just not the sole function). (4) Doctrine makes truth claims. From, The Genesis of Doctrine, 37.

83 It is important to note that primarily, McGrath refers to the “narrative” or “life of Jesus” as the hermeneutical key to doctrinal formation. Occasionally, although less often, he refers to the “event” of Jesus which seems to refer more to the Resurrection.

84 McGrath, Genesis of Doctrine, 179.

85 McGrath, Genesis of Doctrine, 170-171. Schleiermacher differentiated between Christ’s “ideality” (urbildlichkeit) and the ability to reproduce this in other people (vorbildlichkeit). Schleiermacher explains that “The Redeemer, then, is like all men in virtue of the identity of human nature, but distinguished from them all by the constant potency of His God-consciousness, which was a veritable existence of God in Him,” from Section 94 in The Christian Faith, Volume II (NY and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1963), 385. Schleiermacher explains redemption as “The Redeemer assumes believers into the power of His God-consciousness, and this is His redemptive activity” from Section 100, The Christian Faith, Volume II, 425.
In any case, doctrine, according to McGrath, should be understood as maneuvers to imagine, “re-imagine, and recreate” ideas drawn from the narrative history of Jesus.\textsuperscript{86} Doctrine is a necessary element of the Christian faith because the Christian community needs to understand the history and life of Jesus. For McGrath, doctrine serves this community-focused teaching function for the Christian community. Since any attempt to give ‘full expression’ to the insights of the Christian narrative will inevitably fall short, it becomes necessary for theologians to “draw upon the conceptual resources which their day and age recognizes as outstanding” in order to construct more adequate formulations of the faith.\textsuperscript{87} As tensions necessarily arise from differences of interpretation or emphasis, the need to provide better conceptual clarification emerges. Doctrines are passed on through time as the tradition and possession of the Christian community. Tradition, according to McGrath, is an essential part of the Christian faith, serving as an “inherited manner of interpreting scripture” and as a means for “transmitting the kerygma which it contains, rather than a source of revelation in addition to scripture.”\textsuperscript{88}

McGrath recognizes the irreducible historicity of every theologian and therefore of any doctrinal formulation. Every age is culturally and linguistically conditioned, an irreducible contextual situation in which any act of theological imagination, or mode of discourse, is necessarily limited. For McGrath, every theologian is located within a tradition as,

\textsuperscript{86} McGrath, \textit{Genesis of Doctrine}, 7.

\textsuperscript{87} McGrath, \textit{Genesis of Doctrine}, 3.

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid, 173. See McGrath, \textit{The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation}, second edition, (MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 140-151 for an analysis of “scripture and tradition” in the Medieval, and especially late Medieval age, in which McGrath argues that the two categories were always understood as a “mutual coinherence” rather than as two separate sources of revelation.
[an] inhabitant of the flux of history—an inherited complex of symbols, values and pre-understandings which fixes a world-view and functions as a framework for communication in which the past obstinately impresses itself upon the present.\(^89\)

I would suggest that McGrath’s project is an attempt to negotiate a kind of ‘middle way’ between a thoroughgoing historical relativism on the one hand, and any understanding of an epistemology that would essentially deny the historically conditioned nature of reason, method, and thinking on the other. The means by which he does this, is through the work of Alasdair MacIntyre and Hans-Georg Gadamer—two thinkers that are mentioned rarely in the text, but are nevertheless, clearly vital influences of McGrath’s thought.\(^90\)

Another important theoretical query McGrath considers vital to his methodology involves the question of how cultural development is possible. McGrath is asking how this development is


\(^90\) Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, second edition, (IN: Notre Dame Press, 1984); *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (IN: Notre Dame Press, 1988). Criteria of rationality are contextual, and so no claim—such as that often expressed in the Enlightenment—of a culturally-neutral ‘universal rationality’ may be justified outside of the situation in which the claim is originally asserted. The idea of formulating a universally valid rationality that is purified from any vestige of tradition or historical contingency is itself a claim that reflects the historical particularities of the times in which it was constructed, see McGrath, 197. For MacIntyre, traditions are the necessary context for any form of rationality. Moral reasoning in the contemporary context is basically incoherent because moral methodological arguments today are merely ungrounded fragments from the past and the traditional-context from which they arose. As a result, moral thought today tends to be a mere “will to power” in that people appeal to notions of individual rights, or forms of consequentialism, at different times to serve their interests, at that moment. These theories are shorn of their original rich context, and so today, are used as ‘tools’ to achieve some immediate goal. MacIntyre argues that the “ought-is” gap may be overcome with a return to valuing tradition, Aristotelian ‘virtue ethics’ as a means for shaping one’s character within a narrative, community, and tradition. McGrath seems to reiterate the ideas of MacIntyre in many places throughout the text. See McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine*, especially pages 172-184 and 188-192. Gadamer was interested in demonstrating that the Enlightenment era goal of seeking “correct methodology” in order to discover universally valid, tradition-neutral truths was overly optimistic. “Tradition,” and “rationality,” cannot be separated. Everyone is embedded within traditions and their horizon of thinking and meaning is saturated with “pre-judgments.” There can be no brute uninterpreted experience. The past has left its imprint upon our era’s interpretive horizon so that although no ‘pure’ objectivity may be attained, we are able to understand the richness of the past precisely due to this “history of effects” upon us today. Understanding comes from the “fusing of horizons” where the “interpreter,” and that which is to be “interpreted” (whether text, event, or whatever), “fuse” these “horizons” of meaning. Meaning arises from conversation, questioning/listening, somewhat similar to a game, or an act of translation, that ultimately leads to action or application. Understanding is never finished, nor can a truly objective ‘truth’ be given, since no actual “view from nowhere” is possible. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, second revised edition. Translation by Joel
possible, if we concede the main thrust of any historically conditioned construction of social reality. In other words, McGrath is concerned with the fact that if individuals are in fact shaped by the culture and time in which they are embedded, how is it that they are able to “escape, at least in part, from their present cultural situation.”\(^9^1\) McGrath asserts that theories of cultural relativity that do not allow for real cultural development are seriously flawed. In order to think through this issue, McGrath suggests an analogy, by utilizing the image of ‘paradigm shifts’ from the philosophy of science.\(^9^2\) Such paradigm shifts happen when a growing number of anomalies appear within a predominant paradigm that can no longer be tolerated or explained by that framework. In this situation of crisis, something analogous to a revolution occurs, and a new conceptual model emerges. This new paradigm is then able to explain the anomalies and stimulates a new approach for organizing the questions and patterns within the discipline. If our thinking was totally conditioned by the prevailing paradigm (or cultural situation), then an “epistemological skepticism would appear to be implied, taking away all possibilities of rational discrimination and of new departures of thought.”\(^9^3\) Nevertheless, “the very recognition that there is an ideological component to our thinking,” McGrath explains, “provides a means by which the total dominance of hidden ideological factors to our ways of thinking may be reduced.”\(^9^4\) McGrath also acknowledges the notion of a ‘double hermeneutic,’ in which there is an explicit recognition that any observer (or interpreter) is just as subject to the historical or

---

\(^9^1\) McGrath, The Genesis of Doctrine, 86.


\(^9^3\) McGrath, Genesis of Doctrine, 86-87.

\(^9^4\) McGrath, Genesis of Doctrine, 87.
cultural conditioning of his or her era as that which is being observed (for example, a doctrine or historical period) is conditioned by its culture and time. The theologian, just as any sociologist or historian, needs to be constantly aware of the historically conditioned nature of any doctrine as well as their own context of interpretation.

This brief tour through McGrath’s methodological background to his perspective of the historicity of knowledge was important for his understanding of doctrine and its development. And as stated above, these ideas allow McGrath to accept a kind of sociology of knowledge that avoids, either extreme relativism, or, a view that denies the importance of historical awareness on any epistemological or axiological considerations. In particular, McGrath’s inquiry seeks to identify what criteria are employed in any given historical era for evaluating ‘the past’ and the value of ‘past authority.’

McGrath undertakes a large historical survey, moving through the Renaissance, Magisterial, and Radical Reformation, before examining the perspective of the German Enlightenment. It was during the Renaissance, according to McGrath, that the first real sense of historical consciousness arose. Whereas the Medieval age did not tend to think historically—McGrath recounts one example in which ‘time’ was often measured in terms of ‘Aves,’ (the amount of time it takes to recite one ‘Hail Mary’)—the Renaissance witnessed a profusion of mechanical clocks, and of course, the re-discovery in Italy of the ancient classical world. The era’s motto of ‘ad fontes’ exemplifies the move away from the Medieval emphasis upon “glosses

---

95 McGrath, Genesis of Doctrine, 97-98. McGrath explains that he draws this concept from Anthony Giddens.

96 McGrath, Genesis of Doctrine, especially 103-145.

97 McGrath, Genesis of Doctrine, 105.
and commentaries” and towards the sources themselves. In this period there is an emerging sense of truth as something historical, rather than as basically static. The era witnessed new literary and philological techniques aimed at re-imagining the “immediate experience of the apostolic period.” An emphasis upon the elegance of literature and the formation of the self were indicative of the era. This all too brief overview of McGrath’s deep research is meant to illustrate something of his main point: The thinkers of the Renaissance looked to the past as something to be valued as a source for moral improvement. They did not value the past for its fixed doctrinal pronouncements. The context-specific criteria of the era affected the attitude of doctrinal indifference within the Renaissance. Yet the literary emphasis—such as Erasmus’ Greek translation of the New Testament—would directly impact the years of the Reformation.

Within the Magisterial Reformation, different attitudes towards the past emerged between Luther and Huldrych Zwingli. The later looked to the new Greek translations of the New Testament as the primary criterion for judging certain moral doctrines of the church. Reflecting the emphasis of the Renaissance, Zwingli was primarily concerned with issues of orthopraxy such as “clerical celibacy, communion in one kind, praying for the dead and worshipping images.” Zwingli was “deeply influenced by Quattrocento humanism,” and generally personified a view similar to the Renaissance preference to read the scriptures for moral edification, rather than for doctrinal concern. Turning to Wittenberg, it is of course well known how Luther and Karlstadt sought academic reform through an emphasis on Biblical

———

100 McGrath, *Genesis of Doctrine*, 121.
languages as well as emphasizing a “personal transformative encounter between the individual and Jesus Christ.” This of course reflects the *ad fontes* motto as well as the Renaissance emphasis upon experience and personal transformation. It should be noted that the Swiss Reformed thinker Zwingli tended to agree with many Renaissance thinkers (and also Erasmus) that Medieval thought was overly arid and inelegant—an actual “impediment to interpretation” of Scriptures. Yet for Luther, there was real value in maintaining a sustained dialogue with the Medieval theologians—in particular the scholars of the *Via Moderna*—and so it was, that from these debates, Luther’s “theology of the Cross” emerged. It should also be noted that McGrath is quite clearly influenced by this later notion, which for him is basically the hermeneutical key to Scriptural interpretation and doctrinal formation as described in his text. It is important to McGrath that it is precisely in this intersection—the intersection between Luther’s debates with representatives of the *Via Moderna* (such as with Gabriel Biel), and his “epiphany” of the “Theology of the Cross”—that the doctrine of justification emerged. McGrath takes issue with scholars such as Heiko Oberman who argue that the doctrine of justification had “forerunners” in the late Medieval era. For McGrath, the social conditions of the era—the recent emergence of

102 McGrath, 123

103 McGrath 112.


105 See Heiko Oberman, *Forruners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thought* (NY: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1966) for Oberman’s arguments that the ‘doctrine of Justification” had late medieval precedents, for example with Augustinians such as Gregory of Rimini. McGrath, by contrast, maintains that the doctrine had no precedents and that Augustine had always emphasized that justification was a process—not a one-time forensic event—and that it entailed continued human cooperation with God’s grace. See Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A
movable print, the Renaissance turn to experience, and the urge to “learn the original languages”—were the conditions for the possibility of these doctrinal innovations. An example of an opposite response—one of a rejection of past authority of the Church, although not a rejection of the past authority of Scriptures—was exemplified by the “radical Reformation.”

According to McGrath, the goal of these thinkers was for a transformation of society and therefore a complete break with the past. Somewhat oddly, McGrath appears to dismiss these individuals, discussing them in a mere two pages. He suggests the movement is based upon social concerns alone and that issues of doctrine were not particularly essential. McGrath claims the Radical Reformers valued individual experience of the Holy Spirit and subsequently had little desire to focus on doctrinal issues which they associated with Church authority and its past hold over society.

This brief survey through the contextually shaped attitudes towards the past—with the exception of the Radical Reformation—was one of basic respect, albeit with differing degrees of emphasis and interpretation. McGrath contends that each era’s “conceptual framework” was shaped by the societal, political, and economic changes occurring in the various geographies across Europe. These ‘frameworks’ or ‘ideologies’ cannot be considered universally valid, but

---

107 McGrath, Genesis of Doctrine, 131-132.
108 As McGrath explains “Without wishing to reduce Christian theology to an ideological epiphenomenon, an ideational superstructure erected upon a socio-economic base, the history of this discipline suggests that ideological factors are a major consideration in shaping a theologian’s attitude to the past; questions of ‘truth’ concerning attitudes to the past may thus ultimately reduce, at least in part, to the question of whether a conservative or progressive ideology happens to be dominant in a given situation. (I use the terms ‘conservative’ and ‘progressive’ as defined in Marx’s German Ideology, accepting the inevitable conceptual limitations which result),” from McGrath, The Genesis of Doctrine, 152. And again, McGrath defines ideology as “purely phenomenological,” and as “an integrated system of beliefs, assumptions and values, not necessarily true or false, which reflects the needs or
rather, are irreducibly contextual, with the result that doctrinal construction reflects the concerns of that era. However, it was during the arrival of the Enlightenment that the very notion of ‘doctrine’ was basically rejected. McGrath focuses almost exclusively on the German Enlightenment, and orients the values associated with that time as originating from the social changes occurring during the years, 1780-1790.\textsuperscript{109} McGrath begins by examining the rising population and concomitant decline in ‘professional positions’ such as might be found in the church, government or in academia.\textsuperscript{110} The growing number of educated persons of the time were becoming more inclined towards an “overthrow of the ancien régime and its tradition-ridden outlook.”\textsuperscript{111} This attitude was paralleled with a desire to reject the doctrinal formulations of the Christian past as well. This bourgeois movement accelerated with the news of the French Revolution, and was itself paralleled, by the rise of the Moravian or Pietist strands of theology that de-emphasized the role of doctrine, albeit out of a perceived sense that doctrines are by their nature arid and inhibiting of a true spirituality. As a result, McGrath argues that Lutheran Orthodoxy emerged to give the growing emphasis on “personal experience” a “coherent intellectual framework.”\textsuperscript{112} Yet the real legacy of this era, according to McGrath, is the Enlightenment’s influence in Germany, with its emphasis upon two central points: The first, is the recognition amongst many of the era, that doctrinal constructions are always historically located and were formulated in the past. Therefore, although these doctrines may have been

\textsuperscript{109} McGrath, \textit{The Genesis of Doctrine}, 133.

\textsuperscript{110} McGrath, \textit{Genesis of Doctrine}, 133.

\textsuperscript{111} McGrath, \textit{Genesis of Doctrine}, 133.
necessary or useful in their time, they are essentially irrelevant to the modern period if they cannot stand up to the standards of reason. This is essentially the type of rationalist assumptions behind Gotthold Lessing’s assertion that the “accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason.”\(^\text{113}\) The second element important to the era, according to McGrath, states that true rationality is necessarily universal and autonomous. Therefore, justified knowledge is universally true and must be grounded on reasonable evidence or logical formulations. Any proposition that may be granted the status of ‘Knowledge,’ is either a necessarily true \textit{a priori} judgment of reason, or a contingent and empirically inferred \textit{a posteriori} judgment arising from the senses. According to views such as these, most doctrines have very little credibility.

Yet it is precisely these assertions of a universally applicable method guaranteeing a sure route to indubitable knowledge that seem \textit{oblivious to their own} “historically-conditioned” status. In other words, Enlightenment claims to a public and universally applicable and “tradition-independent” rationality is self-deceptive.\(^\text{114}\) As McGrath puts it:

The Christian tradition may indeed by evaluated by the standards of another historically-contingent tradition; the notion, however, that it may be evaluated (presumably to be found wanting) by some universal rationality, purified of the contingencies of history, would seem to be a notion which is distinctly located in history, prior to the growth of historical insight.\(^\text{115}\)

\(^\text{112}\) McGrath, \textit{The Genesis of Doctrine}, 137.


\(^\text{114}\) McGrath, \textit{The Genesis of Doctrine}, 192.

\(^\text{115}\) McGrath, \textit{The Genesis of Doctrine}, 192.
So, the upshot of all of this, is that for McGrath, the proper sphere for “doctrinal criticism” can only be within the “community of faith.” Here again we may recognize the influence of MacIntyre and his claim that it is only within traditions that we may locate the essential context for any form of rationality. And it is only within a tradition, McGrath explains, that an individual’s identity may be formed by becoming “linked with the history and story of the community.” Furthermore, it is only through being embedded within a “communal tradition” that any legitimate “religious epistemology” may be found.

So only in a traditional context may one be in a position to interpret and understand the meanings inherited from the past. Therefore, it is only within the historical context of narration and tradition that comprises Christianity that one may understand Christ as the hermeneutical key to properly evaluating doctrine. Doctrine must necessarily be expressed within the ‘ideology’ or cultural language of the time in which it is constructed. Yet this does not mean that the ‘meaning’ of the doctrine is in anyway reduced to the language of that culture. It is only expressed in the language of the time in which it was formulated. Thus, it is the task of theologians, working within the tradition, that are able to make critical judgments on doctrinal assertions. It is from the tensions witnessed by differing historical doctrinal constructions that doctrinal development occurs and allows no one doctrine to become reduced to a particular era’s ideology. Only within the tradition may doctrinal formation, interpretation, or criticism take place. McGrath asserts that the reason that it is difficult to understand a contemporary culture

116 McGrath, The Genesis of Doctrine, 192-193
117 McGrath, The Genesis of Doctrine, 189.
118 McGrath, The Genesis of Doctrine, 189.
119 McGrath, The Genesis of Doctrine, 189.
such as the “Azande or the Dinka tribes of Africa—who exist in my own day and age—is that their ideas and values have not been mediated to me as formative or identity-giving.” McGrath seems to be claiming that one may only hope to interpret or critique a doctrine—at least with any confidence—if one is already embedded within that tradition that gave rise to it. McGrath would likely reply that someone outside of the tradition may indeed critique the doctrine, but they will inevitably be utilizing their own standards, and therefore would be guilty of a sort of ‘ethnocentrism.’

Having only previously read works of McGrath on the intersection of science and religion (and his works on “justification”), I was somewhat surprised to read this type of incommensurable narrative theology found in this text. There is no place for a ‘public theology’ in a sectarian project such as we observe in McGrath’s understanding of doctrine. Furthermore, although McGrath refers to the category of ‘doctrinal development’ in multiple locations throughout the text, I wonder if this is truly a ‘theory of development,’ or rather an attempt to continually re-translate the same inner core that McGrath tells us we must find in the New Testament and may only be interpreted within ‘the’ Church community. For example, McGrath explains that “doctrine must not be seen as an alienating move away from the gospel, being rather a development of a more advanced level of interpretative consciousness within the Christian community.” At the same time, McGrath affirms in multiple locations the fact that doctrines do in fact develop and change over time. He briefly suggests the possibility of utilizing the developmental psychology of Jean Piaget as a model for doctrinal development since “these four phases are hierarchical in that each stage incorporates its predecessors, building upon and

---

120 McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine*, 188.
Although he does not develop this interesting idea, it also does not seem clear to what extent any actual development of doctrine is allowed in McGrath’s theory. Furthermore, I think that the idea of the ‘narrative life of Jesus’ as both the generative source of doctrine as well as its ‘framework’ for interpretation is likewise ambiguous. One would like to know, for example, which interpretation of Jesus should serve as the ‘hermeneutical key’ for developing this project. Perhaps McGrath would suggest that different communities tell different interpretations of the life of Jesus, sharing only the importance of the telling of that story. To my mind this would only further isolate and fragment theological reflection into multiple traditions, all of which may well become more sectarian and incommensurable. There is also the matter of, what seems to me, to be a monolithic conception of tradition, culture, or conceptual frameworks. Kathryn Tanner describes this kind of terminology as belonging to the ‘modern’ rather than ‘postmodern’ conceptions of culture. Postliberal theology—as an example of utilizing modern anthropological notions of culture—tends to assume the untroubled assertion of an isolated system of interpretation, viewing them as exhibiting some internally consistent and stable identity. But as Tanner points out, and we will soon examine more closely, cultures, are actually quite fluid, with shifting and porous boundaries. And finally, I wonder if one can draw such a sharp demarcation between what is historically, culturally, or linguistically conditioned, and that which is immune to such social constructivism? This is a complex matter, and far outside what may be addressed in this project, yet to my mind, McGrath has not successfully made a case for his choices in what appears to be ‘socially constructed,’ and that which can be known, ‘in-itself.’

Perhaps another way of looking at this is to note the difficulty McGrath faces in attempting to

---

reconcile a type of correspondence theory of truth (and a defense of Lindbeck’s cognitive-propositional notion of doctrine) with his historicism and advocacy for a sociology of knowledge. McGrath is a brilliant theologian, I have a bookshelf full of his writings, but this theory of doctrine presented here is precisely the kind of incommensurable and sectarian theology that this project is attempting to challenge.

Kathryn Tanner

A perspective that does resonate with much of what I plan to say in this project may be found in Kathryn Tanner’s, *Theories of Culture*, a work that we will be returning to throughout this project. For all the differences between Lindbeck and McGrath—particularly Lindbeck’s ‘instrumentalist’ view versus McGrath’s ‘realist’ approach to doctrine—the two theologians have quite a bit in common. For instance, both appear to interpret culture, tradition, and doctrine as something inherently ‘stable,’ with well-defined boundaries. And often enough, in considering such ‘social phenomena’ in this way, is to view them also, as incommensurable. Views of culture, religion, tradition, or doctrine that assume the existence of ‘well-defined’ boundaries, however, are also exclusive in nature, in that they divide and decide ‘who is in and who is out.’ So, the question that we need to ask is whether any culture or religion really should be thought of as stable in this way with such definite and clear-cut boundaries? Are doctrines ever, ‘unconditionally and permanently essential?’ Can they be considered as having such stable identities with strict clearly defined boundaries? Asking these questions brings us into Tanner’s book and her extensive knowledge regarding the difference between modern and postmodern understandings of anthropology. First, Tanner makes a convincing case that static or homogenous social phenomena are illusory. There never has been any strict boundaries to culture (or doctrine) that are inherently stable or immutable in the way post-liberals such as Lindbeck and McGrath are proposing. In her text Tanner guides the reader through the changes in thought patterns associated with a modern, and then into a postmodern, anthropological sensibility. She argues that a postmodern understanding of culture, religion, doctrine, or any other social phenomena, should be viewed as dynamic, interactive, reciprocal, porous, and with shifting
rather than stable boundaries. The imposition of borders or boundaries, or indeed any assertion of some stable and unvarying concept that is supposed to remain transcendent and above the continually changing world of becoming, is not only an illusion, but often enough, such claims may be a thinly veiled ‘power play.’

Accordingly, any cultural, religious, or doctrinal formation should be interpreted as always and already constructed from ‘borrowed materials.’ Lindbeck and McGrath—and indeed most post-liberals or narrative theologians generally—would assert that the Biblical narrative is the ultimate criterion, or framework, for organizing and interpreting the overwhelming amount of “borrowed materials” comprising Christianity, or Christian doctrine, into a “distinctively Christian track.” The Bible, Tanner explains, when viewed in this way as a meta-narrative or hermeneutical key, becomes the central lens for how all of the variegated “borrowed material” may be interpreted. Yet it is precisely this perspective that fails to recognize that the Bible itself consists “of borrowed materials.” And as Tanner explains, by exempting the Bible—or the concept of doctrine we might add—from this process, “some subset or aspect of Christian social practices is being privileged in a theologically suspect fashion.” Tanner continues by explaining that:

The process of transforming borrowed material should be as much about self-criticism as it is about criticism of other ways of life; it should be a self-directed process of

---

124 Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 164.
125 Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 114.
126 Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 114.
127 Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 114.
transformation in keeping with an awareness of its own need for criticism. That would be the case if, as we have suggested, Christian social practices are never themselves anything other than the transformation of what is outside; if that is, Christian identity is established from the beginning through the use of borrowed materials.\textsuperscript{129}

I would suggest that what may be said of Biblical materials may also be said of doctrinal formation. I will return to this theme of ‘borrowed materials’ throughout this work as it is a key element in the constructive aspect of this project, as we will see. In many ways, to my mind at least, Tanner is suggesting a postmodern anthropological perspective that parallels to some extent my metaphorical language that employs ideas from contemporary information theory.

There is another term that Tanner employs that will be important in later chapters of this work and that is the reference to “motifs.”\textsuperscript{130} She rarely refers to ‘doctrine’ as such, but the concept of the ‘motif,’ or the ‘form,’ seem to parallel the idea of doctrine, perhaps including other themes, phrases, or ideas that are also prevalent throughout Christian history. For Tanner, theology is best understood as an ongoing ‘task,’ in the sense that the very search for ‘Christian identity’ is itself a ‘task’ (or a style) in which any such identity is the task of continuing to construct and self-critique such identity, especially any claim to a final or ‘stable’ identity.\textsuperscript{131}

There is an irreducible plurality across Christianity—both throughout history and across ‘cultures.’ Yet it is precisely Christian discipleship, Tanner claims, that is what enables talk of a ‘Christian’ way of life.\textsuperscript{132} As Tanner explains, there are certain “affirmations” that provide a common thread wherever Christians may be located. What she means by this is that there are certain “motifs” that arise time and again in Christian discussion or forms of life. It may be the

\textsuperscript{129} Tanner, \textit{Theories of Culture}, 114.

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid, 124.

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid, 144-157.
case that Christians tend to use expressions such as “love of God and neighbor,” or “the Messiah,” or they may speak frequently of “dying and rising.”\textsuperscript{133} It is not agreement on the precise meaning of these ‘motifs,’ nor the fact that those who identify as Christian use these terms in exactly the same way that makes them Christian ‘motifs.’ These ‘motifs’ and other phrases similar to these are indeed important to Christian ways of life. Yet there is no fixed essence that is agreed upon as to the precise meaning of these motifs. Christians do not agree on the content of these motifs, but they do typically agree that the motifs are important to their lives in some way.\textsuperscript{134} Importantly, for this project, I would like to emphasize the following point from Tanner. She insists that these motifs may themselves be called into question if they lead to some form of idolatry or injustice. As she phrases this:

> Christians claim that Jesus is God; that does not mean however, that some Christians might not decide in the process that the central and overriding significance that Jesus continues to have for human life would be less misleadingly expressed some other way. In short, while they set the terms for argument, the forms themselves are not immune from questioning as the argument proceeds.\textsuperscript{135}

If at some point, within the vicissitudes of history, certain ‘motifs’ or doctrines become a source or contributor to injustice, or in some way become contrary to Caritas—the love of God and neighbor—then it may be ethically necessary to re-consider the formulation of this ‘motif’ or doctrine and ponder whether a new construction or development may be in order. This is a point that we will return to over the course of this project as well. In Tanner’s estimation, motifs may provide guidelines to Christian thought and theological construction, but we must guard against

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid, 152.
\textsuperscript{133} Tanner, \textit{Theories of Culture}, 124
\textsuperscript{134} Tanner, \textit{Theories of Culture}, 125.
\textsuperscript{135} Tanner, \textit{Theories of Culture}, 127.
making assertions to stable identities of these doctrines or writings as if they represented the final truth. It is self-critique and humility that Tanner suggests are needed to live the Christian life and guard against idolatry—either idolatry of our pride or idolatry in affirming doctrinal constructions as if they fully represent Divine Truth. Tanner stresses that Christians should always be open to hearing ‘new voices,’ or perhaps voices from the margins of ‘the borrowed materials,’ and what they may be saying to us. It may be, that they help us avoid doctrinal idolatry. As I will reiterate again in later chapters, a particular claim that Tanner iterates reminds me of H.R. Niebuhr’s ‘permanent revolution’ within a view towards ‘Radical Monotheism,’ or Tillich’s ‘Protestant Principle.’ In this phrase Tanner is again warning against the ever-present threat of making our claims into an idolatrous representation of any ‘motif.’ Tanner stresses that we must

…make God, rather than some human account of God, the center of one’s life. Doing otherwise, making a Christian identity a matter of allegiance to certain meanings, threatens to put human ideas about God in the place that only God should fill in Christian life.  

**Wolfhart Pannenberg**

We now turn from the postmodern to the postfoundational. One scholar who is certainly seeking to develop a publicly rational form of theological thought is Wolfhart Pannenberg. Although we will look much closer at Pannenberg’s theology in the next chapter, it is important to include him here, in the literature review, since he has provided a unique dialectical understanding of the doctrinal development process. Asserting that “whatever is true, must finally be consistent with all other truth,” Pannenberg may be said to be dedicated to a coherence

---

136 Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 126.
theory of truth. At the same time, Pannenberg insists that truth be understood as an historical occurrence so that we do not “narrow-mindedly substitute a particular perspective for the whole of truth.” Truth is always provisional, only partly developed, and endlessly revisable. And it is only in the very process of history that we may say that ‘truth happens.’ Clearly the influence of Hegel looms large over Pannenberg’s thought. As Pannenberg explains:

Hegel’s Thesis that the truth of the whole will be visible only at the end of history approximates the biblical understanding of truth in two respects. It does so, firstly, by the fact that the truth as such is understood not as timelessly unchangeable but as a process that runs its course and maintains itself through change. Secondly, it does so by asserting that the unity of the process, which is full of contradictions while it is underway, will become visible along with the true meaning of every individual moment in it, only from the standpoint of its end. What a thing is, it first decided by its future, by what becomes of it.

Pannenberg differs from Hegel, however, in that it is the resurrection of Christ that stands as a proleptic event that both informs, and even shapes the past, as well as the present, from the eschatological future while simultaneously keeping the future open-ended. Of course, the Incarnation was, for Hegel, a mode of revelation of the unity of infinite and finite, but according to Pannenberg, for Hegel “the Christ event was certainly something belonging to the closed past, which might at best still continue to operate in the present in the spirit, in concept, but could by no means be a still-open future.”

---


Another aspect of Pannenberg’s methodological approach that we must recognize involves a philosophical hermeneutics such as that which was explicated by Hans-Georg Gadamer. Pannenberg explains this interpretive movement in the following way:

The horizons of the interpreter and of the text to be interpreted are different at first, but that is only their initial position, so to speak, in the process of interpretation. The interpreter’s own horizon is not fixed, but capable of movement and expansion. In the process of understanding, the interpreter’s horizon is widened in such a way that the initially strange matter along with its own horizon can be appropriated into the expanded horizon he attains as he understands. In the interpreter’s encounter with the text, a new horizon is formed.\footnote{Pannenberg, “Hermeneutic and Universal History” in \textit{BQT} Volume I., 117.}

In a rather bold claim, Pannenberg describes God as the “all determining reality,” so that the theologian should expect that all academic disciplines—history, sciences, psychology and so on—must contain “theologically relevant dimensions.”\footnote{Pannenberg, “On Historical and Theological Hermeneutic,” in \textit{BQT} Vol. I, 156. Pannenberg, \textit{Anthropology in Theological Perspective}. Translated by Matthew J. O’Connell, (PA: Westminster Press, 1985), 19-20.} At this point the assertion that God is the “all determining reality,” may well leave one wondering why history does not appear to be necessarily “providentially guided,” or “all- determined.” Pannenberg’s answer to this is that if the coming of the Kingdom of God is understood as the eschatological rule of the “all determining power” over all reality, then the obvious fact that the Kingdom has not yet arrived, suggests that God will not be fully God until the Eschaton. Therefore, Pannenberg is able to state that “in an important sense God does not yet exist. Since his rule and his being are inseparable, God’s being is still in the process of coming to be.”\footnote{Pannenberg, \textit{Theology and the Kingdom of God} (Westminster, 1954), 56.} The entire historical process amounts to “a self-demonstration of God’s existence.”\footnote{Pannenberg, \textit{An Introduction to Systematic Theology}, (MI: Eerdman’s Press, 1991), 12.} The dialectical process of history has a structure of anticipating the future (from the prolepsis of the Christ event), while continually looking back to
re-configure our understanding of the past. And in keeping with his interdisciplinary commitments, Pannenberg considers the category of ‘doctrine,’ to be best interpreted as ‘hypotheses’ that are “always to be tested against everything that can provide us with evidence.” As we construct, revise, and test our ‘doctrinal hypotheses’ against reality, and seek continual ‘coherence’ within this process of doctrinal development, Pannenberg insists that there can be no immediate confirmation since “dogmatics speak constantly of something that will fully appear only in a future which is inconceivable for us.” Therefore, for Pannenberg, we may say that doctrines are hypotheses with eschatological verification. In the present, we must be content with testing our doctrinal hypotheses for internal coherence with all other knowledge and be prepared to revise and judge how well they shed light upon ‘theologically relevant dimensions’ of our current existence.

The process of doctrinal development is a function of this dialectical process of history. And, for Pannenberg, revelation is the whole process of history. The notion of Divine self-disclosure occurs ‘indirectly’ throughout the full unfolding of this process. God does not reveal God-self in any one act but rather it is all of the events of history that provide glimpses, and indirect revelations, of some partial aspect of the Infinity of God. “These acts,” Pannenberg explains,

cast light back on God himself, communicating something indirectly about God himself. That does not of course mean that they reveal God or that God reveals himself in them as their originator, for every individual event which is taken to be God’s activity illuminates the being of God in a partial way. Thus no one act could be a full revelation of God. The


isolated conception of a single divine action as the revelation of God most often leads to a distorted view to an idol.\textsuperscript{147}

The events of history, Pannenberg explains in a very Hegelian manner, are to be taken up and reflected upon; and as they are formed, and tested for coherence with other knowledge, the process of doctrinal development unfolds. Furthermore, the events of history are public and universal in character. (Note how this is a far move away from the sectarian perspective we witnessed in McGrath and Lindbeck)! Pannenberg explains that the universal events of history are not only public but that “God has proved his deity in the language of facts.”\textsuperscript{148} Pannenberg recognizes the importance of interpreting these ‘facts’—since there can be no uninterpreted facts—in their “traditio-historical context”\textsuperscript{149} using any methods, theories, or perspectives that continually assist in our ever-changing understandings. Nevertheless, Pannenberg insists that rational reflection on public and universal historical events are open to everyone and is the proper mode for determining and developing doctrines.\textsuperscript{150} Interestingly, Pannenberg claims that to deny this public character to revelation and doctrinal development—that is, to view these categories as belonging solely to a sectarian ‘Christian community’—would be a form of Gnosticism. For Pannenberg, it is only a public and universal rational consideration of doctrinal development throughout the process of ongoing history that may be understood as legitimate revelation, and “if the problem is not thought of in this way, then the Christian truth for the in group, and the Church becomes a gnostic community.”\textsuperscript{151}


\textsuperscript{148} Pannenberg, \textit{Revelation}, 137.

\textsuperscript{149} Pannenberg, \textit{Revelation}, 137.

\textsuperscript{150} Pannenberg, \textit{Revelation}, 135-139.

\textsuperscript{151} Pannenberg, \textit{Revelation}, 137.
Revelation considered as the unfolding of the whole of history entails that the fullness of God’s revelation will only occur at the end, rather than the beginning of history.\textsuperscript{152} Thinking dialectically involves this forming of new ‘doctrinal hypotheses,’ testing how well they illuminate our knowledge, while we simultaneously look for the ‘theologically relevant dimensions’ of all domains of knowledge. This back and forth, between the anticipated future, in view of the proleptic event of resurrection, while continually revising our understanding of the historical past, is the process of testing ‘doctrinal hypotheses.’ Doctrines, considered in this light, may allow new meanings to emerge and new syntheses to arise even as old ones may be considered unhelpful or misleading. Doctrines considered as hypotheses must continually be tested in light of new interdisciplinary research and questioned for how well they illuminate our understandings. New meanings are lifted up as we move towards the future even while past interpretations are brought forward formulating new syntheses, which must be tested or perhaps re-configured or even discarded. For Pannenberg, doctrinal development is a thoroughly interdisciplinary dialectical process that considers doctrines as hypotheses with eschatological verification.

**Maurice Wiles**

The last theologian I will examine in this literature review is Maurice Wiles. Wiles’ discussion of doctrinal development pushes the concept towards more ‘radical’ directions than anyone examined in this chapter with the exception of Kathryn Tanner. Wiles begins by noting the inadequacies of either the logical model or Newman’s model of development that “involved

\textsuperscript{152} Pannenberg, Revelation, 131-135.
the discovery of truths of which the Church had not previously been fully conscious.”  

The questions that Wiles suggests we should be asking today are of a different sort. For instance, when one looks at any development of doctrine that has occurred in the history of the Church, we should ask whether this was a necessary or merely a legitimate development. If the definition pronounced at Chalcedon was a necessary one, then any further Christological reflection would need to be first thoroughly grounded in that theology before considering any further development or ‘translation.’ Furthermore, the assumption behind any judgment that a given doctrinal formulation is a necessary one would be that it is essentially irreformable or immutable. The only possible orthodox attitude towards it then would be to consider ‘translating’ the inner meaning or significance in a different language. If, however, the pronouncement at Chalcedon is to be considered a legitimate or valuable one, but not a necessary one, then new reflection could occur, and a new formulation might be possible in order to better articulate it. However, Wiles explains that we should go a step further in this and express “an unreadiness to accept in advance that doctrinal development…can be assumed with confidence to have been wholly true in direction and in conclusion.” It is worth pausing to reiterate just how ‘radical’ this assertion is in the history of reflection on any theory of doctrinal development. Note that this ‘step further’ is suggesting that one should be prepared to ponder whether a given past doctrinal formulation was ever even “wholly true in direction and in conclusion.”

Newman, we may recall, claimed that there was an ‘antecedent probability’ that a Divinely infallible guide would guarantee the true, orthodox, and necessary development of

---


doctrine within the Church. But is this justified? Wiles says no. He explains that the same type of expectation was once assumed in the field of scriptural criticism. For example, it was often claimed that God would guarantee a verbal inerrancy to at least the autographs of the scriptures. Aside from not having the originals, the evidence of historical critical analysis demonstrates quite definitively that one cannot continue to claim that scripture has been infallibly written. And if there is no legitimate reason for accepting the infallibility of scripture then a fortiori there is less reason to assert an infallibility to doctrinal development. At any rate, to make such a judgment would require an historical look at the process of development, which as Wiles explains, does not support the claim either.\textsuperscript{155}

To my mind, the model of doctrinal development that Wiles unfolds, can be understood by first considering the idea of a paradigm shift, such as was first discussed briefly in the section on McGrath. Consider the replacement of the Ptolemaic view of the universe with the Copernican or heliocentric perspective.\textsuperscript{156} At least to a point, and for certain purposes, the Ptolemaic model works just fine. One could add epicycles to explain much apparent planetary motion, positions of the stars and so on. For centuries, this worked fine as long as one continues to add epicycle within epicycles in ever more complicated patterns in order to explain observation. With the paradigm shift to the Heliocentric model, however, the model became immediately more elegant and much simpler. Wiles suggests that we consider this analogously with the idea of doctrinal development. The Patristic writers were attempting to “assimilate new


\textsuperscript{156} Wiles, \textit{Making of Christian Doctrine}, 142-143.
ideas” as mere “refinement” to existing doctrine. According to Wiles, this is similar to ancient astronomers seeking to fit new epicycles to their understanding of the universe in order to preserve the geocentric model. According to Wiles, the model that is required to not only account for past doctrinal developments, but to promote useful developments in the future, would be to adopt an analogy to the notion of a scientific paradigm shift. Wiles believes that a careful examination of the history of doctrinal development exhibits a model of change that is less like attempts to “assimilate new ideas by the addition of new refinements to the old” and more like “assimilation of new ideas by modification of the old.”

Wiles further illustrates this way of modeling doctrinal development by examining the way in which the Patristic theologians debated with one another. For example, Wiles provides many examples of the complex ‘role of argument’ in his text. One example should suffice to show the pattern of argumentation that Wiles views as undermining the notion of any clear-cut smooth process of development. Indeed, Wiles advocates something closer to the type of development that one sees in scientific revolutions, as we just saw. So let us briefly turn to one example Wiles provides of how ‘reason’ was implemented in antiquity.

---

157 Wiles, Making of Christian Doctrine, 143. Wiles explains that he is not attempting to determine whether “new ideas” refer to “new revelation or new understanding of the old.” In either case, and for his purposes in this particular text, it suffices that “it is self-evident that there was in some sense an emergence of new insights,” 141

158 Wiles, Making of Christian Doctrine, 143.

159 Wiles, Making of Christian Doctrine, 114-140.

160 See, for example, Wiles, The Making of Christian Doctrine, 170. Also, The Remaking of Christian Doctrine, 6-7. This would seem to imply some version of an instrumentalist view and quite probably a ‘coherence’ theory of truth.
Tertullian, in his debates with Praxeas and the Modalist Monarchians, utilized New Testament passages that seemed to stress the distinction between the Father and the Son.\textsuperscript{161} So, for example, Tertullian appealed to accounts where the Son prays to the Father, or where the Son is said to have ‘been sent’ by the Father and so on. The point Tertullian was trying to make, of course, was to demonstrate that the Son and the Father are distinct based on Scripture and therefore any Modalist claim that the Son is merely a modification of the Father entails the absurdities associated with Patrpassianism. And so it was that the late second and third century debates against the Modalists eventually were successful. Stressing the distinction was usually presented in subordinationist terms as we may see in the writings of Origen. By the time of the Arain controversy, however, the Modalist ‘threat’ had all but disappeared and most theological positions indeed recognized the distinction, or reality of three Divine Persons, or at least a Binitarianism until the council of 381. They only disagreed regarding the co-equality of the three. Typically, they accepted a kind of hierarchal movement such as found in Clement or, especially Origen. So, at this point in the fourth century, theological debate was between those who asserted the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father and those Arians who stated that the Logos was essentially a creature, albeit the highest of all creatures. Wiles’ point is that the arguments (both Biblical and theological), that theologians such as Tertullian had appealed to in his invective against the Modalists were now, ‘embarrassingly,’ being used by Subordinationist proponents\textsuperscript{162}. So, the very arguments and Scriptural passages utilized by Tertullian could now


\textsuperscript{162} Wiles, \textit{Making of Christian Doctrine}, 126.
be used to “support the Son’s inferiority to the Father” in favor of the Arian position.\footnote{163}{Wiles, \textit{Making of Christian Doctrine}, 125-126.}

Consequently, many theologians were insisting that these scriptural passages “did not refer to the relation of the first two persons of the Trinity at all but to the relation of the Father and the Incarnate Christ.”\footnote{164}{Wiles, \textit{Making of Christian Doctrine}, 127.}

At first sight all of this seems to simply confirm that a process of the development of doctrine ‘happened.’ First, a potential threat to Orthodoxy arises in the form of Modalism, and then when new thinking pressed the issue further, the concern over Arianism arose, at which time, new concepts drawn from philosophy were appealed to for dealing with the new concern. But this is not Wiles’ point. Wiles is explaining how there is a logical inconsistency between different eras of theological debate if examined within a kind of arc of history. In other words, if one looks closely at the arguments appealed to in an early point of debate, and then look at a later period, often enough, the arguments in the first point, are forgotten or repudiated later.\footnote{165}{See Wiles, \textit{Making of Christian Doctrine}, 143, where Wiles returns to this issue and explains it thusly: “If, as I have suggested, the Fathers sometimes did contradict the argument of their avowedly orthodox predecessors, it was an unconscious contradiction; it was because they had forgotten the earlier argument and remembered only the conclusions.”}

It is as if the earlier arguments lift the Church to a new position, and then those same arguments are dropped—or actually argued against if needed to combat a new ‘threat’ so that there is no logical consistency over time. (It may remind one somewhat of Wittgenstein’s ‘ladder,’ used to demonstrate the limits of language only to be thrown away once arrived at that desired position).

Or, to simply let Wiles describe the issue as he sees it:

> This discussion of trinitarian doctrine arose out of an attempt to understand the logical structure of the development of a doctrine through two distinct stages; it was designed to
show that the reasoning used in those stages, though apparently convincing when each stage is regarded in isolation, may prove to be self-contradictory when the two are put together and seen as part of a single process of development.  

The logical inconsistency is apparent when these two temporal contexts are viewed together. So, it is not that Wiles is arguing against the idea of applying reason to theological debates. Far from it. Rather, it is simply that Wiles wishes to question any concept of doctrinal development as a process that produces necessary or irreformable doctrines.

Wiles contends that throughout the Christian history of doctrinal development, three sources have been and need to be appeal to. Those three sources are Scripture, worship, and a sense of salvation. I will look briefly at each of these three. Scripture for the early Church was at first the Hebrew Scriptures read in light of the Christ event. Wiles maintains that the oral tradition must not in any way be thought of as separate from the emerging New Testament Scriptures as it was the former that gave rise to the later. Wiles provides many instances of the use of Scripture for doctrinal debates. It should suffice to mention a couple of examples he provides. The central point Wiles insists upon is that often enough Scripture is used to justify a position that a thinker already holds. The tendency to proof text is quite common at the time. For instance, Arius appeals to Proverbs 8:22 where “Wisdom” proclaims “The Lord created me at the beginning of his work.” Athanasius, for his part, was fond of quoting Psalm 110:3, “From the dew of the morning I begat thee before the morning star,” which he apparently claimed supported his position of the eternal “generation” (begetting) of the Logos. Yet as Wiles maintains, neither Arius nor Athanasius came to their theological stances on the basis of these

---

166 Wiles, _Making of Christian Doctrine_, 129.
passages but, “the role of Scripture here was rather confirmatory of a position originally adopted for quite other reasons.”

Worship or the role of *lex orandi lex credendi* in shaping doctrinal outcomes is key in Wiles’ thought. Again, to provide a single example, Wiles cites the way that Origen taught the proper form of prayer. For Origen, prayer should always be to God but through Christ, a position that Wiles has documented as quite common amongst “the official liturgy of the Church.” Yet it is the so-called popular liturgical practices of the time that seemed to have had the most impact on shaping the contours of doctrinal formation, especially of the ‘high’ Christological kind. ‘Popular liturgical’ practices also account for the largest impetus, according to Wiles, for the pressure to understand the Holy Spirit as being consubstantial with the God-head as well.

Soteriological experience is the third source Wiles explains governs doctrinal development. Our example from this section looks to two of the main ways in which salvation was experienced in the early centuries. In Antioch, the so-called Logos-Anthropos school that considered the Word ‘conjoined’ to a human being emphasized the sense that salvation must be ‘of the human.’ The phrase “what has not been assumed is not healed,” uttered by Gregory Nazianzen is invariably associated with this “Christological school.” On the other hand, Cyril, and others at Alexandria—the so-called Logos-Sarx Christological school—insisted salvation

---

can only be achieved by God which for them meant that if the *Logos* is merely ‘conjoined’ to a
man, how could humanity be transformed? Only the life-giving Spirit of the *Logos* would have
the power of restoring the divine likeness to human beings. And, of course, the *Logos-Sarx*
viewpoint was promoted earlier by Athanasius against the Arians. Now, this all too brief
roughshod ride over this convoluted and important period of Christological development has a
point. I mention what we have seen here—not to pretend to have ‘covered the issues’—but to set
up the main point that Wiles is getting to. As a means of illustrating the possibility of how
doctrinal development could have gone in a different direction, Wiles asks: What ‘soteriological
principles’ may we glean from these two viewpoints that played an enormous role in the
Christological debates of the fourth and fifth centuries? Wiles explains:

> On the one hand was the conviction that a savior must be fully divine; on the other was
> the conviction that what is not assumed is not healed. Or, to put the matter in other words,
> the source of salvation must be God; the locus of salvation must be man. It is quite clear
> that these two principles often pulled in opposite directions. The Council of Chalcedon
> was the Church’s attempt to live resolve, or perhaps rather to agree to live with, that
tension.\(^{173}\)

Wiles continues this line of thought by reminding the reader that one further theme that was
common to all the theologians of the era was the belief salvation involved being “made partakers
of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4).\(^{174}\) In other words, the common soteriological belief was in the
process of divinization or *theosis*. Furthermore, all of the Patristic writers distinguished between
‘gods by grace,’ and ‘God by nature.’ Christ was ‘God by nature,’ whereas a believer may hope
to be transformed as seen in the phrase, ‘gods by grace.’ These distinctions that were accepted by


all parties in these disputes suggest that Christological development could have gone in a very different direction. According to Wiles:

In the light of this understanding of man’s destiny, it does not seem logically absurd to claim on behalf of Arianism that the Son, the supreme God’s agent in creation, who in the Arian scheme is the example par excellence of what it is to be a ‘god by grace’ should be able in the work of redemption to bring us to be what he already is and so make us also ‘gods by grace’ with as full a fellowship with God as is possible for finite beings.\ Footnote{175}

Now, Wiles is not recommending that we adopt an Arian Christology, he is merely providing an example of his theory that doctrine may have evolved in very different directions.\ Footnote{176} Wiles is keen on demonstrating that such alternative developments could have been legitimate according to the accepted beliefs of the time, namely scriptural exegesis, worship, and the experience of salvation. These three criteria, according to Wiles, are legitimate sources to any past or future doctrinal developments. Nevertheless, we should be aware that the past interpretations of these sources could have been expounded different—and importantly, for Wiles, in some cases they perhaps should have been constructed differently.

For Wiles, there is no legitimate interpretation of doctrinal development that views this process as one of unchanging dogma or precise continuity.\ Footnote{177} It is rather in the “continuity of aims” that Wiles finds important.\ Footnote{178} We must appeal to the three criteria of development but do so within the time, and context in which we find ourselves. As Wiles puts it:

I believe that we are more likely to prove loyal to the past, in the important sense of the word ‘loyal’, if we think not so much in terms of the translation of old formulae into new sets of words as in terms of the continuation of the same task of interpreting the Church’s Scriptures, her worship and her experience of salvation.\ Footnote{179}

\footnotetext{175}{Wiles, Making of Christian Doctrine, 108.}
\footnotetext{176}{Wiles, Making of Christian Doctrine, 166.}
\footnotetext{177}{Wiles, Making of Christian Doctrine, 171-172.}
\footnotetext{178}{Wiles, Making of Christian Doctrine, 172.}
Some Concluding Thoughts

For the purposes of this essay, I would like to propose a mapping of doctrinal developmental ‘types.’ I suggest three ‘ideal’ types: (1) Organic growth model (2) Pneumological-tradition model (3) Dialectical Doctrinal Development model. I do not think, nor will I attempt, to place the theologians that I review directly under one single category. All of them may be interpreted in light of any of these types, although some will be more directly ‘under’ one category than another. The types may be helpful just to delineate certain, ‘tendencies,’ that any model of doctrinal development may exhibit. I maintain that this tripartite typology can serve as a heuristic device to depict some of the elements that I suggest should be included into a model of our re-configured development of doctrine. The reason why I am suggesting the types is simply to illustrate the value that I wish to derive from each.

Allow me to explain. Each type has value and may be thought to contribute to the reconfigured sense of doctrinal development that I will be unfolding over the course of this project. From the first model, I find the metaphor of ‘organic growth’ appropriate, although I suggest that this should be ‘re-configured’ as we will see especially in Chapter Three. The second model values the importance of tradition and its role in any development of doctrine—especially such as Wiles’ criteria of Scripture, worship, and experience. Here again, Tanner’s use of the term ‘motif’ applies nicely, although as she would insist, any notion of ‘tradition’ cannot be thought of as some incommensurable ‘culture’—such as advocated by Lindbeck and McGrath. Yet the ‘fragments’ and ‘motifs’ of the fluid traditions we find ourselves in still may speak to us today. The third model, is suggestive of Pannenberg’s concept of doctrine as a

179 Wiles, Making of Christian Doctrine, 181.
thoroughly interdisciplinary dialectical process that considers doctrines as hypotheses with eschatological verification. So it is that I find the ideas of ‘organic growth’ metaphors, tradition, and doctrine as interdisciplinary and types of hypotheses that may continually need revision in light of new information to be the vital elements that I glean from these three ‘ideal types’ of doctrinal development.

There is a tendency that we may notice most clearly in the writings of Pannenberg and McGrath to treat doctrine as basically ‘propositional.’ And for these scholars, as well as for Lindbeck, *the essence* of Christianity appears to be doctrinal. In other words, there is a clear emphasis upon orthodoxy but very little view towards an ethical perspective or orthopraxy. For Pannenberg and McGrath, doctrines are inextricably connected to a correspondence theory of truth. There are, of course, elements of a coherence theory of truth in both thinkers. Nevertheless, both are quite insistent that true doctrines must have an ‘external referent.’ Now in this regard, Lindbeck, as we have seen, contends that doctrine is essentially nomological, or perhaps to be thought of as hermeneutical rules. Yet there too, Lindbeck insists that crucial theological and Christological doctrines are “unconditional, necessary, and irreversible.”\(^{180}\) To conceive of doctrine in this way—as something ‘out of play’ and transcendent above the vicissitudes of history—is an unfounded and arbitrary maneuver as I believe Tanner has demonstrated. And the very notion of ‘unconditional, necessary or irreversible’ doctrine is explicitly called into question through the historical analysis of Maurice Wiles.

Two final points. Too often in the history of Christian thought we witness ‘doctrine’ being thought of as unchangeable, to the point of being ossified, and even weaponized. This

point will occupy much of the following chapters. I will not pursue it further here. Secondly, in
none of these authors—with the possible exception of Tanner—do we see the criterion of Caritas
employed as a source or guideline for doctrinal construction. This is the second element that this
project seeks to develop: an ethical dimension, or ethics of belief, as a key criterion to any future
discussion of doctrinal development. With the mention of Caritas, we may now turn to the
second chapter where we will look at Augustine and his emphasis upon the inextricable
connection between doctrine and caritas.
CHAPTER TWO

AN AUGUSTINIAN RETRIEVAL

Simone Weil once asked the question, “How can Christianity call itself catholic if the universe itself is left out?”\(^1\) Although his overall theology tends to place greater emphasis upon the inexhaustible and unchanging transcendent, rather than the immanent, in *De Doctrina Christiana* (*On Christian Doctrine*, translated by R.P.H. Green), Augustine reminds his readers to view the *entire* universe with reference to God. According to Augustine, the ‘things’ of this world, if understood properly, should lead one to a proper mode of love in which the ‘signs and things’ of the universe point to the knowledge of the ultimate double commandment of love. It is a type of an almost Neoplatonic ascent, an ‘upward’ movement from sign (*signa*) to thing (*res*) on to the Divine. This Augustinian notion of the movement from ‘representation’ to ‘reality,’ will, in the first part of this chapter, provide a type of heuristic and analysis for theological ideas and doctrines. In this chapter I will suggest a type of doctrinal ‘mapping’ that utilizes the interpretation theory and praxis laid out by Augustine in *De Doctrina Christiana*.\(^2\)

---


There are, of course, multiple ways in which we could attempt to “map what doctrines are about”—how they form, how they function. ³

When attempting to provide models or ‘maps’ for something as diverse as discussions of doctrine, there is the constant danger of squeezing subtle differences into preconceived categories. ⁴ Furthermore, many ways of considering doctrine are less about theories of truth and more about critical theory or hermeneutics. And I am aware that the very notion of applying any theory of truth in the ways listed is controversial. And again, there are those who would argue that even the very claim to ‘truth’ is a kind of violence. ⁵ Yet to my mind, given the impossible task of reviewing in a single book all the literature on issues of doctrine and its development, this framework is useful as an analytic map as well as a heuristic device for examining the thesis of this chapter: that virtually all theological discussion on the topic of ‘doctrine’ can be understood as exhibiting a type of sign to res structure; and this structure—or what I will call an ‘Augustinian paradigm’ or ‘heuristic’—makes clear that, in whatever other ways the ‘theories’ of

---

³ Often, doctrine is treated as essentially a series of ‘propositions’ that represent ‘True’ knowledge about God.

⁴ It should also be noted that ‘doctrine,” is only one “dimension” of religion. See for example the work of Ninian Smart, The World’s Religions (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 11-21; Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World’s Beliefs (CA: University of California Press, 1996). Other dimensions identified by Smart include: ritual, mythic, experiential, social, ethical, doctrinal, and material.

⁵ See for example, Gianni Vattimo, A Farewell to Truth, translated by William McCuaig (NY: Columbia University Press, 2011). Also, Nihilism & Emancipation: Ethics, Politics, & Law, translated by William McCuaig, edited by Santiago Zabala, (NY: Columbia Press, 2004). Both Vattimo and Richard Rorty feel that a more hermeneutical or pragmatic understanding of thinking is more democratic while universal claims to truth tend towards violence and authoritarian projects. Also see Richard Rorty who suggests dropping any discussion of “Truth” in favor of fallible “truths” achieved through a practice of reason-giving in order to achieve adequate consensus. Rorty holds radically pragmatic views: “For pragmatists, the desire for objectivity is not the desire to escape the limitations of one’s community, but simply the desire for as much intersubjective agreement as possible, the desire to extend the reference of “us” as far as we can.” Quoted from Rorty, “Solidarity or Objectivity,” in Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth. Philosophical Papers, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 23. These topics are extremely important but outside the scope of this chapter. My point is to simply recognize this, and to suggest that my aim in explicating this “Augustinian sign-res paradigm” can serve as a useful heuristic. I would claim that regardless of one’s notion of doctrine or one’s epistemology (or any rejection of this category whether for philosophical or neuroscientific reasons) this paradigm can illuminate some interesting features of doctrine.
doctrine differ, most all discussions of this theological category assume that the sign (or doctrinal representation) is an imperfect attempt to point to an unchanging res. In other words, I am claiming that the various ways one can construe ideas about ‘doctrine’ can be placed under the Augustinian paradigm which is able to show this most general feature of all of them.6

In the first chapter we examined the ideas of some key representative thinkers writing about doctrinal development in the post-Newman era. The arguments of these theologians centered around establishing criteria for whether doctrines are ever, ‘irreformable,’ or establishing criteria for any potential limits to doctrinal development. Nevertheless, I am suggesting that what the various mappings of doctrine elucidated above share with the scholars mentioned in the first chapter is an implicit Augustinian assumption of a type of ‘signa/res,’ ‘a representation to reality’ framework. And so again, and in other words, in whatever way these various models differ—and of course there is considerable difference—nevertheless they all assume, either implicitly or explicitly, that the res—that which the doctrines (signs, symbols, representations) are trying, however imperfectly to express—is an unchanging almost semi-

---

6 So for example, two brief initial illustrations: (1) Alister E. McGrath asserts that “it is proper to suggest that there is an ineradicable cognitive element to Christian doctrine, considered as an historical phenomenon. It purports to be a representation, however inadequate or provisional, of the ways things really are” in The Genesis of Doctrine: A Study in the Foundation of Doctrinal Criticism (Grand Rapids, Mi: Eerdmans, 1997), 75. This is a relatively straightforward claim of a sign or representational quality of doctrine that refers to some res. (2) George Lindbeck would refer to this as a type of “cognitive-propositional” or “first order” truth-claim that relies upon truth theories of correspondence or representational theories of meaning. As an alternative proposal, Lindbeck argues for a cultural-linguistic model of doctrine. Rather than viewing doctrine as propositional or “experientially-expressive,” Lindbeck argues that doctrine serves as “regulative” or as the “grammar” of a “language-game.” Understood as “rules of grammar” I would argue that treating doctrine as such “second-order assertions” or “intrasystematic” claims nevertheless assumes a type of res-like status for doctrine. Just as it makes little sense to question whether rules or grammar are “objectively true,” doctrines too are supposed to be understood as “out of play,” unquestionable and quasi-transcendent criteria that govern the intratextual project of theology. Nevertheless, even if Lindbeck considers doctrine “nomologically” as opposed to “epistemologically,” it seems to my mind to make little difference for our purposes here. Doctrines are still considered the true ‘res’ of Christianity for Lindbeck. See George A. Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age (Pa: Westminster Press, 1984).
Platonic essence or thing-in-itself behind the signs. The signs which are symbols drawn from the culture (*signum*) are attempts to represent this unchanging reality (*res*) behind the appearances.\(^7\)

Or to describe this in another way, the emphasis has been essentially epistemological, with some type of a quasi-metaphysical status attributed to doctrine. Doctrines are elevated to the status of the true ‘*res*’ of the Christian faith. Whereas for Augustine, as we shall see, it is Caritas which is the ‘*res*’ of the faith. Neither doctrines nor scripture are the central key of Christianity for Augustine. Just as one should be open to the inexhaustible love of God, one may see an indefinite number of interpretations that are equally valid insofar as they express *Caritas*.

Doctrines, at their best, are merely expressions of *Caritas* and ultimately in service to it.

Therefore, this chapter consists of two parts. In the first part I will examine the structure of this ‘Augustinian paradigm.’ The second part will consist of an application of this paradigm as a heuristic device to two theologians in order to analyze what I have referred to as a near

---

\(^7\) Perhaps it would be useful to suggest two possible but opposite ‘type’ analogies: (1) realism/anti-realism debates or (2) insights and metaphors from evolution and contemporary genetics. First, the categories of realism and anti-realism within the philosophy of science. Anti-realist positions such as those espoused by the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum physics suggest that, for example, particles such as an electron that cannot be directly observed, even with extended powers of observation, may be understood in a purely instrumentalist or ‘consensus’ perspective. Descriptions of “spin,” “wave,” “position,” and the like are merely human concepts derived from experience at the macrolevel. But at the quantum level, beyond the categories such as space, time, causation that we have available to us, the impositions of these concepts just do not really apply. Formulas used to describe motion at the macrolevel break down at the quantum level. This view might lead one to ask: if a particle is not anything but “probability waves” until measured by some instrumentation, does this mean that reality is in some way dependent upon our categories of thought? In view of the strangeness of wave-particle duality we can say that the Copenhagen view is an ontological and not just an epistemological interpretation. Realists, by contrast, insist that reality is in principle knowable. Quantum physics is thus an incomplete theory. By delving deeper and deeper into existence scientists can move closer to the reality under the appearances. (This leads to notions of multiple dimensions and the like). I would like to suggest that the question of an unchanging *res* behind the sign, or a reality behind the representations, is at least loosely analogous to the debates of the anti-realist and realists. Is there a *res* or not? Or rather, is it that the *res* exists but itself evolves? Utilizing metaphors from modern genetics and evolution one could think of not simply a development or change in sign or representation but rather change “all the way down.” On this later view, all of reality is evolving. In light of such questions, where for example would one place the “death of God” theologians? Do they deny that there is any *res* (anti-realism or instrumentalism)? Or would they argue that there is no distinction between sign and *res*? Or would they think of the *res* as itself evolving? What of certain process thinkers? There are multiple possibilities here. On the other hand, open theists, for example, I would suggest end up treating biblical texts themselves as *res*. At any rate, considering these types of questions in light of these
universal doctrinal structure where the sign (doctrinal representation) implicitly points to an unchanging \textit{res}. Towards this end, the second part will examine aspects of the thought of Wolfhart Pannenberg and Jon Sobrino. These two theologians employ a dialectical approach in their respective works. Yet while it is true that their projects have roots in the thought of G.W.F Hegel, their respective interpretations take the well-examined divergence of thought roughly described as focusing on moving from inadequate symbols to more adequate concepts on the one hand, or ‘turning this upside down’ in order to stress the material conditions of existence on the other hand. In other words, Pannenberg is articulating an example of German Absolute Idealism, whereas Sobrino represents a theology more in line with so-called Historical-Materialism. This is not to say that Pannenberg is merely following Hegel, nor that Sobrino is simply a Marxist. They are both theologians first and foremost. Pannenberg, for example, has been quite clear that the future be viewed as open, allowing for new possibilities and new events in a manner that he believes Hegel (and some of Hegel’s followers like Ernst Troeltsch) cannot provide within their interpretations.\footnote{Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Hermeneutic and Universal History,” originally translated by Paul J. Achtemeier in \textit{Basic Questions in Theology, Collected Essays}: Vol. I, Translated by George H. Kehm. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008), pp. 134-135.}

And Sobrino is adamant in asserting that refusal to understand Christianity in any other way than as total commitment against injustice and poverty would be essentially a betrayal of the faith. And yet he also insists that “we cannot possibly realize the kingdom in all its fullness because it is a gift.”\footnote{Jon Sobrino, \textit{Christology at the Crossroads}, translated by John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1978), 135.} Nevertheless, there is an inverse relation between these two dialectical approaches that ‘fit’ the Augustinian sign-Res paradigm albeit in quite different ways. For Pannenberg, the sign (doctrine) is constructed dialectically in history as a revisable and

\begin{itemize}
\item analogies might be useful as providing another aspect of the mapping and “Augustinian sign-res paradigm.” This article will focus on the perspective of doctrines using metaphors inspired from evolution and genetics.
\end{itemize}
interdisciplinary project as the imperfectly known future (Res) comes as possibility to the present. Doctrines are hypotheses with an eschatological verification. For Pannenberg doctrines are the ‘res’ of the faith. Sobrino, by contrast, interprets the sign of the suffering poor as pointing to the future Res and justice of the Kingdom. For Sobrino, any legitimate discussion of doctrine is really about action or praxis. It is structural change and justice that is the goal and the driving force here. It is not elevating representations to the level of Concept that is central, rather, the point is to “take the crucified people down from the cross.”10 It is this last statement that probably expresses best what constitutes the ‘res’ of Christianity for Sobrino. And so I think that both thinkers can be interpreted within the Augustinian sign-Res paradigm.11 And both also follow Augustine’s understanding that any theological construction requires a praxis, albeit these interpretations are also in an almost inverse relationship to one another. And both also, either explicitly or implicitly, assume that there is an unchanging Res behind these constructions, as I will attempt to demonstrate, after the following elucidation of ‘Augustine’s sign-Res paradigm.’ And yet I am suggesting that Sobrino’s emphasis upon taking ‘the crucified people down from the cross,’ is in fact much closer to Augustine’s insistence upon Caritas as the ‘res’ of Christianity than Pannenberg’s notion of the Christian ‘res’ consisting primarily of doctrinal hypotheses seeking eschatological verification.

An ‘Augustinian Paradigm’


11 It is also interesting to note that Hegel provided the first real new development in any theology of history since the time of Augustine (who provided the first major theology of history). According to Karl Lowith, after Augustine, Joachim of Fiore, Bossuet, and Vico built on this basic Augustinian framework. Voltaire formulated the first notion of a philosophy rather than a theology of history. So Pannenberg and Sobrino as “heirs” of Hegel are in an interesting historical lineage of “theology of history” as well. See Karl Lowith, Meaning in History (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949).
One particular theme that appears time and again in Augustine’s many writings could be summed up in is his assertion that “My will is my weight.” For Augustine, that which one loves is like a weight pulling or directing one’s being towards it, either towards the Creator or some aspect of creation. It is caritas, the love of God and neighbor, that Augustine views as the true goal of one’s life and love. If love unites one to that which one loves, then a life of caritas unites one to God and neighbor. This same theme appears again as the standard of a right-ordered love throughout the four books that comprise his De Doctrina Christiana. Book one deals primarily with notions of possible contents of faith, that is, the right ‘thing’ to center one’s life upon. Books two and three examine issues of signification and interpretation. The final book comprises Augustine’s advice on what he considers the most legitimate ways to effectively convey the Christian message to various audiences.

“All teaching,” explains Augustine “is teaching of either things or signs, but things are learnt through signs” (DDC 1.2.2). Signs (signa) are also things, albeit something that signifies something else. Things (res) can also signify other things although not all things are necessarily signs. Furthermore, all signs are things although not all things are signs. Because a sign (signum)


13 Ibid., Also see 1.1.1; 10.27.38. Also in Book 14 of The City of God.


15 What I mean by referring to Book I as about “faith” as opposed to “things,” is due to the stress Augustine places on the issue of rightly or wrongly ordered love. I cannot read this book without thinking about Paul Tillich’s notion of “Ultimate concern.” For the later, there is an objective and subjective correlate as well. Having an ultimate concern may be universal, according to Tillich, but the objective correlate of this can differ almost indefinitely. For this point see Tillich, Dynamics of Faith, (NY:Perennial Classics, 2001), 1-34. Also, Marcus Borg’s differentiation between “believing that” and “believing in” are helpful distinctions. The former is about “propositions” and their correct correspondence to reality. Believing in, is about an new orientation, “trust, loyalty, love,” and a way of living that leads to transformation. It seems to me that these are some contemporary ways of getting at Augustine’s
serves as a representation of some reality (res), we can understand Augustine’s statement that “things are learnt through signs.” Augustine is suggesting that humans and human activity are always already embedded within “systems of representation.” Yet according to Rowan Williams, a “res is, first and foremost, something whose being is not determined by the function of meaning something else. It is what it is, and does not belong in a system of representation. It may become part of such a system, and be both res and signum.”

It is the concept of res, ‘thing,’ that Augustine interprets in terms of his understanding of _caritas_, or the double commandment of love that is such a constant theme for him. “There are some things,” Augustine explains, “which are to be enjoyed, some which are to be used, and some whose function is both to enjoy and use” (DDC 1.3.3.) The _uti_ (use) and _frui_ (enjoyment) distinction is made in order to ‘map’ out the proper subjective attitude that one should take in relation to the many good things of the world. To enjoy some ‘thing’ in Augustine’s sense of the word is to make it the center of one’s being. Enjoyment of a thing is to regard it with complete commitment, the source of importance, and the ground of meaning in one’s life. The thing one seeks to enjoy is the object of one’s ultimate desire, what they believe will ultimately satisfy their being. It is literally the ‘end’ of all of our seeking. On the other hand, to ‘use’ something is to appreciate it in relation to that which one seeks to enjoy. Augustine wants us to love things

---


17 Williams, “Language, Reality, and Desire,” 139.

that are to be ‘used’ in relation to or for the sake of our ultimate goal of enjoyment of that which makes us happy. For Augustine, the subjective side of all this is involves understanding what should be the proper referent to one’s love in the sense of enjoyment. To love something finite—whether the self or some other thing—is to confuse the notions of what is to be used and what should be enjoyed. No finite ‘thing’ could possibly bear the full ‘weight of one’s will.’ This subjective confusion of properly ordered love with inappropriate objective correlates will simply lead one to dissatisfaction (DDC 1.4.4.). While it may be the case that the many things of the world are created as ‘good’ for Augustine, they are not the infinite Good, and so will ultimately disappoint. The temporal things of the universe are to be ‘used’ to move ‘upward’ to the eternal things that are to be enjoyed—the Triune God as the ultimate Res.19 It is Caritas, the double command to love God and neighbor that Augustine asserts as the scriptural justification for his theory of the true Res. God is the only ‘thing’ that could possibly fulfill human desire.20 And the neighbor, as

---

19 This notion of loving or using the journey for the sake of arriving at the destination and not loving or enjoying the journey itself, is also a common theme in Augustine, eg, (DDC 1.4.4.). Augustine’s Neoplatonic metaphors and ideas of the soul’s ascent from the sensible to the intelligible was probably most influenced by his reading of Plotinus’ The Enneads (see especially “On Beauty” and “On the Three Primary Hypostases.”) Augustine’s notion of Caritas was greatly influenced by the idea of eros that extends back to Plato’s Symposium (esp. 199c-212b) and Phaedrus (esp. 244a-257b). In this Platonist conception, if the soul can move beyond the many beautiful things of the world towards the source of Beauty Itself, this erotic desire will allow the soul to achieve its true place. For a critique of this see the large work by Anders Nygren, Eros and Agape. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1982). It is on pages 476-558 in this large work where Nygren argues that Augustine’s understanding of love has too much of a Platonist conception of Eros about it. See especially chapters 4 and 5 of John Burnaby, Amor Dei: A Study in the Religion of St. Augustine (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1938), for a more positive view of Augustine on love.

20 The idea that God is a “Thing” is, of course, a controversial topic involving discussions of language and the question of onto-theology. The literature on this topic is enormous. A few examples: See for example, Kevin W. Hector, Theology Without Metaphysics: God, Language, and the Spirit of Recognition (UK: Cambridge Press, 2011); Religion After Metaphysics. Edited by Mark A. Wrathall (UK: Cambridge, 2003); Merold Westphal Overcoming Onto-Theology: Toward a Postmodern Christian Faith (NY: Fordham Press, 2001); God, The Gift, and Postmodernism, Edited by John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington,IN: Indiana University Press, 1999); also see Thomas A. Carlson Indiscretion: Finitude and the Naming of God (University of Chicago Press, 1999); Views more “ontotheological”: Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology Edited by
the fellow being that is capable of ‘using and enjoying,’ is thus able to enjoy God with others, and so is worthy of human love as well, in reference to the Divine (DDC 1.27.28; 1.29.30). It is worth quoting Augustine on this point:

The chief purpose of all that we have been saying in our discussion of things is to make it understood that the fulfilment and end of the law [cf. Rom, 13:10; I Tim. 1:5] and all the divine scriptures is to love the thing which must be enjoyed and the thing which together with us can enjoy that thing (DDC 1.35.39).

Also at the end of Book I, Augustine explains that as soon as one understands that the double command to love is the end of all scripture, one cannot interpret those scriptures incorrectly, even if one does not understand correctly the original (human) authorial intention (DDC 1.36.41.). Therefore, “A person strengthened by faith, hope, and love,” Augustine explains, “has no need of the scriptures, except to instruct others” (DDC 1.39.43). Thus, the scriptures are to be ‘used’ and not considered an object of ‘enjoyment.’

After his discussion on ‘things,’ Augustine turns his attention to ‘signs.’ Some things are, in themselves, a terminus of a sign when the thing in question does not signify anything else. Yet many things will also act as signs. Signification can refer to natural signs (*signa naturalia*) as well as ‘conventional signs’ (*signa data*). Natural signs refer to smoke or footprints and thus point to the fire or animal that gave rise to them (DDC 2.1.1.). Augustine is primarily concerned with analyzing conventional signs. These can be analyzed into two groupings: *signa propria* and *signa translata*. When a conventional sign refers to some ‘thing,’ such as in Augustine’s

---


example of an ox, the verbal sign ‘ox’ refers to the extra-mental animal, namely an ox.\textsuperscript{22} Such verbal signs are \textit{signa propria}, and any confusion over the meaning can, according to Augustine, be clarified often enough through studying the language or consulting various translations. The real issue for Augustine involves the category of \textit{signa translata}, often translated as \textit{signa figurata}.\textsuperscript{23} This involves situations in which a sign refers to a thing which signifies somethings else. Such figurative speech occurs frequently within scripture. Augustine uses the example of the scriptural sign ‘ox,’ that signifies an ox, which signifies an apostle [1 Cor.9:9 and I Tim. 5:18, quoting Deut. 25:4 (DDC 2.10.15)]. Now, frequent uses of such figurative speech occur throughout culture. According to Augustine the signs and symbols of language can be understood in terms of “two kinds of learning” (DDC 2.19.29). The first type refers to those ‘systems of signification’ that were instituted by human beings. The second, refers to those that were “already in place” or even “divinely instituted.”\textsuperscript{24} The fact that some ‘things’ are in some sense ‘signs’ able to point to other ‘things’ is due therefore, to the existence of one or the other of these two types of ‘learning.’

One ‘kind of learning’ that Augustine sees as instituted (or perhaps we might say socially constructed) by human beings involves astrology. Astrology or divination both involve a complex ‘system of signification’ in which certain ‘things’ are invested with meaning and refer

\footnote{22 Although outside the scope of this essay, there are many aspects of this “referential theory of meaning” that could be discussed. Augustine’s examples may be found in DDC 2.10.15.}

\footnote{23 For a discussion of reasons for and against these translations see Babcock, “\textit{Caritas} and Signification in \textit{De Doctrina Christiana} 1-3,” in \textit{De Doctrina Christiana: A Classic of Western Culture}, pp. 149-150 and 159-160.}

\footnote{24 Babcock, “\textit{Caritas} and Signification,”160. This phrase, “systems of signification,” is from Babcock’s article. It is a phrase I find quite useful and so it appears in this chapter often. Augustine refers to the patterns of signs signifying some ‘\textit{res},’ that in turn, signifies other \textit{res} as “kinds of learning” that are either “humanly instituted” or “divinely instituted.” See DDC 2.19.29 According to Babcock, the phrase “kinds of learning,” interestingly enough is rendered from the plural form of the Latin word: \textit{doctrinae}.}
to other ‘things,’ in order to, for example, provide reasons for human events, significance of natural events for human destinies and so on (DDC 2.20.30—2.25.39). For Augustine, such practices form ways of thinking and acting that encourage people to worship creation rather than the Creator. Such actions are idolatrous because they amount to ‘enjoying’ things in themselves rather than ‘using’ them as ways of ascending to the Infinite. And although Augustine considers such practices as actual pacts between humans and demons, many today would at least agree that such systems of signification are elaborately socially constructed (DDC 2.23.36).

For Augustine there are other humanly instituted ways of signifying that are neutral in value. Some type of economic exchange, systems of weights and measure and so on are essential for any society to function (DDC 2.25.38—26.40). Interestingly, Augustine makes the assertion that although the type of signification used for mathematics and logic are humanly instituted, the things that they refer to are not. In this respect Augustine seems to be in line once again with Platonic and Pythagorean interpretations. In this case he seems to hold to at least some type of Platonic number theory. For these schools of thought, as apparently for Augustine, numbers and things are discovered, they are not invented (DDC 2.30.58—2.34.52; 2.37.55—2.39.63).

Now the issue that Augustine is raising with all of these categories involves the following questions: How can one determine whether any given ‘system of signification’ is legitimate or not? How can one know whether a given verbal sign (for example in scripture) is to be understood as figurative or not? Augustine wants to avoid two potential difficulties. First he does not wish to confuse any ‘sign’ that was intended to be understood as signa propria in such a way as to be interpreted as a signa figurata (DDC 3.9.13—3.10.14). This would amount to merely imposing some external meaning onto something else. Second, he wants to avoid the
opposite problem where something that should have been understood figuratively ends up interpreted in a literal sense. For Augustine, this is would be a context where “The letter kills but the spirit gives life” [(2 Cor. 3:6) (DDC 3.4.8—3.5.9)]. A further danger lies in the possibility that people interpret these things incorrectly because they decide the two questions above on the basis of their own cultural values or moral judgments (DDC 3.9.13—3.25.36). For Augustine the answer to all of these questions comes down to the double commandment of love. Once again it is caritas that enables Augustine to determine the legitimacy of interpretations. So, in regards to a ‘system of signification’ such as astrology, Augustine argued that the socially constructed values and meanings attached to ‘things’ within these ‘sign systems,’ does not lead one to caritas but instead it will lead them towards a deeper cupiditas. According to Augustine, any ‘system of representation’ that involves one’s mode of love, (as in the sense of ‘enjoyment’), of created things will encourage both self-love and further love of created entities. Yet any language, sign system, or interpretation that builds up love of God and neighbor is based on caritas. Caritas has the ability to encourage social interactions and relationships precisely because it is the only mode of being in which one lives according to a rightly order love (DDC 3.10.15). And so any interpretation of the scripture is legitimate as long as it promotes and embodies caritas. One can know quite readily whether an interpretation of scripture should be taken as literal or figurative by asking the question: Does this passage, taken literally, build up or tear down caritas? If it literally exhibits nothing of caritas, then it must be understood figuratively.

**Summary of Augustine’s Signa-Res Paradigm**

From this brief exploration of Augustine’s sign theory, here are six central points that it seems, to my mind at least, should be noted at this point:
First, there is Augustine’s prescription that any rightly-ordered mode of love should only seek ‘enjoyment’ (‘belief in,’ ‘ultimate concern’), in what is truly Infinite Love, Justice, and Goodness. The double commandment of Love (*Caritas*) is really what the ‘*Res,*’ the ‘*Thing,*’ that is to be ‘enjoyed,’ is all about for Augustine.

Second, in Augustine’s thought, the entire world becomes a kind of intersection between human desire and the open-ended fluidity of signs and things, language, and reality. Any number of res may have any number of ‘meanings’ and significations. For Augustine, ‘logs, stones, and sheep’ are indeed ‘*res,*’ but they also become signs of Moses’ transforming the waters, a pillow for Jacobs’s head, and a substitution for Isaac (DDC 1.2.2.). As Rowan Williams explains “not everything is signum in the ordinary course of things; but in the light of Christ, no res is left alone. It can be used, and so become a sign; it can mean what it is not.”  

Thirdly, the endless and multiple patterns of ‘sign to res’ that humans are embedded within are ‘systems of signification,’ where all meaning and value exist. The world may be a variegated patchwork of such systems of representation, but *Caritas* is a way of accepting and celebrating diverse patterns of signification. And yet caritas may show that not every sign system is necessarily ‘loving’ nor equal. Thus there are ways to interpret and even judge between various sign systems. Which leads to the Fourth point, which is really a corollary of the first point and is one of Augustine’s main concerns: *Caritas* is the mode of love that unites human beings in relation to, and for the sake of God. And *cupiditas* is self-love, the mode of love that promotes love of material things of the world in a self-centered manner. In other words, caritas and *cupiditas* represent the two opposing ‘loves’ or ‘drives’ that lay behind diverging ‘social

---

theories,’ if I may phrase it that way without, I hope, being too anachronistic. *Caritas* encourages and unites people whereas *cupiditas* represents that drive that divides them.

This fifth point provides an example of doctrinal construction in Augustine’s theology. This is a vivid example of a sign-res doctrine that I would place under the ‘propositional’ category of the ‘doctrine table’ above. When Augustine speaks on the Incarnation, he first utilizes a distinction between a ‘word’ (verbum or logos), understood as an interior word (*logos endiathetos*), and one viewed as an external word (*Logos prophorikos*).26 The act of understanding involves hearing the spoken (external) word of another and translating it in one’s mind back into the interior word that originated in the mind of the speaker. Now, when humans communicate in this way, there is often misinterpretation, and a failure to accurately ‘translate.’ And no accidental language ‘casing’ can fully convey the inner essence. Yet when God speaks forth the Word, it becomes a perfect self-expression of God’s Wisdom. Although the prior interior Word in the mind of God and the external expression are distinct, it is nevertheless the case that God’s sapientia is fully present in the historical manifestation.27 Augustine would say this is the one example of where a ‘sign’ perfectly corresponds to the ‘*Res.*’ So for Augustine, while the historical Jesus is a ‘*res*’ that existed at a point in history, he is also a ‘sign’ that refers beyond himself to another ‘*Res.*’ Now when humans read about Jesus in scriptures, this ‘sign’ can only point towards the *res* (the historical Jesus), that is a ‘sign’ of the eternal ‘*Res.*’ The doctrine of the Incarnation is understood explicitly in signa-res terminology. For the Sixth point, I am simply noting that all theology does, either explicitly or implicitly, involve some type of

---

26 Also see Augustine, *The City of God*, Book 15. This section relies on Jean Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 32-39

praxis. For Augustine, living by Caritas is the hermeneutical key and guide to Christian praxis. It is the true ‘res’ of the Christian faith. So, not surprisingly, in Book IV Augustine explains that the purpose of Books I-III was to lead people to the double commandment of love. In Book IV, and drawing upon Cicero’s advice on rhetoric, Augustine states that a ‘plain style’ is most appropriate to aid people into grasping and absorbing the ‘res’ of Caritas. The more ‘grand style’ should be used to inspire and transform the listener’s heart. More important than the skills of eloquence, however, and the best way to inspire the audience, is the principle that the rhetor should live by Caritas. This constitutes the Christian praxis for Augustine.

What I have referred to as an ‘Augustinian sign-res paradigm’ simply consists of the following elements: Any doctrine involves a pattern of movement from contingent signs (symbols, representations drawn from culture(s)) that are necessarily interdisciplinary in nature and which comprise attempts to point towards some type of res, some ‘thing,’ that is often assumed to be eternal, unchanging and essential. Any legitimate construction of doctrine would embody and reflect the double commandment of love. In quasi-Augustinian language, one could say that of the many varied possible ‘systems of signification’ that have been, or could be utilized for doctrinal construction, some would build up caritas, while others (intentionally or not) might promote cupiditas or a type of self-love, or even at times a love of created things. And finally, any doctrinal construction that does in some sense embody caritas would naturally flow towards some type of praxis. While all these points invite further examination in later chapters, the main feature that I want to reiterate in this chapter, is the Augustinian notion of signs embedded within ‘systems of signification,’ attempting to ‘get at’ some unchanging res behind any doctrinal signification. Although there are many ways in which doctrines can be ‘mapped,’ it
is my claim that most, if not all possible ways to talk about doctrine may be understood as such. The next section of the chapter will look at just two theologies that utilize somewhat opposite dialectical approaches and can be viewed in light of this ‘Augustinian sign-res paradigm.’ Questions about the ethical implications of assumptions of an unchanging res, its relation to caritas, and so on will be addressed in later chapters.

**After Hegel**

Probably the most innovative development in the theology or philosophy of history after Augustine’s *City of God* was G.W.F Hegel’s dialectical understanding of history.\(^{28}\) For Hegel, the Absolute is both ultimate substance as well as living subject.\(^{29}\) All that exists is directed by the ‘Idea,’ such that the logic of dialectic directs the unfolding of reality itself. Geist, the subjective aspect of the Absolute, gradually develops towards self-awareness within Hegel’s logic of dialectic. As Geist progresses through History itself there is a similar but gradual progression of consciousness towards freedom. Individuals and nations work towards their own ends yet all the while the ‘cunning of reason’ is operating to achieve the purposes of the Absolute Idea.\(^{30}\) Similarly, it is within art, religion, and philosophy that the Idea is expressed in

---

\(^{28}\) The thirteenth century monk Joachim of Fiore had developed an eschatological view of the Trinity in which history is divided into three eras with each era corresponding to one of the persons of the Trinity: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Joachim declared that the age of the Spirit was about to dawn in 1260 C.E. According to Eric Voegelin, this tri-partite view of history immanentized the transcendent, weakening the delicate Platonic-Christian synthesis of living in a metaxy, the in-between transcendent and immanent. According to Voegelin, this de-railing of the divine into the becoming of history helped pave the way towards the enlightenment and later progressive, Hegelian, Marxist and Fascist tri-partite views of totally immanent history. Voegelin, in *The New Science of Politics: An Introduction* (originally published by University of Chicago Press, 1952) now in *Modernity Without Restraint* Vol. 5. Edited by Manfred Henningsen (Columbia, Missouri, University of Press, 2000), pp. 178-180. Also see Karl Lowith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1949).


increasingly more explicit formulations as history progresses. For Hegel, the symbolic representations of the Christian faith are the highest form of religious expression in history because of the doctrine of the Incarnation. It is in the incarnation that the emerging awareness of the unity of the Infinite and the finite begins to reveal the concept of the Infinite Spirit. Yet it is only through the ‘lifting’ of the symbolic representations of Christian doctrine into the more developed universal truth of the concept, that truth, reason and freedom can find their most adequate expression. Hegel’s notion that history unfolds dialectically was appropriated by Karl Marx, although, with the caveat that it be understood in terms of material conditions. According to Marx, Hegel’s dialectic is “standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell.” Instead, for the more material interpretation of dialectical logic, it is class struggle and economic tensions that drive the dialectic of history forward, not the Hegelian Idealistic focus on Idea and Concept. So we can see that the very logic of dialectical thinking can be understood in two quite opposite ways. Pannenberg and Sobrino utilize dialectical thought in their writings that could be referred to as a form of Idealism and Historical-Materialism respectively. It is precisely because of this inverse relationship that I think that the choice of Pannenberg and Sobrino are wonderful examples of dialectical approaches to theology. In this way, I intend to demonstrate that dialectical models of doctrinal construction exemplify well the Augustinian paradigm discussed above.

In his article, *The Crisis of the Scripture Principle*, Wolfhart Pannenberg describes, how, what Paul Ricoeur elsewhere has referred to as the end of the ‘first naivete,’ has led to the privatization of faith by many in the world today. The basic trust in the authoritative interpreters, biblical accounts, and the worldview described within them, has eroded in the wake of the enlightenment, historical-critical studies, comparative religious research and scientific discovery. For Pannenberg, this explains western Christianity’s turn towards “enthusiasm” and the eventual “subjectification” of faith. Atheism and skepticism are bound to expand unless the necessarily universal truth claims of Christianity can be established as universal historical truth rather than as subjective experience. Pannenberg is committed to interdisciplinary research to achieve this goal of a publicly rational theology. Asserting that “whatever is true must finally be consistent with all other truth,” Pannenberg has declared his adherence to a coherence theory.

32 Along with Ernst Troeltsch, Pannenberg should be viewed in contrast to Neo-Orthodox “Theologians of the Word” such as Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann or similar approaches such as Kahler or Kierkegaard. For Pannenberg, if one takes seriously the belief that theology should be a public discipline, then all of Christian thought must be related to the whole of reality, and not simply some small part of it. See Pannenberg “Introduction” in *Revelation in History* (Toronto: MacMillan Co, 1968). Pannenberg should also be understood as opposed to the type of epistemological and ontological dualism associated with Platonic and Kantian schools of thought. This would include liberal Protestants such as Schleiermacher, Ritschl, or Harnack as well as Wittgenstein or the so-called Yale or Post-Liberal school, especially Lindbeck, Hauerwas or Radical Orthodox theologians such as James K. A. Smith, John Milbank, William Cavanaugh, et al.


34 Ibid., p.8.

of truth. And yet truth must be considered an historical phenomenon for Pannenberg so that we do not “narrow-mindedly substitute a particular perspective for the whole of truth.” If we hold theology to the same standards of rationality expected from historical sciences, for example, then it must be recognized that truth is provisional, only partially developed and so on. In fact, any truth claim of human knowledge is necessarily incomplete and partial, debatable and revisable, until the future eschaton, according to Pannenberg. This applies to claims of theology as well of course. So when Pannenberg asserts that God is the “all determining reality”—a claim that could only be confirmed at the eschaton—he is able to boldly claim that all aspects of reality—science, history, psychology and so on—must contain “theologically relevant dimensions.” These two claims—that all knowledge is provisional until the eschaton and that God is the “all determining reality”—leads the theologian to develop an eschatological ontology of the future of God. For Pannenberg the entire world historical process amounts to “a self-demonstration of God’s existence.” God does not exist as a “presence” or a “timeless being underlying all objects,” but rather, God is the “power of the future.” Pannenberg asserts that Jesus’ claim of the coming of the future Kingdom of God is a reference to this power, which he claims should be taken

---


39 Pannenberg, An Introduction to Systematic Theology, p. 12

seriously in light of the evidence of the resurrection.\textsuperscript{41} Perhaps even more provocatively, if the coming of the Kingdom of God is conceived of as the eschatological rule of the “all determining power” over all reality, then given the obvious fact that the Kingdom has not arrived, Pannenberg suggests that God will not be fully God until the eschaton.\textsuperscript{42} As Pannenberg puts it “Since his rule and his being are inseparable, God’s being is still in the process of coming to be…we should not be embarrassed that God cannot be ‘found’ somewhere in present reality.”\textsuperscript{43}

At the same time, it is important to note that Pannenberg shares Hegel’s (and Troeltsch’s) intention to understand the ‘Whole’ of reality.\textsuperscript{44} Indeed, Pannenberg considers God as the “all determining reality” in which nothing in reality—and in fact no domain of knowledge—could ever aspire to completeness without taking into account that fact.\textsuperscript{45} In Pannenberg’s view of the

\textsuperscript{41} Pannenberg, Jesus—God and Man, 2nd edition (PA, Westminster Press, 1977) where Pannenberg argues that the preponderance of evidence suggests the historical reality of a bodily resurrection, empty tomb, and the “vision” traditions. Pannenberg disagrees with Troeltsch’s principle of historical analogy that argued that all historical events must have some analog with the present in order for the historian to be able to interpret and make sense from it. See Ernst Troeltsch, “Historical and Dogmatic Method in Theology,” in Religion in History, Translated by James Luther Adams and Walter F. Bense, Introduction by James L. Adams, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997).

Pannenberg agrees that this principle is indeed the starting point for any work of history. And furthermore, he rejects any attempt to exclude any scriptural texts from critical standards of scholarship. Indeed, Pannenberg argues that theology should always seek to follow accepted standards of rationality. The disagreement, however, is that there be any a priori decision to simply exclude any alleged supernatural or unexpected events from the horizon of rational inquiry. Pannenberg sees this as an arbitrary and unfounded criterion. While maintaining rigorous historical-critical methods, the historian should, at the same time focus “on the nonexchangeable individuality and contingency of an event,” and look out for “nonhomogeneous things, which cannot be contained without remainder in any analogy.” See Pannenberg, “Redemptive Event and History,” in Basic Questions in Theology, Collected Essays, Vol. 1, translated by George H. Kelm, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008), 46.

\textsuperscript{42} Pannenberg, Theology and the Kingdom of God, 55-56.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 56.

\textsuperscript{44} Thus Pannenberg is opposed to the type of epistemological and ontological dualism associated with Platonic and Kantian schools of thought. This would include liberal Protestants such as Schleiermacher, Ritschl, or Harnack. Neo-Orthodox like (Kahler), Kierkegaard, Barth, Bultmann as well as Wittgenstein or the so-called Yale or Post-Liberal school, especially George Lindbeck, Stanley Hauerwas, as well as Radical Orthodox theologians such as James K.A. Smith, John Milbank, William Cavanaugh, et al.

Whole, however, it is the resurrection of Christ that stands as a proleptic or anticipatory event that both informs and even shapes the past and present from the eschatological future, and yet, keeps the future open-ended and unfinished. Hegel too, of course, viewed the Incarnation as a mode of revelation of the unity of infinite and finite, but according to Pannenberg, for Hegel “the Christ event was certainly something belonging to the closed past, which might at best still continue to operate in the present in the spirit, in concept, but could by no means be a still-open future.”

Using the Augustinian heuristic discussed in the previous section, it is clear that the notion of God’s ‘res’ is interpreted by Pannenberg as a future reality. And a doctrine such as the resurrection of Jesus is a proleptic ‘sign’ of the eschatological Kingdom. Pannenberg insists that end-time resurrection has already occurred proleptically with Jesus. Regarding the resurrection, Pannenberg explains that “what happened in Jesus will always retain an openness to the future. The ultimate divine confirmation of Jesus will take place only in the occurrence of his return.” For Pannenberg, the only and final place where any theological truth can be ultimately confirmed would be with the eschatological arrival of the Kingdom of God. As he puts it “Dogmatics speak constantly of something that will fully appear only in a future which is inconceivable for us.” In fact ‘doctrines’ in Pannenberg’s theology are very much like

---


47 Pannenberg asserts that Apocalyptic literature of the late Second Temple Period of Judaism should be understood as having a perspective of universal history. Furthermore, the German theologian argues that Jesus should be understood in this light. On this view also see John J. Collins The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature Third edition. (Grand Rapids, MI; Eerdman’s Press, 2016) especially 320-351.


49 Pannenberg, “What is a Dogmatic Statement?” in BQT Vol.1, 205.
“hypotheses” that are “always to be tested against everything that can provide us with evidence.” In keeping with a coherence theory of truth, Pannenberg interprets doctrines as debatable and provisional expressions, to be judged in terms of how well they ‘illumine’ all human knowledge, cohere with other doctrines, and expand understanding. The fullness of truth, however, cannot be known until the eschaton. Pannenberg insists that this perspective that ‘Truth’ itself will only be revealed in total at the eschaton is in complete accordance with the Hebrew and Christian scriptures.

This understanding of truth and doctrine as historical informs Pannenberg’s theory of Revelation as History. While Barth insisted that revelation is the transcendent self-disclosure of God entering into time as the Divine Word, and Bultmann understood revelation as a moment of existential decision, Pannenberg argues that the category of revelation must be understood historically. Pannenberg asserts that Divine self-disclosure occurs ‘indirectly’ as historical events are reflected upon. God does not reveal God-self in any one act, but rather it is all of the events of history that are partial and indirect revelations of some aspect of the infinity of God.

“These acts,” Pannenberg explains,

cast light back on God himself, communicating something indirectly about God himself. That does not of course mean that they reveal God or the God reveals himself in them as their originator, for every individual event which is taken to be God’s activity illuminates the being of God in a partial way...Thus no one act could be a full revelation of God. The isolated conception of a single divine action as the revelation of God most often leads to a distorted view, to an idol.

---

50 Ibid., 206-207.
51 Ibid., 210.
53 Ibid., 16.
Revelation considered as the whole of history implies that the fullness of God’s revelation will only occur at the end, rather than the beginning of history. It also suggests that the category of revelation is something public and open to rational scrutiny. Reflection on the events of history require anticipating the future and reconfiguring aspects of the past and its meaning. Thinking dialectically involves forming new doctrines as ‘hypotheses,’ testing how well they illuminate our knowledge, while we simultaneously look for the ‘theologically relevant dimensions’ of all domains of knowledge. This back and forth intellectual movement includes looking ahead tentatively in light of the proleptic event of the resurrection while interpreting the past in light of new understandings. As we move ahead new hypotheses emerge and new syntheses arise while old ones may be discarded as unhelpful or false. New meanings are “lifted up” as we move towards the future even while past interpretations are brought forward formulating new syntheses, which must be tested or perhaps re-configured or even discarded.\(^5\)

This dialectical movement that considers the entirety of history while formulating and reformulating doctrines as ‘hypotheses,’ fits quite nicely under the categories of our Augustinian paradigm of doctrines as representational ‘signs’ referring, however imperfectly, to some unchanging ‘res’ or essence of what the doctrine is attempting to ‘get at.’ All doctrines are provisional and open to revision. And all such ‘hypotheses’ are imperfect representations attempting to signify the future res wherein final confirmation or falsification may occur.

As one example, consider Pannenberg’s concept of the Spirit of God as ‘field.’ Pannenberg insists that notions of field, such as one finds in electromagnetic field or

gravitational field theories, should be understood historically, as having their roots in the *pneuma* theories of ancient Stoicism.\(^5^5\) By rejecting the anthropomorphic conceptions of God as a type of pure disembodied intellect and will, Pannenberg finds a conception of God as field useful in interpreting God’s action in history or nature. In Pannenberg’s words “Each finite event or being is to be considered as a special manifestation of that field, and their movements are responsive to its forces.”\(^5^6\) This perspective does not, Pannenberg insists, encourage thinking about God as physical in some sense. To the contrary, Pannenberg seems to be suggesting that such thinking actually spiritualizes physics. Pannenberg also takes seriously ecology as a ‘field’ in which all life—human and non-human animal alike—‘self-transcends,’ growing and developing within the broader ecological context.\(^5^7\) This ecological field is the context of creation viewed as a dynamic process of the Spirit of God.\(^5^8\)

\(^{55}\) Pannenberg, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 43-47. Also “The Doctrine of the Spirit and the Task of a Theology of Nature” in *Beginning with the End: God, Science and Wolfhart Pannenberg*. Edited by Carol Rausch Albright and Joel Haugen. (Chicago: Open Court, 1997), 65-79. This is not to accept the “material” assumptions associated with Stoic notions of pneuma. Pannenberg suggests that *pneuma* can be understood in such a way as to be close in meaning to the Hebrew *Ruach*. Field theory as metaphor can avoid any conception of God as “onto-theological” according to Pannenberg.

\(^{56}\) Pannenberg, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 46. Also see *Systematic Theology. Vol. 2*. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Press, 1994), 82. Furthermore, such a “field” theory of Spirit avoids the early modern notions of “force as a function of bodies.” Such ideas lend themselves to overt onto-theological notions of God. Force can be thought of independently of beings and thus events and process may be considered as “field effects.” Pannenberg’s ideas develop in relation to the debate on space and time in Newton, Clarke and Leibniz. In this way, Pannenberg considers God’s omnipresence as co-extensive with space. Leibniz countered that this was similar to Spinoza’s pantheism.


\(^{58}\) It is important to note that, when considering the human animal, Pannenberg argues for a way around scientific determinism by appealing to an interpretation quantum physics. Briefly, he suggests that quantum indeterminacy be considered both epistemically and ontologically. If for example the position and velocity of subatomic reality is not determined by present or past states then “individual future events are not derivable from any given situation. They occur contingently from a field of possibility, which is another word for future” (*Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 49).
After arguing that the ancient notion of *pneuma* became the metaphorical and historical foundation for later nineteenth century thinking about electromagnetic fields, Pannenberg employs a new metaphorical use of these ‘significations.’ Pannenberg utilizes thinking about fields as new hypothesis or ‘signs’ to refer metaphorically to his conception of God as Spirit. And these significations ultimately point towards the future, where Pannenberg perceives an ontological priority. Furthermore, just as all doctrinal construction (viewed as provisional hypotheses) are developed dialectically, the ontological priority of the future is at the same time “releasing event after event” towards the present as a “field of possibility.”

These unique ‘systems of representations’ constitute a dialectical type of the Augustinian heuristic, where signs refer in a revisable and provisional way towards the ‘res’ of the future.

**Jon Sobrino**

Theologian Jon Sobrino’s project emphasizes the often neglected historical and material dimensions of existence. The form of dialectical thought that he employs stresses the centrality of embodied human beings in the context of the crippling poverty of Latin American countries. Many of these countries are essentially ruled by numerically small oligarchies that cooperate with transnational corporations that own most of the arable land. Coupled with the historical situation of tacit collaboration with powerful first world industrialized nations—especially in terms of military aid, economic and political privilege as well as through global organizations such as the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and so on—these few landowners are

---


often able to maintain authoritarian control of the indigenous people in their countries.\(^6\) The conditions of these regions are exploitative, oppressive, and create situations of extreme poverty and death. Resistance is dangerous and difficult given the asymmetrical power relations. It is within this context that Sobrino’s thought is situated.

Methodologically, Sobrino states that theology—and hence any discussion of doctrine—must be a “second act” in which “what comes first is the reality of revelation and faith.”\(^6\)

Sobrino makes clear what the content of this revelation is:

> Theology finds its place in a suffering world insofar as such a world is a mediation of the truth and the absoluteness of God. The determination of the suffering world as the place of theology is an option prior to theology, an option required of all believers and all persons.\(^6\)

Using the Augustinian paradigm as a heuristic, it is clear that for Sobrino, the experience of the suffering within the world serves as ‘mediation,’ as signs pointing towards the ‘res’ of God. God is experienced as present amongst those who are marginalized, oppressed and suffering as well as when they are struggling for their liberation from those oppressors. It is this experience of the liberating and transforming empowerment of love that constitutes the ‘res’ of the Christian faith for Sobrino.

Central to the dialectical approach to Sobrino’s thought is the tension between the Kingdom of God and the anti-Kingdom. And one important element of Sobrino’s conception of the anti-Kingdom is the notion of structural sin. The concept of structural injustice (or sin) may

---


\(^6\) Ibid, 157.
be perceived in any socially constructed system, structure, or institutions that create disparities of wealth/poverty, opportunity/disenfranchisement, or prosperity and power/hunger and suffering. When injustice becomes ‘embedded’ or ‘locked-into’ cultural, military, economic, legal, or financial systems, these structures continue to produce and re-produce the conditions of suffering, even apart from the individuals or groups that may have purposefully (or even inadvertently) set them up in the first place.64 Structural sin manifests within the Latin American context in a particularly unique way. This is best demonstrated with reference to the concept of ‘Dependency.’

Within the context of Latin America, ‘Dependency’ or ‘Neodependency’ paradigms serve as the most prominent theories of international relations in the region.65 Although beginning with the Spanish and Portuguese imperial ventures from the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Latin American development projects of the twentieth century created an even deeper dependency within the international economic system. And it was with the U.S. during the post WWII era when this dependency tightened even further. Within the Latin America continent, many of the countries, especially within the Central American regions, became exporters of

---


65 LaFeber, Inevitable Revolutions, 16-17. Dependency models highlight the influence nations of the so-called first world have had in Central and South America. Neodependency refers to the much more aggressive economic and military use of force in Central America by industrialized nations, especially the United States since the late nineteenth century and in the twentieth. For example, in Nicaragua from 1909 to 1912; in Guatemala 1954; or again in the 1980’s El Salvador.
perhaps one or two crops such as coffee or bananas. Since many of these transnational
corporations and the foreign investors connected with them are headquartered in the U.S., the
local leaders collaborating with these powers are able to express near total control over these
exports and their production. These local leaders also depend on military and economic
protection from the U.S. Therefore, since these leaders (and corporations) are practically the sole
employers of the lands, their control of many aspects of life is near total. Furthermore, the near
complete reliance upon one or two exported crops that depend on the vicissitudes of the
international market prices—coupled with the necessity of importing virtually everything else—
creates the conditions where the nations of these regions are fully dependent on the first world.
The impact of authoritarian leaders supported by powerful nations such as the U.S. adds to the
suffering of many of the peoples, most especially, in the Central American regions.

Structural injustice (or sin), therefore, refers in this Latin American context to the
multiple systems that have been developed over time in the region. International economic,
political, legal, military and financial systems are actually perpetuating injustice and erecting
barriers for the indigenous peoples of the region, condemning them to perpetual poverty. The
responsibility is diffuse, and the injustice is embedded or ‘locked-into’ structures that in a very
real sense, exist independently of any one individual or group, as we saw above. Sin understood
socially in this way “is fundamentally historical and structural, communitarian and objective, at

---

66 Ibid., 76-78 for discussion in relation to Guatemala; 176-177 for El Salvador and 132-134 for Nicaragua. LaFeber
covers the evolving role of Standard Fruit Company and the United Fruit Company in these regions in particular
detail.
once the fruit and the cause of many other personal and collective sins, and its propagation and consolidation is the ongoing negation of the Reign of God.”

Sobrino at times refers to this as an “anti-Reign” of God or an “anti-Kingdom” that consists of these very structures, institutions, and systems of any society that embody such violence. Furthermore there is a dialectical tension between the Kingdom of God (or Reign of God) and the anti-Kingdom. Whenever there are those people who are actively engaged in conflict or struggle against the various forms of oppression or “institutionalized violence” that perpetuates poverty and death, there is a site of tension between the Kingdom and anti-Kingdom. As Sobrino puts it “the anti-Kingdom is not just the absence of the not-yet of the Kingdom, but its formal contradiction. Building the Kingdom means destroying the anti-Kingdom,” and especially within Latin America, “the Kingdom is not being built from a tabula rasa, but in opposition to the anti-Kingdom, and the present persecution of those who are mediating the coming of the Kingdom is effective proof of this.” It was, for example, Jesus’ teaching and living a life that embodied the idea of the Kingdom that inevitably led to crucifixion as an insurrectionist against the Roman Empire. Historical-critical scholarship provides the best evidence, according to Sobrino, for what it was that led to the crucifixion. It was precisely Jesus’ way of entering into a compassionate solidarity with the suffering and marginalized poor that led to the cross. “Jesus was killed,” Sobrino explains, “like so many people before and after him—

---


69 Ibid., 126.
because of his kind of life, because of what he said and what he did. In this sense there is nothing mysterious in Jesus’ death, because it is a frequent occurrence.”

This solidarity with the oppressed is the real meaning of the incarnation of God into the world. If this is the case, then Sobrino argues that we should look to the “crucified people” in the world today, those who continue to suffer from the anti-Kingdom and its unjust structures, for the revelation of human salvation in a suffering world. “Those who bring salvation to the world today,” Sobrino explains, “or at least those who are the principle of salvation, are the crucified peoples.”

Turning to the Augustinian Heuristic, I would suggest that in Sobrino’s theology, phrases such as these serve as ‘signs’ or representations pointing towards the ‘res’ of Christianity. When Sobrino states that the mission of the church should be to “take the crucified people down from the cross,” I would suggest that this resonates quite closely with Augustine’s prioritization of Caritas as the ‘res’ or essence of Christianity. It is the “crucified people” that “make it possible for this world to recognize itself for what it is, sinful, but also to know that it is forgiven.” Sobrino is therefore able to make the further claim that “the crucified people are Christ’s crucified body in history. But the opposite is also true: The present-day crucified people allow us to know the crucified Christ better.”

In phrases such as these we can see a type of Augustinian ‘signification,’ such as with the ‘symbol’ of the present crucified people who signify the

---

70 Ibid., 209.

71 Ibid., 260.


73 Sobrino, Jesus the Liberator, 264.

74 Ibid., 264-265.
crucified Christ, and who in turn, becomes another sign referring to God. Thus, in Sobrino’s expression it is “in a suffering world” that we find the “mediation of the truth and the absoluteness of God.”

Furthermore, I would suggest that it is within the hermeneutical “circle of praxis” that a liberative theological system of signification can be understood more fully. For example, contrary to critics such as George Lindbeck or Stanley Hauerwas who argue that liberation theologians are “experiential-expressivists,” it should be clear that the very experience of God as present within the marginalization, poverty, and extreme suffering of the Latin American world—as well as within the experience of resistance to these—is interpreted in this manner precisely because the experience of these peoples are indeed already shaped by the biblical narratives. In other words, it is their experience of God in the midst of their suffering and God’s solidarity with them that both shapes and is already shaped by their experiences of growing up hearing the biblical stories as well as from living directly the suffering around them. So, it is not that they first experience the suffering and then express this in terms of biblical symbols. Rather, the ‘signs’ and ‘representations’ of the biblical narratives already give a certain meaning to their experience, which at the same time informs their interpretations of those same

---

75 Sobrino, “Theology in a Suffering World,” 157.

76 Ibid., 161. For example in contrast to many Neo-Orthodox theological hermeneutics—where many common biblical themes such as “the exodus, or the prophets or the kingdom of God or the beatitudes” have been read “existentially or personalistically,” or as allegories for the church—liberation hermeneutics read such passages as actual voices of suffering. By reading scripture through the lived experience of poverty and oppression, liberation theology is able to bring to the forefront the historical and material conditions in which the texts were likely first written.

77 See an interesting article defending a view of salvation and liberation as “unified” under a “regulative doctrinal perspective” such as that which is found in Lindbeck’s cultural-linguistic model. David G. Kamitsuka “Salvation, Liberation, and Christian Character Formation: Postliberal and Liberation Theologians in Dialogue,” Modern Theology 13 (1997), 588-606.
representations. At the same time, Sobrino insists on the appropriateness of articulating a doctrine of Christology using a ‘ground-up’ historical approach. For example, a particular Christological doctrine such as naming Christ as ‘Lord,’ has often times historically been interpreted by first delineating implications from the title of ‘Lord,’ such as power, authority and so on in a kind of ‘top-down’ construction. Sobrino, by way of contrast, argues for the necessity of beginning with the life of the historical Jesus which “will explain the content of the titles, not the other way around.”\(^{78}\) For Sobrino it is the hearing of the stories of Jesus’ life that shapes how marginalized peoples interpret the meaning of their experience of injustice. At the same time, however, their experience of suffering also serves to shape the interpretation of those stories. Thus, the hermeneutical circle equips others with ‘ears to hear’ with a more historically grounded interpretation of scriptures. It is only after this, as a ‘second act,’ that theologians may then formulate such ‘representations’ that also serve as ‘signs’ pointing towards the res of what God is all about. In summary, each type of signification—the Crucified People, Christ as Lord, suffering world—function as a “mediation of the truth and the absoluteness of God.”\(^{79}\) The ‘res’ of the Christian faith, is expressed succinctly with Sobrino’s admonishment for the Church to “take the crucified people down from the cross.” To my mind, this expression is Sobrino’s statement of Caritas, the ‘res’ that is key to the Christian faith.

**Conclusion**

The ‘sign-res’ paradigm found in Augustine’s *De Doctrina* can serve as a heuristic device for recognizing a types of ‘representational referencing,’ articulated in doctrinal statements.

---


\(^{79}\) Sobrino, “Theology in a Suffering World,” 157.
Doctrinal constructions tend to represent, however imperfectly, some unchanging essence or ‘res.’ In Augustine’s thought there are innumerable ‘systems of signification’ that may be employed in any type of doctrinal formation. For Augustine, it is Caritas that enables one to have a rightly ordered love in which one’s system of representations signify reality correctly. In short, for Augustine, it is the double commandment of love that is the res of Christianity. Neither the Bible nor doctrine should be confused for the ‘res’ of the Christian faith. When a person understands and lives by Caritas that person has no need for either scripture or doctrine. The Christian praxis, for Augustine, is to live by Caritas, and discover ways to convey the beauty and transformative power of Caritas to others. Pannenberg’s interpretations of doctrine as hypotheses, developed historically and dialectically, may be judged on how well they shed light upon our interdisciplinary and coherent knowledge of the Whole of Reality. The ontological priority of the future coming towards the present means that our contemporary construction of ‘doctrines as hypotheses’ are always partial, provisional, and fallible. Nevertheless, doctrines are constructed ‘signs’ or ‘representations’ pointing toward the future ‘res,’ significations that may be tentatively judged by standards of coherence, fruitfulness in explanation and their ability to enlighten “theologically relevant dimensions of reality—a reality that, as future ‘res,’ will not be finally confirmed or falsified until the eschaton. For Pannenberg, the establishment of correct doctrinal propositions are central to any theological project. And in short, for Pannenberg, doctrines are hypotheses with eschatological verification. The ‘res’ of the faith is future. Jon Sobrino explicates a theological praxis in which experience of a suffering world, and most especially, the crucified people reveal and mediate the truth of God. ‘Significations’ such as these point toward the truth and ‘res’ of God. However, for Sobrino—and this is crucial to
liberation theologies in general—doctrinal representations are, theologically, only ‘a second act.’ Doctrines are not ‘dropped’ in Sobrino’s work. Rather, they are viewed in liberating terms. The poor and suffering marginalized peoples reveal the grace of God by revealing both injustice and forgiveness.

Each of these theologians utilized a dialectical approach to history, although their formulations are quite different, as we have seen. Yet a key point of this chapter, and the result of reading with our Augustinian heuristic, was to demonstrate that even such divergent approaches to doctrine may be understood as imperfect signs referring to some unchanging essence or res. And yet, using this Augustinian model, not all ‘res’ should be understood as equally valid. At least for Augustine, the ‘res’ of the Christian faith is Caritas. To my mind, we may conclude that the insights we have seen after reading Sobrino are closer to Augustine’s vision than the approach taken by Pannenberg. Perhaps viewing the category of ‘doctrine’ as primarily an epistemological concern is a kind of an historical ‘wrong turn.’ Perhaps doctrine should not be interpreted as attempts to articulate logical propositions representing some quasi-metaphysical ‘res.’ I suspect that Augustine did not want his De Doctrina to be interpreted solely as a ‘theory of semiotics.’ One of the goals of the next chapter will be to ‘update’ the metaphors of doctrinal development with the hope that we may begin to move discussions of ‘doctrine’ away from this over-emphasis on epistemology and ossified notions of doctrine.
CHAPTER THREE

CONTEMPORARY INFORMATION THEORY AS A MODEL FOR DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT

One main and over-arching goal of this project is to hopefully move discussions of “doctrine” or “doctrinal development” away from an over-emphasis on epistemological and quasi-metaphysical notions of those categories. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to begin the process of constructing a reconfigured category of doctrinal development. At the conclusion of this chapter, we will be able to suggest some of the components of such a reconfigured category. First, however, I will begin by suggesting three concerns that, to my mind, must be considered with any early twenty-first century discussion of development of doctrine. The three concerns are: (1) reifying “res-thinking” and “strong thought” in doctrinal reflection; (2) living “after Darwin”; and (3) the need for an ethical dimension in any future discussion of doctrinal development.

Although the theological category of “doctrine” is only one dimension of religion, the last chapter provided a type of “heuristic-model” in order to suggest that doctrinal formulations, historically, tend to make a rather general and basic assumption. This assumption, it was suggested, is that doctrinal statements are about some “thing,” some inner res, where some mysterious intrinsic essence or unchanging truth “resides.” There is, I suggested, a general tendency towards a type of “reification” of doctrines. In other words, doctrinal expressions are
attempts to symbolize something absolute, however imperfectly. But is this assumption correct? Is there any reason to think this is what doctrines are, or should be about? Furthermore, is the background assumption that there even is a res, an unnecessary problem and source of concern? Does ‘res thinking’ lead to violence and unnecessary exclusion and division? Whether interpreted as a type of a hermeneutical rule theory, symbolic disclosure, or correspondence model, is doctrinal formulation based on ‘res thinking’ inherently problematic in these ways? What might a “non-res” type of doctrinal development look like?

If theologians typically take care to avoid attributing “Thingness” to God, then should we not take care to avoid attributing “thingness” to any doctrines whatsoever? If God is not a “Thing”, then perhaps we should not attribute to doctrines what we do not attribute to God. Quite probably most theologians would agree with some axiom such as: “one should not confuse the finger with what it is pointing towards,” or “do not confuse the map with the terrain,” or some similar refrain. Yet, to my mind, it seems that just as many theologians tend to assume that there is some res ‘out there’—something that a doctrine is either “closer or farther away” from representing. Is not the logical entailment of attempting to avoid the problems associated with onto-theology, to avoid the notion that there is some “being” behind our doctrines as well? If we take seriously the potentiality of a “living God,” then perhaps we need to also consider a notion of ‘living doctrine.’


2 Elizabeth A. Johnson, Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God (NY: Continuum International, 2007). The concept of a “living God” is to be found in many areas of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. The attempt to avoid “reifying” doctrine are, of course, already common in theology and philosophy. Some hints, at least, are present in H. Richard Niebuhr’s The Meaning of Revelation 2nd edition (Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), and Radical Monotheism and Western Culture: With Supplementary Essays (Westminster John
Whenever doctrine is presented as a representation of some “res,” there is often an accompanying assumption that this representation is closer to “the way that things really are.” Or that there is some “thing-in-itself,” some absolute Truth (with a capital T), that really is “out there,” perhaps inexhaustibly transcendent to mere human understanding—but nevertheless some representation is closer to it than other significations.

I am concerned that such assumptions are unnecessarily divisive, exclusive, and ultimately violent. Gianni Vattimo refers to this type of assumption as “strong thought.” This way of thinking tends towards intolerance by drawing lines of inclusion/exclusion, the elect/damned, friend/foe, us/them or foreigner. Attempts to produce definitions, names, or labels, considered in some sense as ‘universally applicable,’ have the tendency to force a very fluid world of becoming and difference into fixed and determined categories. Now, it is not that we cannot “make a case”—after all, that is what I am attempting to do right now. But it does mean that we can think otherwise than “strong thought.” Following Vattimo, I agree that we should be vigilant in constructing ideas with an awareness of the “weakening of being.” This notion that Vattimo has promoted, involves a Verwinding, a “twisting” or “holding ironically” or “softening” of our language. Thus, I am suggesting we adopt this approach in terms of doctrine. We must be aware of the danger of “hardening” our non-metaphysics into a new type of

Knox Press, 1993) with his reference respectively to a “permanent revolution” in a “radically monotheistic” theology. Paul Tillich’s “Protestant Principle” is a similar attempt see Tillich, Dynamics of Faith (NY: Harper Collin, 1957), 33. Also see Kathryn Tanner, Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology (MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1997); Jacques Derrida, “Force of Law: The ‘Mystical Foundation of Authority’” in Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld, and David Gray Carlson (editors), Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice (London: Routledge Press, 1992), 3-67; Derrida, Specters of Marx (London: Routledge Press, 1994). Also see the writings of John Caputo. All of these thinkers are concerned to avoid what I have been referring to as “reifying” doctrine. All of them are concerned to keep things “open,” whether to something like “the Spirit that blows where it will” or to “hope” or perhaps a “justice to come.”
universal or absolute truth. Therefore, any new language of doctrinal development or doctrinal construction needs to be held “ironically,” or in a weakened sense such that other “languages” and metaphors may be used or even preferrable in various contexts. With this in mind, I do think we would be better off using “languages” that are looking for metaphors that may mitigate “reification” of doctrines. This involves a constant self-critique, and really a change within us.

3 This is a perpetual danger. Claiming to have moved totally “beyond metaphysics,” can surreptitiously become a new metaphysics. It is better, to my mind, to acknowledge this danger, as I believe Vattimo is doing with the notion of a Verwinding rather than an Überwinding. For a clear presentation of Vattimo’s use of these two terms: see Gianni Vattimo’s chapter, “Nihilism and the Post-Modern in Philosophy,” in The End of Modernity (MD: John Hopkins Press, 1988), 164-181. He relates this to Kenosis in his works on Christian theology See Vattimo, Belief. Translated by Luca D’Isanto and David Webb, (CA: Stanford University Press, 1999); After Christianity, translated Luca D’Isanto (NY: Columbia Press, 2002); in conversation with John D. Caputo, After the Death of God. Edited and Introduction by Jeffrey W. Robbins, (NY: Columbia University Press, 2007); Fascinating discussion with Rene Girard’s work on the “Sacred” and Scapegoat mechanism and the mimetic rivalry see Gianni Vattimo and Rene Girard, Christianity, Truth, and Weakening Faith: A Dialogue. Translated William McCuaig. Editor Pierpaolo Antonello, (NY: Columbia University Press, 2006). Very interesting to compare the notion of God’s kenosis with Thomas J.J. Altizer, The Gospel of Christian Atheism (PA: Westminster Press, 1966). Many may ask why try to reconfigure the category of doctrinal development with this language of information, logic or science? If one is concerned about “reifying” doctrine and violence associated with “strong thought” why not appeal to post-structuralism, or some other so-called “radical hermeneutics” or the “ethics of deconstruction?” By proposing a “weakened thought” I do not deny that other ways of speaking about this are legitimate and sometimes preferable. For example, Kathryn Tanner’s work is quite similar to some of what I am proposing, although she uses a “language” of cultural anthropology. However, doctrinal development by its nature seems to naturally appeal to “biological growth” metaphors. Furthermore, utilizing the type of “public rationality” associated with language of sciences, logic, and mathematics, presents new possibilities for comparative theology, doctrinal development. And this approach also enables use of the concepts of complexity, emergence, downward causation, (top/down and bottom/up interaction), and “rule evolution” as well as the ability to make the distinction between changes that happen “over time, naturally,” versus “changes that we may make, intentionally.” I will also claim that an ‘ethical dimension’ is inextricably integrated into the process of development. Unexpected and unforeseen ethical issues literally “emerge” over time from what may seem quite innocuous initial conditions. Of course, critical theories or some type of a hermeneutics of suspicion are required to bring to light certain dynamics at play that may otherwise not be noticed. It is hoped that this reconfiguring of doctrinal development with an integrated ethical dimension is a useful supplement to other modes of inquiry. Also, is it not interesting how we see “information” throughout nature? The category of information may be applied to both nature and ideas. We encounter fractal shapes or self-similar patterns across various scales throughout nature; and we may view recursive self-similar patterns evolving in cellular automata which can give one a sense of “the infinite within the finite.” We see similar amazing features within “informed” nature when considering insights from theories of chaos and complexity, emergence and the strange way mathematics can “describe” nature. If I may borrow a phrase from David Tracy, I would suggest that the logic of information has a “mystical” as well as a “prophetic” potential. The “prophetic aspect” referring to the kind of integrated ethical dimension we will examine in the next chapter. See David Tracy, “The Christian Option for the Poor,” in Option for the Poor in Christian Theology. Edited by Daniel G. Groody (IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 120 where I borrow from his phrase, “The Mystical-Prophetic Paradigm.”
The second concern for our discussion of doctrinal development involves the “organic metaphors” traditionally employed for this category.⁴ It is not surprising that discussion of any type of development naturally tend towards utilizing metaphors and analogies drawn from the fields of biological, botanical, or organic growth. What is somewhat surprising is that more than a century after Darwin, language of doctrinal development still utilizes organic metaphors that are quite teleological and essentialist. This reluctance to recognize all the potential implications of living “after Darwin” is, of course, probably not really all that surprising given many theologians’ concerns with the roles of providence and orthodoxy in ecclesiology. Nevertheless, we are not in the nineteenth century, we are in the twenty-first century, which is a very different world. As discussed in the Introduction to this work, Christianity is but one of many religions in the world. Politically, scientifically, theologically there are legitimate reasons for such a reconfigured category. And this is in large part why I would like to see a re-opening of this discussion. Doctrinal development, “after Darwin,” allows the use of many (I would argue)

⁴ C.F. D. Moule describes two terms for describing development theologically. The two models form a spectrum rather than discrete categories for Moule. First, there are ‘evolutionary’ thinkers. These would include the ‘history of religions’ scholars and any others who think about doctrinal change as involving interactions and influences from the broader environment (for Moule, this refers to the notion of Christological ideas starting in Palestine and then moving into the broader environment of Rome to interact with ‘non-Semitic Savior cults’). “Developmentalists,” on the other hand, are those who deny any significant influence from the environment, focusing instead on the inner “teleos,” essence or ‘res’ that allows development to occur from its own resources. This represents Moule. I think this is the position of a biblical scholar such as Richard Bauckham. When Bauckham describes the earliest Christology, say in Paul or even the synoptic gospels, as already representing a High Christology, he is what Moule calls a ‘developmentalist.’ Bauckham attempted to do this by claiming these earliest writings ‘included’ Jesus into the identity of God. For example, assertions from the Hebrew Scriptures that were to only apply to God (such as Proverbs 8:22 or Isaiah 42:8 or Isaiah 45:23) were referenced and utilized in descriptions of Jesus, for example in Philippians 2 or Acts 2. In this way, according to Bauckham, Jesus was “included” in phrases to were only to be applied to God. This is why Bauckham can claim that the definitions at Chalcedon are just a “translation” of an already high Christology, and not an “evolution.” Nothing new has been added, just described differently. My position is very much in an “evolution” perspective. However, my argument will attempt to refer to “Darwinian evolution,” not Moule’s ‘evolution.’ C.F.D. Moule, The Origin of Christology (UK: Cambridge, 1977), 1-10. Richard Bauckham, God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament (MI: Eerdman’s Press, 1998).
useful metaphors that will “open up” new possibilities. What can doctrinal development look like in terms of phylogenetic trees and the clades and lineages leading from these? What might allopatric or sympatric speciation events, recombination and the like do for the theological imagination? Could doctrines be thought “otherwise” using categories of “symbiosis”? What about the concept of “flows” or “patterns” of information, which is the basis for biology? The possibilities for comparative theology and any type of philosophical/theological construction are exciting.

The third concern I would like to express, is the need for an ethical dimension in any new discussion of doctrinal development. It is important to recognize that prior discussions of doctrinal development have not, insofar as I can tell, truly considered several major cultural shifts. A few examples should suffice to demonstrate my point. There has been no “post-Newman” consideration of the voluminous work (and very broadly speaking) that “takes into account” the so-called “hermeneutics of suspicion.” There has been no discussion of ‘critical theories’ or even any recognition of the variegated spectrum of liberation theologies. Similarly, I do not find any discussion of the multiple perspectives raised by people after the cultural shifts following the New Left’s shift from (earlier) class-based analyses towards more ethnic, cultural, 

---

and gender-based concerns (I am generalizing much here to simply raise the point that previous discussions of doctrinal development have not, to my knowledge, raised or considered any of these “ethical” aspects).

Therefore, I would like to suggest that these three concerns: (1) reifying “res-thinking” and “strong thought” in doctrinal reflection; (2) living “after Darwin”; and (3) the need for an ethical dimension are issues that any new discussion of doctrinal development should seriously consider.

**Proposal for a Reconfigured Model of Doctrinal Development**

Keeping these three concerns in mind, I would suggest that the key metaphor we utilize for a reconfigured understanding of doctrinal development be: *information flow*. In short, it is cascades, streams, flows, clusters, translations, transcriptions, and patterns of information that form the basis of much contemporary understandings of biology. Adopting tropes associated with ‘information flow’ is preferrable, to my mind, over the ‘res-like’ metaphors of ‘essentialist’ or ‘teleological’ thinking such as “seed growing into a plant,” or “acorn developing into an oak.”

Modern genetics and evolutionary biology are certainly not using language of ‘res’ or intrinsic ‘essences.’ Metaphors of Information flow express the insight of these contemporary sciences that everything is subject to evolution and there are no unchanging essences. Flows of information form an important aspect of areas such as systems biology, genetics, and cellular automata in computation, allowing features such as complexity, emergent properties, downward

---

6 Of course acorns do grow into oak trees and not frogs. But our understanding of this process involves a different understanding than the ‘essentialist’ pre-Darwinian explanations; thus an ‘updated’ model of doctrinal development should take these updates into account and utilize their potential as metaphors. For some discussion on “teleonomic” rather than “teleological” understandings of evolution, see Douglas Futuyma, *Evolutionary Biology*, 3rd ed. (MA: Sinauer Associates, 1998), 342.
causation (and generally top/down, bottom/up interaction and evolution). It is from these notions (that will feature prominently in the next chapter) that I will argue that an “ethical dimension” can indeed emerge from quite unforeseeable initial conditions or starting points. In short, thinking of doctrinal development as flows of information, integrates an “emergent ethical dimension” directly into the process of development of doctrine. A key point of this Chapter Three will be that the metaphors of information flow, complexity, and emergence enable, not only the emergence of ‘rules’ that govern biological processes (or informational processing), but also the very possibility of ‘state dependent rule evolution.’ In biology (and any type of computation): rules evolve. They do not necessarily evolve constantly, or even quickly. But they can evolve. And scientists can use technology and bring about alterations intentionally. Scientists can, for example, use technology to edit or alter the way in which information flows as in new CRISPR technology. They do this by editing gene sequences and thus altering gene expression. The last section of this chapter will examine this notion of ‘rules that evolve’ in relation to doctrinal thinking in George Lindbeck and in conversation with Kathryn Tanner. Analogically to biological evolution, I would suggest that not only can doctrinal (as well as biological) ‘rules’ evolve, but that sometimes they should evolve. We may use intentional ‘techne’ to alter or ‘edit’ doctrinal rules if ethical ‘complications’ arise, or unexpected ‘features or properties’ emerge that

---

are producing ‘downward causal’ effects that may well have been unanticipated when the doctrinal rules were first formulated but are now seen as producing deleterious effects.

In concluding this section of the chapter, I would like to reflect a bit on the following thoughts from Stephen Hawking. Noting that although there is approximately a “hundred million bits of useful information” in “our genes,” while there is likely a “hundred trillion bits” of information published in the “50,000 new books published” just “in the English language each year,” Hawking recognizes that Homo Sapiens are, therefore, entering a “new phase of evolution,” one where we are producing voluminous amounts of information and beginning the process of ‘self-designing evolution.’ By distinguishing an ‘internal’ evolution that involves the transmission of information encoded in DNA from the ‘external’ phase of evolution that involves the vast amounts of information discovered and transmitted by human beings, Hawking recommends extending the concept of evolution. As Professor Hawking explains:

> Some people would use the term “evolution” only for the internally transmitted genetic material and would object to it being applied to information handed down externally. But I think that is too narrow a view. We are more than just our genes. We may be no stronger or inherently more intelligent than our caveman ancestor. But what distinguishes us from them is the knowledge that we have accumulated…I think it is legitimate to take a broader view and include externally transmitted information, as well as DNA, in the evolution of the human race.”

To my mind, this idea of extending our understanding of evolution beyond the internal, and towards the external modes of information exchange, sets a type of precedent for extending notions of “evolution” into a reconfigured model of doctrinal development.

---

8 Stephen Hawking, *Brief Answers to the Big Questions* (NY: Random House, 2018), 77

9 Stephen Hawking, *Brief Answers to the Big Questions* 78.

10 Stephen Hawking, *Brief Answers to the Big Questions* 78.
Brief Overview of the Structure of the Chapter

The remainder of this chapter consists of two main sections: the ‘science’ section followed by a section discussing George Lindbeck’s ‘rule theory’ of doctrine and Kathryn Tanner’s cultural anthropological ‘task’ for theology. The first, ‘science’ section, consists of three parts. The first part is a brief examination of the idea of information flow in biology. Information patterns are at work in gene expression as seen in both transcription and translation. Note that although protein synthesis follows a ‘genetic code book’ (assignments of the ‘triplet code’ of DNA (eventually) to particular amino acids), this ‘book of rules,’ can and does change in evolutionary history. The informational streams, flows and patterns may be observed both ‘reductively’ as well as from a ‘systems’ approach. Viewed from the later perspective, biological information flow is analogous in protein production to electronic circuitry following defined ‘logic gates.’ The notion that biological information could be understood as a type of ‘software’ to chemical ‘hardware’ suggests a deeper look at the logical and mathematical roots of computation. The second part of the ‘science’ section looks particularly at these logical foundations: especially the concept of self-referential paradoxes seen in Russell, Godel and Turing’s ‘Decidability problem.’ It is because a system is ‘undecidable’ that open-endedness and novelty may occur allowing new emergent properties to appear. In the final part of this ‘science’ section, we will examine how this self-referentiality, and its ‘undecidable’ element, allows emergent higher-order rules to emerge in cellular automata. We will observe how these higher-order rules are ‘state dependent information-processing rules,’ rules that both put certain limits on evolution, and yet themselves do evolve over time. This will be followed by the final section
of the chapter with a discussion of Lindbeck and Tanner. From this I will provide a synthesis of the most salient points for a reconfigured model of doctrinal development.

**Patterns of Information Flow as the Basis for the Biological Sciences**

Physicist Paul Davies suggests that the notion of an “informed chemistry,” or perhaps the expression “chemistry plus information,” quite neatly sums up that which “separates life from non-life.” Indeed, metaphors of “information” are prevalent in molecular biology: “transcription,” “translation,” “code,” “redundancy,” “synonymous,” “messenger,” “editing,” “proofreading,” “library.” We may read of “signaling” between cells, or even “communication” of information on the social level such as that which may be observed when a flock of birds suddenly and in unison alters course mid-flight.

And examples of the flow of information at the cellular or molecular level abound. A few brief examples here should suffice to express my point at this stage in the argument.

Information flows occur throughout the processes of *transcription* (roughly speaking the genetic informational flow between DNA to RNA), and *translation* (RNA to protein synthesis), which are essentially the ways in which genes direct the activities of the cells.

Allow me to provide a brief description of the information flow or transfer involved in

---


13 It is, of course, important to note that ‘copying errors,’ are information too. Errors may occur in RNA and protein synthesis, or they may occur in DNA copying. The information flow can then be analyzed in phylogentic trees that show the way in which species branch from one another—here we can see clades, lineages, and so on—as well as identifying common ancestors. These may be reconstructed by analyzing the copied errors of information.
Proteins do much of the work inside cells. These three-dimensional structures, varying to serve different functions, are made up of chains of amino acids. All life consists of proteins and all proteins are constructed from twenty different amino acid combinations. And a particular gene on a strand of DNA resides in the nucleus of a cell. The ultimate expression of this gene, however, occurs outside the nucleus in the cytoplasm of the cell, where a ribosome molecule resides, ready to act like a little protein synthesis factory. The gene is first transcribed into mRNA that copies the gene’s nucleotide bases (the well-known A, C, T, G, although the Thymine becomes a “U,” Uracil in RNA), and transfers the information to the ribosome. Now, this occurs because a particular “signal,” called a promoter, is sent from a sequence on the DNA “requesting” to be copied (in order to synthesize some useful protein that is needed). The RNA polymerase is the molecule that is attracted to the promoter, which arrives at the site to “read off” from the relevant strand of the DNA molecule. (The RNA polymerase enzyme attaches to the promoter with the assistance of other proteins known as “transcription factors”). The RNA polymerase copies, or transcribes, the gene. Then, at the ribosome, the mRNA (with the transcribed information), waits for the appropriate amino acids to be brought for the synthesizing of the protein chain. These amino acids are brought to the ribosome “factory” by tRNA. These “transfer” or tRNA molecules bind to the base pairings of the mRNA and read off code as triple base pairs (codons). In a sense, there are two “languages” at work here. There is the four letter “alphabet” of DNA base pairs (written in triplet coding), and the twenty-letter alphabet of the “language” of amino acids. Certain tRNA molecules, for example, aminoacyl tRNA synthetase

---

molecules are “bilingual” in that they “read off” the triple-code of the language of DNA (now transcribed in the mRNA) and “translate” by reading the “twenty-letter” code of amino acids.\textsuperscript{15} These amazing little molecules are then able to bring the appropriate amino acid to the correct tRNA for synthesizing protein chains in the ribosome.\textsuperscript{16}

Considering the above mentioned examples of informational flow in a manner of reductivism, we can miss insights to be gained from viewing the same processes from an emergent, or “systems” biological perspective. For example, chemical circuitry can be viewed analogously with electronic circuitry. Mapping structures in this more ‘holistic’ way is a first step towards thinking about ‘information flow’ in biological systems as a kind of “software” running on the “hardware” of chemistry.\textsuperscript{17} So considered as “circuitry,” genes may be “‘wired’ together via chemical pathways to create features like feedback and feed-forward,” activities which are common to computing.\textsuperscript{18}

For example, as we saw in the example above, cells regulate protein production through a complex process of informational input from their environment as well as information gathered regarding their internal needs. In this process, certain protein molecules known as transcription

\textsuperscript{15} Davies, \textit{Demon in the Machine}, 19 for discussion of aminoacyl tRNA synthetase.

\textsuperscript{16} Note that this process of “assignment” between a given DNA “triple code” and a particular amino acid can be referred to as a genetic “universal code book.” For example, from Davies, \textit{Demon in the Machine}, 20, “there are countless ways that the sequences of A, C, G, and T bases can code for twenty amino acids, but all known life uses the same assignments, suggesting it is a very ancient and deeply embedded feature of life on Earth.” This “rule book” of information comprises the informational architecture of life, but “it would be wrong to think of it as a law of nature, like the fixed law of gravity. Almost certainly the CGT-> arginine assignment emerged a long time ago, probably from some earlier and simpler rule.” From Davies, \textit{Demon in Machine}, 211. Key here is the point that information flows, streams, and patterns are ubiquitous to life, following as they do, certain rules. Yet these rules do themselves evolve over time. There are no “res” or unchanging essences in the contemporary biological sciences.


\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 135-138. See Davies, \textit{Demon in the Machine}, 87.
factors, (such as seen with the RNA polymerase enzyme example), can “recognize” a given sequence of DNA and attach to this appropriate segment (known as a promoter because it first ‘sends out’ a ‘promoting signal to start’ because of a need for some protein). When the transcription factor attaches to that particular segment, it is then able to begin the process of increasing or decreasing (depending on the need of the cell) the “rate at which a nearby gene is expressed.” Because this activity is central to understanding the informational processing aspect of biological systems, it is worth providing this following explanation from Paul Davies:

Transcription factors may combine their activities to create various logic functions similar to those used in electronics and computing. Consider, for example, the AND function, where a switch Z is turned on only if a signal is received from switches X and Y together. To implement this, a chemical signal flips the transcription factor X into its active shape $X^*$; $X$ is switched on, chemically speaking. Thus activated, $X^*$ may then bind to the promoter of gene Y, causing Y to be produced. If, now, there is a second (different) signal that switches Y to its active form, $Y^*$, the cell has both $X^*$ and $Y^*$ available together. This arrangement can serve as an AND logic gate if there is a third gene Z, designed (by evolution) to be switched on only if $X^*$ and $Y^*$ are present together and bind to its promoter.

This fascinating view of logical operations within the internal mechanisms of cells can also be observed operating according to other logic gate configurations as well. Logic,

---


20 Davies, *Demon in the Machine*, 89.

21 For example, scientists were able to use two “nucleic acid enzymes” to create complex integrated logic gates with biomolecular components. I do not pretend to fully understand the “synthetic” biology here. But the point is what these researchers were able to construct. The researchers were able to use two “deoxyribozyme based logic gates that process oligonucleotide inputs” for their biological ‘computer.’ The Boolean logic gates they constructed were for NOT, AND, and XOR operations. The researchers were then able to create a “deoxyribozyme-based network of 23 logic gates to encode the game of tic-tac-toe, capable of interactively competing with a human opponent.” From Takafumi Miyamoto, Shiva Razavi, Robert DeRose, and Takanari Inoue, “Synthesizing Biomolecule-Based Boolean Logic Gates,” in *American Chemical Society Journal of Synthetic Biology*, 2013, Vol 2, 72-82. See also, Tae Seok Moon, Chunbo Lou, Alvin Tamsir, Brynne C. Stanton, Christopher A. Voigt, “Genetic Programs Constructed from Layered Logic Gates in Single Cells,” in *Nature*, vol. 491, (8 Nov 2012), 249-253; Tom Siegfried, *The Bit and the Pendulum: From Quantum Computing to M Theory—The New Physics of Information* (NY: John Wiley & Sons, 2000), see chapter 5.
mathematics, and therefore computation, is a real integral part of the fabric of life. And furthermore, if informational flows can be interpreted as “software” processing within biological and chemical “hardware,” then it is these computational roots, found in mathematics and logic, that we must examine next.

**Logical and Computational ‘Foundations’ for the Biological Sciences**

A key feature in what follows revolves around the recurring themes of “undecidability” and the paradox of self-reference. The parallels between self-replication in biology and self-referential paradoxes in mathematical logic are not coincidental. Both are what permit cosmic as well as biological evolution. And because of this paradox of self-referentiality, open-endedness, undecidability, and novelty emerge. As Paul Davies puts it “given that undecidability is enshrined in the very foundations of mathematics, it will also be a fundamental property of a universe based on mathematical laws. Undecidability guarantees that the mathematical universe will always be unbounded in its creative potential.”

Davies continues by explaining that it is also due to this feature of “undecidability,” that the “logic of life permits biology to explore a boundless universe of novelty, to create ‘forms most wonderful,’ to use Darwin’s memorable phrase.”

Although finding a particular point as the “origin” of the paradoxes of logic is altogether

---


23 Paul Davies, *The Demon in the Machine: How Hidden Webs of Information are Solving The Mystery of Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 71-72. For the remainder of this section, Davies’ chapter ‘the logic of life’ (67-108) is central to the flow of my argument. I am drawing heavily upon his excellent exposition.

arbitrary, we need to start some place. And it is with David Hilbert’s “Formalist program” that we will begin. Hilbert argued that mathematics was a formal system, like a language, that consisted of a set of symbols, axioms, and agreed upon rules of inferences that allow the construction of well-formed formulas and theorems. Mathematics, according to Hilbert, is ‘syntactic,’ and not descriptive (such as a Platonist might argue); it is rather like a deductive system where a mathematical expression is considered true relative to the “rules” of some formal system. Mathematics in this sense does not ‘refer’ to anything, it is simply about the internal consistency of the axiomatic system. Therefore, the central concern for this type of Formalism is consistency. So it was that Hilbert posed his questions regarding the prospects for a consistent, deductive, and formalist systems of mathematics. First, Hilbert asked, is mathematics consistent? In other words, will mathematics form a coherent system of non-contradictory expressions? Second, is mathematics complete in itself? Here Hilbert is asking, can mathematicians prove all true propositions? Third is mathematics decidable?

Interestingly, one could perhaps identify the first form of self-referential paradox in the Christian New Testament letter to Titus (NRSV, 1:12-13) where the author of the letter says: “It was one of them, their very own prophet, who said, ‘Cretans are always liars’….that testimony is true.” The paradox is that if a Cretan says ‘that all Cretans are liars,’ and this is a true statement, than is it false (since Cretans are liars)? Another way of phrasing this “liar paradox” can be: “This very statement is false.” If it is true, then it is false, but if it is false, then it must be true.


mathematical expression in a step-by-step fashion.\textsuperscript{29} If mathematics is fully consistent in this manner, Hilbert reasoned, then it must be the case that all mathematical statements could be determined by a set of algorithms. Mathematics would be consistent \textit{and} decidable.

The third of Hilbert’s questions—whether mathematics is ‘decidable’—became the focus of Alan Turing’s “On Computable Numbers with an Application to the \textit{Entscheidungsproblem}.”\textsuperscript{30} Although Turing was discussing the possibility of any form of ‘computation,’ whether performed by one person, many people, or some machine following an algorithm, the conclusion remains the same. In fact, the very idea of any “machine,” human, or other form of computation that can read, write, erase, and move across a set of instructions (Turing originally envisioned a long ‘tape’ with symbols on it with a moveable “reading and writing head”) may be a Turing machine.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{29} Questions about reducing mathematics to logic, as well as problems with the project, were already prevalent by the time of Hilbert’s project and questions. For example, Gottlieb Frege’s work sought to define arithmetic in terms of a formal system of logic and set theory. See G. Frege, \textit{Basic Laws of Arithmetic}, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). The axiomatic system articulated by Frege allows for an adequate number theory but also allows inconsistencies such as discovered by Russell. The most clear and concise explication of Russell’s paradox I have encountered comes from Rebecca Goldstein: “Sets are abstract objects that contain members, and some sets can be members of themselves. For example, the set of all abstract objects is a member of itself, since it is an abstract object. Some sets (most) are not members of themselves. For example, the set of all abstract objects is a member of itself, since it is an abstract object. Some sets are members of themselves. For example, the set of all mathematicians is not itself a mathematician—it’s an abstract object—and so is not a member of itself. Now we form the concept of the set of all sets that aren’t members of themselves and we ask of this set: is it a member of itself? …If the set of all sets that aren’t members of themselves is a member of itself, then it’s \textit{not} a member of itself, since it contains \textit{only} sets that aren’t members of themselves. And, if it’s not a member of itself, then \textit{it is} a member of itself, since it contains \textit{all} the sets that aren’t members of themselves. So it’s a member of itself if and only if it’s not a member of itself.” In Rebecca Goldstein, \textit{Incompleteness: The Proof and Paradox of Kurt Godel} (NY: W.W. Norton, 2005), 91. For Russell’s paradox published in 1903 see Russell \textit{The Principles of Mathematics} (NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996). Also see Oystein Linnebo, \textit{Philosophy of Mathematics} (Princeton Press, 2017), 129-31,137. R.M. Sainsbury, \textit{Paradoxes} (UK: Cambridge Press, 1995), 107-134.


\textsuperscript{31}William S. Robinson, \textit{Computers, Minds, & Brains} (PA: Temple University Press, 1992), 82-90 for a good description of a Turing machine, universal computation or any machine that is “Turing complete.”
Turing’s question was whether it was possible to write a program that could specify whether any other program would stop (output an answer in a finite number of steps) or if it would loop forever. This is essentially Hilbert’s question about the decidability of mathematics. Turing’s answer was no, such a program cannot be coded, and therefore mathematics is ‘undecidable.’ The way in which he answered this was ingenious. One can think of this question of decidability by asking whether a program or set of algorithms could be written that could answer whether some particular problem could be solved. For example, if one were to write an algorithm that could check whether Goldbach’s conjecture is true, how long might it take to solve? If the algorithm “chugged” along checking every consecutive even number greater than two to see if it could be written exactly as a sum of two primes, the process of computation may go on forever (or not, it is a conjecture after all). The point is that if one were able to write a Turing style ‘decidability program’ that could check whether any mathematical problem is decidable, that is, whether it will come to a stop or if it will loop forever, mathematics would be a complete and consistent system just as Hilbert suggested.

Turing’s answer is a reductio ad absurdum argument that begins with the assumption that such a program could be written. Let us label this program “T.” “T” is able to take as input

---

32 Or an algorithm might be written to solve for “prime pairs” which are “a pair of prime numbers whose difference is 2, such as 3 and 5, or 11 and 13. Mathematicians have tried in vain to answer the question whether there are infinitely many such pairs, or only a finite number of them. It is not even known whether this question is computable.” Quote from David Deutsch, The Fabric of Reality: The Science of Parallel Universes—and its Implications (NY: Penguin Books, 1997), 133.

33 It is interesting to note that this problem was dealt with independently at around the same time as Turing’s work. Turing’s doctoral advisor Alonzo Church published a proof on the Entscheidungsproblem around the same time as Turing. Sometimes a version of this argument is referred to as the Church-Turing Thesis. Alonzo Church, “An Unsolvable Problem of Elementary Number Theory,” American Journal of Mathematics, 1936, 58 (2): 345-363. Also, Alonzo Church, “A Note on the Entscheidungsproblem,” Journal of Symbolic Logic, 1936, 1 (1): 40-41.
any other algorithm (let us refer to it as a program for ease of discussion) and output “yes” or “no” as to whether the program will stop or loop.\footnote{This thought experiment version of Turing’s Decision Question is based on memory and my notes from a lecture by Professor Michael Denty at Aquinas College in Grand Rapids Mi. The class was entitled Minds, Brains, and Machines. Turing’s paper is difficult to follow with the number system he employed. The best source for going through the original is the point-by-point annotated guide by Charles Petzold, \textit{The Annotated Turing: A Guided Tour Through Alan Turing’s Historic Paper on Computability and the Turing Machine}, (NJ: Wiley, 2008).} Turing then suggested that we take “T” and ‘extend’ the program to include a type of subroutine (let us call this program “O”) that would take the output from “T” as an input (an input into “O”) which would then output the opposite. For example, if “T” outputs stop, “O” will loop, and if “T” outputs loop, “O” will stop. So if we programmed input and program (say, for example, program “A”) into “T” and “T” returns halt as an output, “O” will loop, but if “T” returns loop as an output, “O” will stop. Turing’s genius involved asking what would happen if we fed the program “O” as input into “T.” What would happen? Well, if “T” reads “O” as input and returns output “O” stops, then “O” loops, and if “T” returns “O” loops, then “O” will stop. So, “O” will stop just in case “O” loops and “O” will loop just in case “O” stops. It cannot be that program “O” will both stop and run forever at the same time and same respect. Thus, there can be no algorithm (or program) that can say if any other algorithm (or program) will stop.


\footnote{Kurt Godel wrote his Incompleteness Theorem in 1931. This is yet another type of self-referential paradox that demonstrates open-endedness in mathematics or logic. In short, there can be no formal axiomatic system adequate
from the self-referential nature of the algorithmic expression found in a way that is quite similar to the self-referential paradoxes observed in the works by Russell and Godel. And it is undecidability that “guarantees that the mathematical universe will always be unbounded in its creative potential.”

The paradox of self-reference is at the heart of any universal computer, (Turing machines), but it is also a feature inherent to the very concept of ‘self-replication.’ John von Neumann applied this more biological question of self-replication to his notion of a Universal Constructor (UC). Imagine a machine that is programmed to follow a blueprint for self-replication. It utilizes physical parts as raw materials by following a blueprint (the program) and can thus manufacture a physical copy of itself. The program serves as blueprint, but also has to become a datafile itself, if the UC is to make a fully functioning copy of itself, that is able to replicate a “daughter” machine that is also able to make fully functioning copies of itself that can further the process of self-replication. The program is not just a blueprint (software) but must alter its own status and become an object (hardware) that must itself be copied. And this is


37 Davies, Demon in the Machine, 72.

38 Davies, Demon in the Machine, 72-75.

39 This type of self-referentiality where a ‘program’ must contain the program itself as part of the program brings to mind the image of fractal geometry where one may observe various self-similar patterns or shapes occurring across various scales in nature and recursively with scale invariance within computer programs such as in some Cellular Automata. Fractal geometry, however, deals with the notion of infinite recursion and as such, is not exactly appropriate for the concept of von Neumann’s UC, which would be, like any machine, dealing with finite storage, parts, space and so on.
essentially what we may observe when considering DNA. The base sequence in any DNA molecule acts like both blueprint (code) that must be expressed in protein synthesis, and it is to be copied (replication). In this way, molecules of DNA are like miniature von Neumann self-replicators. The mathematics in von Neumann’s model of a Universal Replicator is the inspiration behind the various forms of Cellular Automata coded for research into information theory, biology, and neuroscience. Perhaps the most famous Cellular Automaton created is John Conway’s Game of Life. It is to this concept that we turn next. This will help us better understand phenomena such as complexity, emergence, downward causation, and state dependent rule evolution.

**Cellular Automata as Models of ‘Rule Evolution’**

In nature we often find that the level of complexity observed within a system is not necessarily proportional to the amount of complexity put into it from the beginning. Complex behaviors or properties do regularly arise from surprisingly simple “rules,” and the unpredictable states of neighboring cells, molecules, or other external conditions. These two basic aspects—simple rules and adjacent conditions—can in fact generate unpredictable and unforeseeable complexity or “higher-order” properties that display surprising features or activities that could not have been predicted from a thorough analysis of the parts in isolation. The mathematician John Conway constructed a particular Cellular Automaton, which he named the Game of Life, in order to isolate in the abstract some of these observable aspects of nature. Cellular Automata are quite central for understanding how complex patterns emerge within nature. And the notion of constructing mathematical models for the purpose of analyzing some narrow aspect of the world

---

40 Davies, *Demon in the Machine*, 74.
in symbolic form in order to “cast light” on some feature of “the real world” is quite common.\(^{41}\)

Such models enable a more specific analysis of a particular feature that could then be transferable to more general aspects of the “world.” The Game of Life—and other such Cellular Automata—are able to shed much light on how quite simple interactions produce rather complex results throughout nature: in galaxy formation, snowflake, or crystal formations, in research on fluid or aerodynamics as well as research in self-assembling robotics to name a few.\(^{42}\)

The Game of Life follows quite simple rules to be displayed on a computer. The program displays a grid pattern of cells. Each cell is considered ‘live’ or ‘dead’ such that a darkened cell is ‘alive’ whereas a white or uncolored cell is ‘dead.’ Each cell has exactly eight neighboring cells that are either alive or dead. The starting pattern for this two-dimensional world is referred to as ‘generation 0.’ There are only four laws that structure this world:\(^{43}\)

1. A live cell with fewer than two live neighbors will die as if by underpopulation.
2. A live cell with 2 or 3 live neighbors will remain alive into the next iteration (or generation).
3. A live cell with 4 or more live neighbors will die in the next generation (as if by overpopulation).

\(^{41}\) Paul Davies, *The Mind of God*, 33.


Any dead cell with exactly 3 live neighbors will become alive (in the next generation), whereas in any other case a dead cell will remain dead.

Every cell has 8 adjacent neighbors. Now, on each successive ‘generation’ from generation 0, these same rules are applied. Provided the initial starting conditions, the patterns of live and dead cells subsequently change in sometimes quite unpredictable patterns.\(^{44}\) The information flow and complex clusters that emerge can appear to move across the screen, sometimes “colliding and creating new shapes from the debris.”\(^{45}\) One such configuration that has been shown to evolve within the game is the “glider.” This pattern of five squares appears to “glide across the screen without change of internal configuration.”\(^{46}\) The Gosper Glider Gun is another complex manifestation named after the mathematician Bill Gosper. This configuration is a “glider gun” where a pattern of “36 live cells…pulsates in and out, like a beating heart, giving birth to a glider every 30 generations. The gliders scamper away in a diagonal line, one after another, like an endless stream of bullets shot from a gun.”\(^{47}\)

The Gosper glider gun configuration is important because it is a basic first step in demonstrating how the Game of Life satisfies the conditions of a universal Turing machine.

\(^{44}\) Stephen Wolfram formulated 256 Update Rules that describe the possible ways in which “cells” can react to the state of each neighboring cells. For example, Rule 30 is able to produce a pattern sequence that closely emulates the patterns on a Textile Cone seashell. In this particular seashell, every cell promotes or inhibits the secretion of certain pigments in a way that responds to its neighboring cells, just as in a Cellular Automata. following Wolfram’s Update Rule 30. This fascinating phenomenon therefore appears to be a chemical version of Wolfram’s Rule 30. Again, it is the stream of information flows and patterns that is providing these new insights into biology. See Brian Hayes, “Computing Science: The World According to Wolfram,” in American Scientist 90, no.4 (July-August,2002), 309-310.

\(^{45}\) Davies, Demon in the Machine, 76.

\(^{46}\) Davies, Demon in the Machine, 77.

\(^{47}\) Bellos, The Grapes of Math, 267.
Since Claude Shannon’s 1948 articulation of the concept of information theory it has become clear that a defining property of information is its transformability. As Rolf Landauer proclaimed, all “information is physical.” Now, this means that while information requires a physical medium for communication—whether in the form of light, magnetic fields, sound, or electronic pulses is irrelevant—it is also abstract, as it does not matter what type of media is utilized. And furthermore, information can be represented in terms of binary digits, as Claude Shannon demonstrated in his formulation of the science of information theory. Shannon showed that any system of solid-state electronic circuits that can switch on and off can correspond exactly to information expressed in base two mathematics. And so any sort of information can be represented precisely by binary digits, or bits. This means that any type of on/off (or in Conway’s game live/dead cells) can convey any type of information. Thus, logic gates, or really any kind of “switching circuits,” are also able to express logical propositions such as the kind of logical operations formulated by George Boole and Augustus de Morgan.

What does this have to do with Gosper’s Glider Guns? Well, it is possible to set up Conway’s game so that a series of these Glider Guns can “fire off” a pulse or sequence of gliders that traverse the two-dimensional grid. The gliders pulsing across the grid system can represent exactly the ‘ones’ and ‘zeros’ of binary mathematics. In this way it is possible to construct any

---


50 For example, the simplest logic gate follows the basic Boolean operator: ‘negation.’ For any proposition, P: (1) If P is true, then its negation is false. (2) If P is false, then its negation is true. The equivalent logic gate is a single electronic transistor with a collector connected to a power supply and an emitter connected to a ground. The transistor is “on” when the “control line” of the transistor is receiving an input (a 1) in which case the current traverses to the ground. The output then registers as 0. If the input is “off” (a 0), the transistor is off and the current
type of logic gate and thus Conway’s game can emulate a computer.\textsuperscript{51} The Game of Life is a universal Turing complete program that runs as a computer inside a computer. There are three basic logic gates: the NOT, AND, and OR gates. All other more complex logic gates may be established from these basic gates: NAND, XOR, and so on.

The implications of Conway’s game being a Turing machine (any machine capable of universal computation however slowly) extend further. Turing proved (with the Decision problem) that undecidability, as a property of any universal computational machine, allows a certain “open-endedness” or the possibility of emergent order that transcends the discrete functionality of the individual parts of the system. Just as Turing’s undecidability thesis demonstrated that there is no way to determine in advance whether a given “program” will run forever or stop in a finite time, it is likewise impossible to determine what “novel” emergent behavior will arise from the “computer within a computer” that is the Game of Life. The patterns that emerge within the game “are not arbitrary but obey higher-level rules of their own.”\textsuperscript{52} And one key implication of these discoveries (and a re-acknowledgment of Landauer’s dictum)\textsuperscript{53} is

---

\textsuperscript{51} Computer versions of the Game of Life programmed to demonstrate Turing Completeness by its ability to emulate the behavior of logic gates are widely available online. It should be noted that all other logic gates can be constructed out of these three basic versions, that the Game of Life really is a computer running within a computer.

\textsuperscript{52} Davies, \textit{Demon in the Machine}, 77.

that higher level informational rules may arise independently of whatever type of physical media employed. Therefore, these insights may be applied to life, consciousness, or any other physical medium.

One really very interesting implication of this feature of complex Cellular Automata, and one that is directly relevant to my argument, involves the construction of a “time-dependent model” where the “update informational rule” is allowed to evolve. Alyssa Adams formulated a Cellular Automaton that utilizes Stephen Wolfram’s study of all possible logically consistent “update rules” for Cellular Automata. Wolfram found 256 such update rules that “take into account the nearest-neighbor squares only.” Now, what Adams and her team did, was create a program where a wide array of Wolfram’s “update rules” could apply in different situations. The model that they constructed uses two Cellular Automata: one that represents the “environment,” and one that represents the “organism.” The basic idea is that this particular model allows the two CA to interact and adapt to one another in such a way that the update rules for each actually evolve. These interactive dynamic systems are allowed to operate autonomously in order to demonstrate “open-ended evolution,” “innovation,” and “complexity” in such a way that would exceed the “Poincare recurrence time,” or the time at which there is a return to the initial state. By introducing “non-local rules”—rules that allow interaction with “cells” that are not directly adjacent to one another—unpredictable patterns will emerge that mutually influence both


55 Davies, Demon in the Machine, 80.

“environment” and “organism.”57 A key point here is that this “arrangement changes the update rule as a function of both the state of the ‘organism’ itself—making it self-referential—and of the ‘environment’—making it an open system.”58 The point that I wish to emphasize here is that whether we are discussing virtual organisms interacting with their environment or in the realm of biology (which we will examine next), rules of information-processing are “state dependent” and dynamic.59 The rules that govern dynamic systems must themselves be subject to evolution.

It must be reiterated that the important notion that “rule evolution” can and does occur is due to the peculiar nature of the self-referential paradox that we have already encountered with Russell, Godel, Turing, in von Neumann’s universal replicator, and of course in Adams’ state dependent informational-processing rule evolutionary Cellular Automata. The behavior of a system depends upon its internal states as well as the state of the environment in which it finds itself. Information, for example that is stored within a genome of a living organism, may be expressed in “innumerable feedback loops—a process through which the genetic information is continually re-evaluated by permanent interactions with the physical environment to which it is exposed.”60 “What a system does,” Paul Davies explains, “depends on how a system is.”61

57 The idea of “unpredictable patterns” mentioned here refers to the fact that the new states of interaction observed could not have been predicted or have occurred as a result of any of the 256 fixed rules delineated by Wolfram. See Adams, “Formal Definitions of Unbounded Evolution,” 5-7. Also see Davies, Demon in the Machine, 81-82.

58 Davies, Demon in the Machine, 81.

59 Adams, “Formal Definitions of Unbounded Evolution,” 13-14. Adams and her colleagues explain the far reaching implications of this insight: “state dependent dynamics…represents a radical departure from more traditional approaches to dynamics where the ‘laws’ remain fixed….the principles governing open-ended evolution and innovation in biological and technological systems may require removing the segregation of states and fixed dynamical laws characteristic of the physical sciences for the 300 years.” (p.14).

Emphasizing this bottom up and top down causal phenomenon within the domain of biology, the physicist Nigel Goldenfeld states that “self-referential dynamics is an inherent and probably defining feature of evolutionary dynamics and thus biological systems.”

Although it is well known that crystals can self-organize and replicate, such entities are in basic equilibrium with their environment. Life, on the other hand, is quite out of equilibrium with its environment, relying as it does on some source of energy as input (for example food or sunlight) while “outputting” something else as by-product such as “oxygen or carbon dioxide.” Recognizing life as an “emergent phenomenon” that is far from being in equilibrium, Goldenfeld argues that life must arise from “the laws of non-equilibrium statistical physics.” He continues asking “how is it that matter self-organizes into hierarchies that are capable of generating feedback loops which connect multiple levels of organization and are evolvable?”

Goldenfeld claims that what is required is to think beyond the standard paradigm of biology’s “modern synthesis.” It is within the emerging yet quite promising area of research involving information theory and mathematics that Goldenfeld argues scientists will be able to deal with such issues. In short, exploring chemical and biological versions of Wolfram type algorithms, where several cellular

---

61 Davies, *Demon in the Machine*, 212.


64 Goldenfeld, *Life is Physics: Evolution as a Collective Phenomenon far from Equilibrium*, 4.

65 Ibid., 5-7 for Goldenfeld’s view of certain limits with the modern synthesis of Mendelian genetics and natural selection. Goldenfeld is not criticizing this “synthesis” as such. He is saying that recognition of self-referential phenomena such as the type of state dependent information-processing rule evolution discussed in Adam’s et al. CA model, suggests some new interdisciplinary approaches for more fruitful future research. This research proposal is very much beyond my expertise as well as the scope of this paper.
automata are allowed to affect one another and evolve in relation to one another (such as Adam’s “state dependent dynamics”) many complex patterns observed in nature may become more clear. Such a future analysis that seeks to unify biology and physics with information science insights would be distinguished from current research in standard physical theories such as “condensed matter physics.” For example, quoting from Goldenfeld’s article, Davies writes:

…in condensed matter theory there is a clear separation between the rules that govern the time evolution of the system and the state of the system itself. In biology however, the situation is quite different. The rules that govern the time evolution of the system are encoded in abstraction, the most obvious of which is the genome itself. As the system evolves in time, the genome itself can be altered, and so the governing rules are themselves changed.\textsuperscript{67}

This is essentially a biological version of the information-processing “rule evolution” discussed in Adam’s CA model.

It will be helpful at this point to provide a concrete example of this type of “rule evolution” at work in genetics. Again, I will quote from Paul Davies. Rules in biology “refer to the informational architecture of organisms. Take the genetic code: the triplet of nucleotides CGT, for example, codes for the amino acid arginine. Although there are no known exceptions to that rule, it would be wrong to think of it as a law of nature, like the fixed law of gravity. Almost certainly the CGT \rightarrow arginine assignment emerged a long time ago, probably from some earlier and simpler rule…When we consider the great drama of evolutionary history, the game of life

\textsuperscript{66} Goldenfeld, Life is Physics, especially pp. 12-13.

\textsuperscript{67} Quoted from Davies, Demon in the Machine, 213. The passage Davies quoted is from Nigel Goldenfeld, “Life is Physics: Evolution as a Collective Phenomenon far from Equilibrium,” in Annual Reviews of Condensed Matter Physics, vol.2, 8.
must be seen as a game of quasi-rules that change over time.”

At this point it should be clear that even the most “ancient” of “rules” in biology are subject to evolution. Genetic information, the molecular code, differs from certain interpretations in science, in that emergent rules are not just epiphenomena, but have real effects. “In biology,” Davies explains, “there often is coupling between levels, between processes on many scales of size and complexity: causation can be both bottom-up (from genes to organisms) and top-down (from organisms to genes).” It is this bottom-up and top-down interaction between organism and genes—or as in Adam’s CA “organism” and her CA “environment”—where we can see how basic simple rules—whether chemical or electronic versions of a mathematical algorithm—and the interaction of neighboring states (or cells, entities)—which allow unexpected emergent ‘rules’ (whether genetic code or higher-order algorithms within a computer) to appear. These rules are examples of patterns of information that emerged from other streams or flows of information. No ‘essence’ or ‘res’ like entities are involved. Rules emerge, guide behavior, and are in turn affected by their environment. In this way, we can speak of flows of information and “state dependent rule evolution” as defining features of contemporary biological sciences.

**Summary of ‘Science’ Section**

In this section we have examined how streams, flows, patterns and clusters of information are the basis of contemporary biological sciences. Activities within cells such as observed in protein production, resemble and follow logical operations analogous to solid-state electronic circuitry and logic gate configurations. Because biology functions computationally,

---

68 Davies, *Demon in the Machine*, 212-213. This notion of ‘rule evolution’ in terms of the “code book of codon to amino acid synthesis” was discussed in the first part of this second section of the chapter titled ‘patterns of information flow as the basis for the biological sciences.’
and from a “systems” approach, behaves ‘similar’ to ‘software,’ we turned to an examination of the logical and mathematical foundations observed in these biological processes. The paradoxes of self-referentiality were examined, most especially with Turing’s “decidability “problem. Self-referential paradoxes were noted to show the “incompleteness” of any system (biological or mechanical). And the paradoxes of undecidability and incompleteness “open up” room for novelty in the form of emergent properties. (Note the similarities-in-difference with certain aspects of post-structural thought here. This is not uncommon whenever information is self-referential). Finally, we examined how these processes—when modeled on cellular automata—demonstrated how basic rules governing the patterns and flow of information may themselves evolve due to the ‘bottom-up/top-down’ interaction between ‘organisms’ and ‘environment.’ At the final section of this chapter, I will suggest that some of these insights drawn from research in contemporary biological science provide useful and salient ‘components’ for a reconfigured category of doctrinal development. In the next chapter we will see more of how these ‘components’ operate within such a model. But for now, we will briefly discuss some ideas presented by George Lindbeck and Kathryn Tanner.

**Lindbeck’s ‘Rule Theory’ and Tanner’s Anthropological Alternative**

Although George Lindbeck’s major work, *The Nature of Doctrine*, deals with issues of ecumenism and theories of religion, it is what he refers to as a “regulative” or “rule theory of doctrine” that interests us here. And although Kathryn Tanner’s *Theories of Culture*, does not

---

69 Davies, *Demon in the Machine*, 216.

explicitly deal with doctrine as such, much of what she wrote is of great interest to the topic of
this chapter. There are many issues that could be examined with either of these books, but for
the purposes of this chapter, I will discuss only two topics: (1) the non-foundational, intratextual
hermeneutic of Lindbeck’s “cultural-linguistic” model of religion, with the postmodern cultural
anthropological alternative suggested by Tanner; and (2) the “rule theory of doctrine” suggested
by Lindbeck, and Tanner’s ideas revolving around “motifs,” within the ongoing constructive
‘task’ of Christian identity. This will be followed by some concluding thoughts.

Lindbeck argues that religion is best understood as a kind of culture, especially in the
sense given that term by modern anthropologists such as Clifford Geertz. Considered in this
way, a ‘culture’ is an interpretive framework, a unique “web of meaning.” Religion, for
Lindbeck, is quite literally a culture or “language game” that one is always and already
embedded within. This “cultural-linguistic” view interprets religion as a system of symbols that
is comprised of values, texts, symbols, and rituals that shape and channel the experience and
thought of its members. Conversion to Christianity (or any religion, ideology and so on) is
therefore similar to immersing oneself in another language and culture. Immersion in a new
language and culture opens up new categories of thought and experience. To think of “religions”


72 Lindbeck is intentionally utilizing Wittgenstein’s metaphor of language games. See for example the forward to the

73 Lindbeck, 48. Also, for Lindbeck, there can be no universal religious experience because experience of any kind is
always already mediated through some kind of ‘lens’ or ‘network’ of signification and meaning. Religion, therefore,
should be understood in light of an “intrasemiotic or intertextual” hermeneutic, ibid., 100. This is also why
Lindbeck thinks religions are incommensurable and non-foundational language games. See van Huysteen, *Essays in
Postfoundationalist Theology* for a post-foundational rather than non-foundational approach.
as a “cultural-linguistic” model, however, is to also view them as incommensurable, with stable and well-defined boundaries; boundaries that determine, in a sense, ‘who is in and who is out.’

Therefore, perhaps we should ask, along with Kathryn Tanner, whether any culture or religion really is a stable and undifferentiated structure or language with distinct boundaries? Kathryn Tanner has demonstrated that this notion of static homogenous cultural groups with incommensurable or impermeable boundaries is based on unfounded assumptions. There never have been any cultural boundaries that are stable and unchanging in the way Post-liberals such as Lindbeck are proposing. Any cultural or religious notion is always already constructed from “borrowed materials.” People have multiple commitments, and social roles, belonging to different associations and connections. As Tanner describes, “people do not discard their identities when they take on a Christian one.” If Paul in his letter to the Galatians saw no need to divide people in God’s Kingdom along ethnic, class, or gendered lines, why should Christian theologians seek to do so today?

There are many important issues that could be discussed here. Unfortunately, I must stay focused on the issues most relevant to the topic of the chapter. However, on the question of ‘incommensurability’ defined in Wittgenstein’s or Thomas Kuhn’s analytic style of philosophy, a good critical article may be found in Donald Davidson, “On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme,” in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (UK: Oxford, 2001), 183-198. See also J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, *Essays in Postfoundationalist Theology* (MI: Eerdmans, 1997); Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983).

This point of the illusion of “stable identities” is important in regards to strident assertions of “national sovereignty” too, as we discussed briefly in the Introduction and will return to in Chapter Four.

One further problem with Lindbeck’s notion of religion as a
stable culture has to do with what we might call the criterion for interpretation. Lindbeck—and it seems most Post-liberals—would assert that the Biblical narrative, or ‘story,’ is the ultimate standard for keeping the vast amounts of “borrowed materials” on “a distinctively Christian track.” In other words, the ‘Biblical story’ becomes the overarching narrative or hermeneutical lens for focusing on how all other “borrowed materials’ be integrated and interpreted. Yet as Tanner points out, the Bible is itself “made up of borrowed materials.” By arbitrarily exempting the Bible from this process, “some subset or aspect of Christian social practices is being privileged in a theologically suspect fashion.” She continues her explanation:

…[that] the process of transforming borrowed material should be as much about self-criticism as it is about criticism of other ways of life; it should be a self-directed process of transformation in keeping with an awareness of its own need for criticism. That would be the case if, as we have suggested, Christian social practices are never themselves anything other than the transformation of what is outside; if that is, Christian identity is established from the beginning through the use of borrowed materials.

This is what I am trying to express in my claim that we should be vigilant in avoiding “res” or “reified” thought, especially in doctrinal construction. Although she is using a different, ‘anthropological style’ here than my talk of ‘information flows,’ I believe we are on the same page. Let us look at Lindbeck’s ‘rule theory’ of doctrine, before, once again, consulting Tanner on her use of the term, ‘motifs.’

According to Lindbeck, doctrines neither refer to an objective reality nor are they mere ‘significations’ of some inner experience. Doctrines are hermeneutical rules. Thus, Lindbeck

81 Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 114.
82 Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 114
83 Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 114.
84 Ibid, 114.
avoids viewing doctrine in terms of epistemology (such as some correspondence theory of truth, for example). Doctrines are nomological rather than epistemological. So if one considers the category of ‘doctrine’ as analogous to ‘rules’ of a game or ‘grammatical rules’ of a language, then it would be a mistake to ask whether such “rules” are true or false. Rules are what direct and guide the legitimate ‘play’ or maneuvers within a game or within a language, and as such, it would be a categorical mistake to ask if the rules themselves are true.

Understanding doctrine according to this notion of “rule theory,” Lindbeck explains, is the most appropriate metaphor for describing how theologians of the Patristic era thought about doctrine. When Athanasius insisted that the Church adopt the concept of ‘consubstantiality,’ his intention was to use this metaphysical term as nothing more than a ‘hermeneutical rule.’ As Lindbeck explains, “the theologian most responsible for the final triumph of Nicaea thought of it, not as a first-order proposition with ontological reference, but as a second-order rule of speech.” Doctrines conceived as rules, therefore, allow for different theological constructions. Theologians may formulate these categories in multiple ways, the only stipulation being that their representations follow the pre-established ‘rules.’ Whether formulated as Bonhoeffer’s

---

85 It should be noted that the metaphor of doctrine as ‘grammar’ to a language should take into account the fact that grammar itself evolves and changes over time. Old English, for example, was an inflected language. Over time, with historical influences from multiple directions: French, Latin, Dutch and so on, changes began to emerge. Today’s analytic language, depends upon word order, and not the notion of word endings required in inflectional languages. Traces still exist of course. The point is grammar does change, and so this parallels my argument that just as “rules” change in cellular automata and in biology, they (rules, grammar, or doctrine) change as well. To follow the use of metaphors such as grammar/language, rules/game, we should be consistent and recognize that “rules” and “grammar” are not “out of play.” They are not ahistorical transcendent res that remaining unchanging and immune from influence from the ‘environment.’ Nothing is immune from influence from the environment. See Max Plank Institute for the Science of Human History. “The ‘Myth’ of Language History: Grammar Changes Faster Than Vocabulary.” ScienceDaily, 2 October 2017. https://tinyurl.com/yf66fmrw

86 Kathryn Tanner, Theories of Culture, 80.
“Man for Others,” or Barth’s “Humanity of God,” the “basic rules for its use remain the same.”

Viewed in the light of this “rule theory,” Lindbeck insists that the creedal or definitional statements from Nicaea or Chalcedon, “represent historically conditioned formulations of doctrines that are unconditionally and permanently necessary to mainstream Christian identity.”

In short, for Lindbeck, doctrines may be “historically conditioned,” and the creeds retain their “continuing value” only insofar as they are authentic representations of what he refers to as “regulative principles.” These principles are “monotheism, historical specificity, and Christological maximalism.”

Furthermore, as Lindbeck explains:

[The] Nicene and Chalcedonian formulations were among the few, and perhaps only, possible outcomes of the process of adjusting Christian discourse to the world of late classical antiquity in a manner conformable to regulative principles that were already at work in the earliest strata of the tradition. These creeds can be understood by Christian and non-Christian alike as paradigmatically instantiating doctrinal rules that have been abidingly important from the beginning in forming mainstream Christian identity.

But should we consider these “regulative principles” to be truly “unconditionally and permanently necessary?”

---

87 Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 68-69. According to Lindbeck the Christological rule Athanasius formed was “whatever is said of the Father is said of the Son, except that the Son is not the Father,” Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 80.


89 Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 82. Lindbeck uses “‘principle’ and ‘rule’ interchangeably” in this discussion: see endnote 8., p.94.

90 Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, These ‘principles’ or ‘rules’ are explained as monotheism, “second, the principle of historical specificity: the stories of Jesus refer to a genuine human being…third, Christological maximalism: every possible importance is to be ascribed to Jesus that is not inconsistent with the first rules,” p. 80.

First, to my mind, it seems that no *doctrine* (or underlying “principle” which seems to me to be subject to the same critique) could have unconditional necessity. There seems little reason to think that Christological formulations utilizing Greek metaphysical concepts such as homoousion were necessary developments. Regarding this I am inclined to mention a statement Maurice Wiles made in his work on doctrinal development:

…the historical processes of doctrinal development seem as unlikely to lead to infallible decisions as the oral transmission of gospel material to lead to an infallible record of the life of Jesus. The element of human fallibility is present in the bishops and theologians of the early Church as evidently as it is in the persons of the apostles and evangelists. We have as much reason in the one case as in the other to believe either that that fallibility was totally suppressed or that it was incapable of reflecting enough of the inspiration of the divine Spirit to provide us with valuable guidance for the Church’s life.

Once again, I would like to highlight some ideas from Tanner’s book. Although she rarely uses the term, ‘doctrine,’ in this book, she refers to ‘motifs.’

---

92 To the question of “regulative principles,” any notion of an unchanging, unquestionable and non-negotiable “res” is, to my mind, potentially dangerous. Furthermore, why are *these* three principles ‘unconditional?’ What if one were to follow Augustine in the claim that the “double commandment of love” be the one ‘unconditional regulative principle?” This type of claim has been made by many thinkers, including Vattimo, Altizer, Paul M. Van Buren, John Caputo. Perhaps *this* ‘principle’ would not, if I might phrase it this way, “auto-deconstruct.” At any rate, in Chapter Four we will be examining how doctrines—and I would include Lindbeck’s principles here—can, in interacting with the larger environment (other cultures, ideas, different thinkers etc), lead to unforeseen and unpredictable complex “aspects” that can lead to a kind of “downward causation” that has real and dangerous ‘ethical’ effects. I think that the ‘exclusivism’ associated with any assertion of a universally held “Christological maximalism,” is just such a type of idea that did lead to unexpected “divisions” and other forms of violence. Monotheism may also lead to issues of ‘exclusion,’ unexpected ‘problems of sovereignty,’ and even ecological impacts that were unpredictable at the “initial conditions,’ yet led to some unfortunate ethical consequences. Furthermore, there is the question of whether Lindbeck’s principle of “Christological Maximalism” was indeed universally held in the earliest communities. There may well have been a variety of “high” or “low” conceptions of Christology in the early Church. Studies from the liturgy of the era show people praying “to Christ” and also “through Christ.” See Rebeca Lyman, *Lex Orandi: Heresy, Orthodoxy, and Popular Religion in The Making and Remaking of Christian Doctrine: Essays in honor of Maurice Wiles*. Also It may be that maximalist claims (and doctrinal formulations in particular) have more to do with sociological reasons of the time. See Hugh Nicholson, *The Spirit of Contradiction in Christianity and Buddhism* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2016)


94 Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 124.
constructive task, where the search for a ‘Christian identity’ is a “task,” or a ‘style,’ where any such identity is the task of continuing to construct and self-critique such identity, especially claims to any ‘fixed’ identity.95 And so in recognizing the plurality within Christianity, Tanner suggests that a unifying thread is the concern for ‘discipleship.’96 Tanner explains that there are certain affirmations that may identify a Christian way of life. For example, Christians tend to find importance in certain ‘motifs or forms’ such as “dying and rising, Jesus as ‘the Christ,’ love of God and neighbor, or God as make of heaven and earth.”97 It is not that there is agreement over the content of these motifs, but it is the fact that these themes are of importance to Christian ways of life that matters. Christians do not agree on the content of these motifs, but they do typically agree that the motifs are important to their lives in some way.98 For Tanner, these motifs or ‘forms’ may be called into question if they lead to some form of idolatry or injustice:

Christians claim that Jesus is God; that does not mean, however, that some Christians might not decide in the process that the central and overriding significance that Jesus continues to have for human life would be less misleadingly expressed some other way. In short, while they set the terms for argument, the forms themselves are not immune from questioning as the argument proceeds.99

Motifs, or forms, may be ‘guidelines’ and of central importance to Christian thought and theological construction, but we must guard against making assertions to stable identities (or I would say “reifying” or res-thinking) of these doctrines or writings as if they represented the

---

95 Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 144-157.

96 Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 152.

97 Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 124.

98 Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 125.

99 Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 127.
Absolute Truth. Tanner stresses the need for self-critique and humility in guarding against this type of idolatry. We should be always open to hearing what new voices, or “borrowed materials” may tell us. We may find that listening may help us avoid ‘doctrinal idolatry.’ In a passage that reminds me of H.R. Niebuhr’s “permanent revolution” or Tillich’s “Protestant Principle,” Tanner argues that we must always guard against making our claims into an idolatrous representation of any ‘motif.’ As she explains we must “make God, rather than some human account of God, the center of one’s life. Doing otherwise, making Christian identity a matter of allegiance to certain meanings, threatens to put human ideas about God in the place that only God should fill in Christian life.”

I would like to suggest that this idea of always keeping open to “where the Spirit may blow,” by listening to the voices from the margins, from other cultures and religions, and from all other academic disciplines, are ways of avoiding “reification” or “res-ification” of doctrines (or motifs). And I hope that by extending the metaphors from an ‘updated’ understanding of ‘organic growth,’ we may also be able to apply the “after Darwin” concept of “state dependent ‘rule’ evolution” to any future discussion of doctrinal development. It is vital, to my mind, that we begin to consider that doctrines can and should evolve, not simply be translated into another ‘language’ while simultaneously insisting that the inner “res, or essence, or meaning” remains untouched. If there is no res to a doctrine, but only flows or streams of ‘information,’ then by listening to those “other voices” we may be open to a radical revisioning and “Darwinian type evolution” of any doctrine whatsoever. When any doctrine leads to division, exclusion or violence, it is time to consider whether we might—analogously to “editing or altering” some

---

100 Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 126.
genetic expression—think of editing the doctrine. Considering doctrines, like Lindbeck as ‘rules’—*but very much differently than him as evolving rules*—we may ponder the implications of doctrines, not only evolving naturally through the “bottom/up and top/down” mutual interaction between the environment (in the broadest sense) and the doctrines or ‘motifs’ themselves, but also our intentional alteration of them if the ethical situation requires.

**Concluding Thoughts**

Perhaps one of the deepest concerns that many theologians or philosophers have with the very idea of ‘resurrecting’ any form of doctrinal development arises from a legitimate resistance to any notion of ‘totalizing thought,’ or the ‘strong thought,’ referred to earlier in this chapter.¹⁰¹ This concern manifests itself anytime there is discussion of some “one true” culture, tradition, history, or metanarrative. And it is certainly true that some forms of doctrinal development have expressed implicitly or explicitly just such an assumption.¹⁰² There has been a tendency to

---

¹⁰¹ Another tendency, therefore, is to abandon any discussion of doctrinal development. In this case, looking at doctrine is simply a kind of “history of ideas.” This would be a research of the completely contingent way that these ideas were formed, under what cultural, intellectual or perhaps political pressures they arose and so on. This is certainly one approach, and will form an important aspect of any new discussion on the subject as I hope to show in the next chapter. I think Wiles came to this position after the publication of his work on the subject. It seems to me that he is essentially arguing for the total contingency of all doctrine. Notions of exegesis, prayer, and ritual practices are the sole sources for Wiles. As Robert Wilken stated however, “By any standard, it is difficult to see how those three activities can provide rational and cognitive norms for Christian thinking. Exegesis, worship and the experience of salvation are as diverse as the Christian tradition.” Wilken, Review “The Making of Christian Doctrine,” *Journal of Religion*, 49, 1969, 313. My approach is a hope for a type of middle way.

¹⁰² In the late sixteenth century, Jesuits such as Luis de Molina, Francisco Suarez, Gabriel Vasquez, and John de Lugo had made doctrinal development a matter of logical analysis. Just as a simple syllogism expresses in a conclusion information that was contained implicitly in the premises, development in doctrine expresses new insights that were, nevertheless, fully contained in earlier stages of the Church’s history. See Owen Chadwick, *From Bossuet to Newman*, 2nd edition (UK: Cambridge Press, 1987), chapter two. Adolf von Harnack argued that he uncovered the ‘essence’ of Christianity in his short work, *What is Christianity?: Lectures Delivered in the University of Berlin During the Winter Term, 1899-1900*, (San Diego: The Book Tree, 2006. Kindle). Harnack saw much of doctrinal change as corruption away from the simple essence of Jesus teaching. Loisy argued against this view arguing that Harnack was quite selective in his proof-texting and a better description would be to understand doctrine as developing organically in the Church as we move towards the eschaton. Alfred Loisy, *The Gospel and the Church*, translated by Christopher Home (PA: Fortress Press, 1976).
construe this category as a ‘teleological’ process, one in which either the “content,” or the at least the “process of transmission,” are inevitable and continuous.103 Tanner critiques these types of projects from her postmodern cultural anthropological position. In contrast to any simple idea of a continuity of history, Tanner suggests that any “cultural continuity is always only the temporary outcome of historical struggle,” and any attempt to portray the ambiguous flow of history as a “continuity of traditional materials” is able to do so only by ignoring the “vicissitudes of history.”104 Secondly, any belief that the variegated spectrum of “borrowed materials” has any real stable or fixed identity is illusory. There is always only re-interpreting, absorbing, shifting interpretations of any ideas or materials. It is only in between all of these differing relations of ideas, fragments of material, and bricolage that a kind of “identity” is constructed. But because of this, it is necessary to be ever vigilant because any “claim of

103 Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 131. Tanner argues that Troeltsch’s notion of the Christian ‘idea’ is simply allowed to evolve and interact with different cultures and eras and is appropriated in various ways in each context. As she explains, “the process of transmission is the same, if episodic, in virtue of this Christian material’s capacity to speak directly to every time and place in a context-sensitive fashion.” (130). Troeltsch, it seems to me, tries to be open to a thoroughly historicized study of all aspects of Christianity. I think he is certainly trying to avoid the type of concern that Tanner is voicing. However, there are passages that certainly seem to support Tanner’s claim. For example, I share Tanner’s uneasiness with phrases or claims to understand the “total context, or “universal history.” Troeltsch, “Historical and Dogmatic Method in Theology,” in *Religion in History*, 17: 19. Now, Troeltsch is very Hegelian and was a central theologian in the “History of Religions School.” See Peter C. Hodgson, *God in History: Shapes of Freedom* (TN: Abingdon, 1989), who has written much on how helpful Troeltsch can be with Levinas’ emphasis on the “infinite” rather than “totality.” Nevertheless, I take Tanner’s critique seriously. Tanner also critiques Hans-Georg Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutical approach to ‘tradition’ where a Wirkungsgeschichte or “history of effects” from “classics” has so influenced and shaped a society that any interpretation of that classic is already shaped in part by its influence. This Gadamer explains, is a positive aspect, as the interpreter seeks to bridge the “horizons” between the horizon of classic and the current context. There seems to be a type of inescapable overriding tradition, therefore that balances things towards a conservative perspective. On this Tanner make good points in regards to Gadamer, especially his “high culture” notion of a classic. Interestingly, this same critique was already dealt with the same year by David Tracy. For example, her book was published in 1997 the same year as David Tracy’s “Fragments and Forms: Universality and Particularity Today,” in *The Church in Fragments: Towards What Kind of Unity*, edited Giuseppe Ruggieri and Miklos Tomka (Maryknoll: Orbis Concilium, 1997), 122-129. Also see David Tracy, (with response from Jacques Derrida) “Fragments: The Spiritual Situation of Our Times,” in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, edited by John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 170-184.

104 Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 131.
consensus may, for example, simply be a power play."\(^{105}\) This is quite similar to what I am trying to say about the need to adopt a non-res approach to doctrine. It is my hope that a reconfigured way of thinking about doctrinal development may avoid as much of this as possible.

This chapter began with a suggestion that three elements should be part of any reconfigured model of doctrinal development: I think we can see how re-thinking the notion of doctrine as patterns, flows, stream or clusters of information can be useful in the constant need to avoid ‘reifying’ doctrinal claims. Information quite literally flows, it does not have a ‘res,’ nor can it become stable for long. It is the nature of information to be flowing just as it is nature’s way to be continually evolving. Updating the metaphors and analogies associated with doctrinal development seems long over-due. We live in a time ‘after Darwin,’ and since we have *inherited* the quite natural language of ‘organic, biological or botanical growth’ as it applies to doctrinal change, it also seems natural that we *update* the metaphors associated with these ideas. For example, what if we considered the metaphor of symbiosis? The notion of symbiosis I am thinking of is the example provided by Lynn Margulis’ endosymbiotic theory of the origin of eukaryotes: Somehow an “amoeba-like prokaryote” entered into some other “energy-producing prokaryotes, and the two species evolved to live together in a mutually beneficial way”—and in this way, the “guest” became “the mitochondria of modern eukaryote cells.”\(^{106}\) With this metaphor of symbiosis in mind—understood as *mutually beneficial*—could we find a caring and peaceful application?

\(^{105}\) Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 164.

To consider an example of “symbiosis,” we may begin with this question from Kathryn Tanner, “When African Christians identify the spirits in control of everyday life with demons and Jesus Christ as the only antidote to their pernicious influence, which is absorbing which—African religious practices or Christian ones?” Now, Tanner’s concern is quite similar to mine. She is pointing out that Christianity is entirely “borrowed material” in that one cannot reach a point where there is, in any simplistic sense, an origin or some “pure” source. She is utilizing notions from postmodern cultural anthropology, while I am suggesting (in the context of doctrinal development), ideas from evolutionary biology and the information flows that underlie the biological sciences.

Yet with my caveat of “weak thought” in mind, (or might we refer to it as alternative/mutual strengthening?), on at least this issue, are we not going about things in similar ways? One possible difference may be that with the metaphor of “symbiosis,” in the sense of “mutually beneficial,” any potential doctrinal discussion would be able to accept this, not as a power play or threat to ecclesiastical authorities, but a natural evolutionary development. And by being vigilant in trying to use “information” language rather than “res” language, perhaps “strong” assertions might be avoided. And so is this question regarding some African Christian communities perhaps a situation is which a type of symbiotic interaction is occurring such that it does not really matter “who is absorbing whom?”

There are many possibilities opened by the incorporation of new metaphors. The usage of the concepts of complexity, emergence, downward causation (top/down and bottom/up

---

107 Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 148-149.
interaction), and the idea of “state dependent ‘rule’ evolution” will be the subject of the next chapter. We have already seen something of how complexity and emergent “higher-order” properties or “rules” arise within biology and cellular automata. In the next chapter I will discuss how an ‘ethical dimension’ emerges over time from what may seem quite innocuous initial conditions. Thus, we can see how doctrine presents at least two ways in which ethical concerns may arise: (1) when doctrine is used as an “ossified weapon” (2) through a doctrinal “emergence.” In this way I hope to demonstrate how ethics is inextricably integrated into any process of development including doctrinal development.
CHAPTER FOUR

EVOLUTION, DOCTRINE, AND EMERGENT ETHICAL DILEMMAS

The aim of Chapter Three was to provide an outline for a contemporary concept of “doctrinal development,” with the express purpose of moving away from an over-emphasis on epistemological and quasi-metaphysical notions of that category. “Ethical considerations” should also be a necessary criterion of any “critically based” development of doctrine, and not simply the mostly epistemological criteria usually associated with that category. I would argue that the contemporary approach to doctrinal development that we discussed in the last chapter allows Newmans’ “organic development model” to be expanded to include this “ethical” aspect. This ‘expanded model’ of doctrinal development is one that can be said to recognize, and include, the way in which doctrines—or any ideas—not only have no “enduring or unchanging essential core,” but also necessarily evolve and interact with their environment in unpredictable ways, often producing emergent ‘moral situations.’ We have already noted how this contemporary approach to development seeks to avoid viewing doctrines in an “ossified” way that may become “weaponized” or used to claim access to exclusive ‘Truth.’ We will see another example below in the “Doctrine of Creation” section. With these considerations in mind, we can now look closely in this chapter, at two doctrines, and how they developed over time: the notion of “Sovereignty’ in monotheism” and the “doctrine of creation.” I am claiming that from innocuous beginnings, unpredictable and complex developments may arise, producing quite unexpected “emergent features” that then produce top/down effects that are often manifested as
unexpected moral situations. Moral situations or dilemmas that were unforeseeable from the outset, but that in current circumstances may demand a re-consideration, and thus become altered, or reconstructed, so as to be an expression of Caritas. In precisely this way, a kind of ‘ethics of belief’ may emerge from doctrinal developments.

First, we will look at how aspects of the theological notion of “sovereignty,” originally associated with God, and “God’s Kingdom,” evolved over time, became associated with the Corpus Mysticum of Medieval Christendom, and then transitioned into the idea of the “King’s two bodies,” eventually morphing into forms of “popular sovereignty.” This concept of a Sovereign representation of a ‘unified people’ is a powerful and ambiguous symbol. This is true in regard to both the theological and political sense of the term. In any case, Sovereignty, at least in its most belligerent forms, receded in the wake of the Second World War. Towards the end of the Cold War, hopes for a “post national” cooperation suggested something of the potential for the fulfilment of peaceful dreams in the global context. In more recent years, however, with global financial disasters, mass migration of peoples, and dramatic shifts in demographics, a dangerous and growing number of people are beginning to call for a new, Nationalist form of Sovereignty.¹ This Sovereignty is often racial, religious, cultural, and nationalist in content. This ‘return of national sovereignty’—however illusory, misguided, and even incoherent—is nevertheless extremely dangerous. The theological connotations are apparent in the political language of this type of National Sovereignty. For example, we see such signs in current political ‘hopes’ for some power and authority standing above the fray—almost transcendent—closing and patrolling borders, deciding who is “in” or who is “out,” demanding obedience, faith, and

sacrifice, while pretending to be a representation of “The People.” This language reflects the theological idea of sovereignty and the transcendent God declaring who is “saved” or “damned”—a theological unity that has often had representation on earth, in the form of Pope or King. But this contemporary populism of the fringe rightwing sees itself as “reclaiming sovereignty” from the global elites, or secularists, or whatever, as well as the perceived “threat” to the culture, coming from multiculturalism, immigration, and other cultural shifts.

By tracing this doctrine and its unforeseen and unpredictable evolution, we can see the “bottom up” emergence of a new “top down” threat in the form of potentially violent, racist, calls for Sovereignty. (It does not matter whether this is essentially “theatrical” if the very real threat exists amongst the growing number who “believe in it”). This example of an evolution of doctrine, admittedly, moves towards the limits of what traditionally constitutes theology, challenges those borders, and provides an example of how a doctrine can evolve in totally unexpected and dangerous ways. The moral implications should be clear. Furthermore, the connotations associated with the concept, “sovereignty,” are both a theological as well as a political philosophical problem. I am not convinced by claims that this a question solely for political philosophy, and not for theology. I would claim that it is difficult to keep language of “religion” and ‘secular” separate. First, the “history of effects” from the Judeo-Christian heritage has certainly left its mark upon all aspects of culture in “the West.” All ideas blur, and the influence of religion on politics, economics, and culture generally, is quite pervasive. Yes, we may abstract and discuss ideas ‘as distinct,’ but I do think that the two notions “auto-deconstruct” the closer we scrutinize them. By taking seriously our commitments to an integration of ethics and theology it seems, to my mind at least, theologians should indeed
examine both the origins and this concept of “sovereignty,” its sources, and the ways in which it has received theological justification. Sovereignty is a theological idea in its origins after all. Therefore, I would suggest that the theological and political concepts of sovereignty are topics that should be of great concern for theologians and ethicists.

Next, we turn toward the doctrine of creation and its evolution over time. A Medieval doctrine of creation, such as we find in Aquinas, is an articulation of a truly Cosmic-Sacramental universe. His doctrine of creation is one in which every created being—non-human as well as human animals, nature, and everything within it—has intrinsic goodness, and together provides a glimpse of the goodness and grandeur of God. Aquinas asserts that every being expresses some aspect—however imperfectly—of the goodness and purposes of God. (This is the ground for the *analogia entis* after all). While Aquinas, of course, did not explicitly describe an eco-theology, he certainly did articulate a perspective of nature and all in it that would be conducive to such an interpretation. Furthermore, we will note that in the Medieval worldview, Christian theology provided the over-arching framework for all other disciplines (trivium, quadrivium, law, and so on). Reading Jose Casanova and Charles Taylor, we will examine some of the shifts that occurred that led to the “differentiation” of various domains of knowledge—for example, where science, politics, and economics all began to develop their own methodologies autonomously and free from the ‘oversight’ of Christian theology. At the same time, and as a result of these changes, theology receded into its own rather narrowed focus on spiritual or moral (intra-human ethical) matters. In response to the Enlightenment shifts towards epistemology and “propositional” knowledge, the robust and rich medieval doctrine of creation also receded into apologetics and epistemological questions about how we may know that God created the world,
whether God “fine-tuned” the initial conditions of the universe, when it was created and so on. Here is an example of how “doctrine” has been understood as the true “res” of the faith. This is a position where “doctrinal ossified propositions” are weaponized for apologetic arguments, providing any easy slide into certain forms of conservative Christian thought. Such maneuvers encourage some forms of conservative Christianity to enter alliances with rightwing movements and Big Oil, Corporations, and such. As a result, the focus of much theology became anthropological and thus Christianity was “caught off guard” as ecological degradation emerged in the wake of the rise of industrial capitalism. Fortunately, today we are seeing a new development and re-construction of the Doctrine of Creation that is environmentally concerned.

Therefore, this chapter attempts to stress the importance of continually keeping ethical implications of doctrine in mind as we trace the evolution of two doctrinal examples, in light of the expanded model of doctrinal development outlined in the last chapter. There is neither space, nor is it the purpose of this chapter to provide any hubristic attempt to “solve” these ethical dilemmas. Instead, I will briefly map some of the proposed solutions that others have suggested. The point of the chapter is to hopefully demonstrate how the discussion of doctrinal development outlined in the last chapter allows for a recognition of “emergent ethical situations.” This more contemporary and critically based model tries to keep ethical thought as a central criterion to development. This chapter may be viewed as looking at doctrine with a kind of “negative or warning,” aspect of our critical or ethical lens. The following chapter will briefly outline a more “positive” constructive appeal to an ethical aspect of doctrinal development. This chapter illustrates how doctrines evolve unpredictably, and across boundaries. And we may also see how doctrines can be of ethical concern as (1) ossified propositional ‘weapons’ [declaring who is
truly “Christian” or not; by focusing on ‘doctrine’ rather than ethical engagement in the world, and so on] (2) how unforeseen ethical contexts emerge unexpectedly from the “bottom-up” with “top-down” moral implications that need to be addressed in any ethically responsible model of doctrinal development. I am not proposing here any one model of critical analysis or ethical model, rather, I would simply say that any kind of ethical tools should be kept at hand when examining or constructing doctrine.

**The Evolving Doctrine of Sovereignty**

In what follows, I will provide an all too brief overview to illustrate a basic point: The theological doctrines referring to the Sovereignty of God evolved over time and eventually began developing outside of the theological/ecclesial realm and into the secular. However, through the inevitable “history of effects” the concept of Sovereignty retains much of the original theological connotations. This unpredictable process of development enabled the emergence of a whole host of “moral” issues.

We begin with observing that from Jesus’ original *announcing* of the coming of God’s Sovereign Kingdom, he soon became “the announced Sovereign,” as the King. Afterwards, the doctrinal connotations associated with the concept of “Kingship,” or “Sovereignty,” became ever more elevated, and having merged with Greek metaphysical categories, eventually became the basis for a theory of the Medieval Church. This idea of a *corpus mysticum* was transformed into a late sixteenth century legal construction of the “King’s two bodies.” From this legal fiction, the notion of a corporate ‘body politic’ takes hold, and as theological power and influence is pushed from the public political arena, the associated concept of “sovereignty” nevertheless survived in the form of the new modern political theories. One might say—continuing our Darwinian
analogies—that vestiges of the theological notion of sovereignty remain (or emerge) in various new forms. These new forms of “sovereign ‘theological’ power” continue, having found their way into the “absent presence” left by the vacating of religion from the public sphere (in particular, the 18th century).2 Into this structural space, new incarnations of sovereignty, transcendence and authority find their place.3 It is within this ‘winding tradition’ and ‘developmental process,’ that I hope to demonstrate one way in which totally unpredictable consequences gradually emerge from the complex interactions of a basic theological title—Christ as King. It is my claim that the repercussions felt from heightened assertions of national sovereignty in the current context of crises in the global neoliberal order have their roots in this initial doctrinal claim; that throughout the complex process and interaction with the broader environment of culture and politics, the connotations evolved quite unexpectedly, and yet the current global situation has ‘forced upon us’ a ‘space’ where an ethics of belief and doctrinal reconsideration is called for. Because there is no ‘res’ to any doctrinal formulation, there are no easy answers to how to deal with the issue. Doctrines as ‘rules’ that evolve from both bottom-up interactions with the broader environment as well as top-down applications have no unchanging or permanent core. However, we will look to some ways of ‘editing’ this particular ‘thread’ that we are following by re-thinking ways about “Christ as King.”

Within current historical-critical research there is something of an historically agreed upon minimal understanding of the historical Jesus. A consensus would include that Jesus was Jewish, and that his followers, originally at least, were all Jewish. Most scholars would probably

---


agree that Jesus was baptized by an “apocalyptic prophet,” John the Baptist, and that he taught in Galilee; that he traveled to Jerusalem to teach, where he was eventually arrested and crucified by Rome at the direction of the Procurator Pilate. Another key consensus element is that Jesus apparently began his ministry announcing the coming of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:15). For the purposes of this project, I wish to point out that what began as this pronouncement of the coming kingdom evolved into the assertion that Jesus is King.

In looking all too briefly at some basic trajectories within historical-Jesus scholarship, we must first recognize that the New Testament Gospel accounts are post-Easter interpretations, constructed from decades of oral traditions. Furthermore, it should be clear that each Gospel interpretation was designed to deal with precise issues relevant to the distinct contextual challenges, concerns, and questions of particular communities. With these caveats in mind, historical-Jesus scholarship does tend to provide two, broadly construed images of the historical Jesus: a Jewish apocalyptic prophet or a Spirit-filled Jewish social reformer and teacher. The point relevant for this project is to recognize that Jesus seems to have either been announcing the future coming of God’s rule or claimed a kind of commission to begin a Kingdom of God on earth where the poor and social outcasts are welcome. This latter notion of a Kingdom without

---

4 For the historical reasons that Rome rather than the Jewish leadership was primarily responsible for the crucifixion see Paula Fredricksen, From Jesus to Christ (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); Howard Kee What Can We Know About Jesus? (UK: Cambridge Press, 1990), 85-86. John Dominic Crossan, Who Killed Jesus? Exposing the Root of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of The Death of Jesus (NY: HarperCollins, 1995).

mediators, hierarchy, or oppression would likely have been very attractive to the many Jewish people suffering under what Marcus Borg refers to as the “Imperial domination system.” Now, the key feature of both visions is that Jesus is announcing the Kingdom of God—a rule in which the justice called for by the prophets becomes actual; where the poor, widow, orphan, and sojourner are cared for—a kingdom in which God and God’s justice rule rather than Caesar or Herod. Jesus does not—according to the majority view of historical-critical scholarship—appear to have claimed himself to be King in any explicit sense.

Scholars arguing for an ‘apocalyptic Jesus’ remind us that the predominant worldview of Judaism in the two centuries prior to Jesus, as well as within the first century itself, was saturated with an apocalyptic imagination. Apocalyptic literature was common in the pseudepigrapha and

---


7 There are exceptions of course. N.T. Wright claims that Jesus, the Jewish prophet believed that he was called to a “messianic vocation,” (645) so as “to enact in himself what, in Israel’s scriptures, God had promised to accomplish all by himself.”(653) See N.T. Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God: Volume II, (MN: Fortress, 1996), 649-653. Jesus believed that the time was fast approaching when God, rather than the client King Herod, the Procurator Pilate, or Caesar would rule. But God’s imminent and historical (on earth and within history) Kingdom, was not only a time of restoration, but potential disaster for Israel. Jesus views himself as “reconstituting” a renewed Israel (Ibid, 316-318). According to Wright, Jesus calls for Israel not to be militant in its views towards Rome (317); Jesus views himself as the “Son of Man” prophet, and Messiah-King called to step in the place of Israel to experience God’s judgment. In Wright’s view, Jesus understands himself to be Messiah, the “anointed one” who will accomplish God’s purposes and usher in the time of restoration where God will rule as King over the people (318). Also, it is important to note that many differing views of what the “Age to Come” would ‘be like,’ existed in the Post-Exilic era. E.g, Isaiah 2:1-4 envisions a peaceful Kingdom for all the nations of the world. By contrast, Joel 3:9-12 for a violent judgement (and reversal of imagery from Isaiah) for the nations.

the Dead Sea community. An apocalyptic sense of the dualism of history, in which ‘this present evil age’ will be finally set right by God in the “age to come,” is a central message and belief amongst many first century prophets such as John the Baptist. This dualist message is also to be found in the letters of Paul of Tarsus during his itinerant journeys around the Mediterranean and Levant. Journeys that took place during the time just after the crucifixion. In other words, Jesus’ message is not only quite similar to other apocalyptic thought of the time, but his life span is situated directly within the time frame best understood as comprising an apocalyptic worldview. Given the centrality of the ‘coming of the Kingdom’ in Jesus’ message, according to these scholars, one is best able to understand him in this broader apocalyptic context. Doing so, these scholars argue, provides the best hermeneutical key for interpreting the authentic sayings of Jesus of Nazareth.9

The other tendency in historical-critical scholarship presents Jesus as either one who is creating a non-eschatological kingdom of inclusion and social reform on the one hand or as a “Spirit-filled” person, capable of healing, teaching, and performing wonders on the other. (Such}

---

perspectives are not necessarily exclusive of one another. But again, it is not my intention to delve into these interesting debates. I am simply providing a thumbnail sketch of the positions merely to illustrate how the nascent notion of ‘kingship or sovereignty’ in the first century referred to either “God, or ‘God’s kingdom,’” in order to set the stage for the later evolution of this concept). A well-rounded integration of these ideas come from Marcus Borg who describes Jesus of Nazareth as a person filled with the “Spirit of God.”

Espousing a panentheistic interpretation of God, Borg provides an image of a “Spirit person” as one who may both experience as well as reflect a sense of the numinous. When Jesus appeared in Galilee, he apparently embodied something of the presence of God, a kind of authentic centering of the Spirit. He reflected the love of God which provided an authenticity to his actions, aphorisms, and parables. Furthermore, these teachings and symbolic prophetic actions contrasted with the conventional wisdom of the day. The image of Jesus as a teacher who spoke wisdom and lived his message through prophetic symbolic actions is shared by John Dominic Crossan. There are many similarities between Borg and Crossan, including their shared assertion that Jesus sought to bring about a type of ethical community on earth. In contrast to a future “consistent or imminent eschatology,” these scholars argue that Jesus was calling for an ideal and egalitarian

---

10 Marcus Borg, Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary (NY: HarperCollins, 2006). A “Spirit-filled” person is similar to Geza Vermes’ assertion of Jesus as Hasid. There was a tradition in the Galilee region of such persons filled with the spirit and a life of prayer. For example, Elijah, Honi the Circle Drawer, or Hanina ben Dosa, all of whom represent charismatic Judaism and are represented in the Talmud. See Geza Vermes, Jesus the Jew: A Historian’s Reading of the Gospels (NY: Macmillan, 1973); Vermes, Jesus and the World of Judaism (PA: Fortress Press, 1984).

11 Borg, Jesus, 196; 241.

community on earth, beginning right there in Palestine. The connotations associated with calling for a ‘Kingdom of God’ would have been understood as extremely dangerous politically, even treasonous, in the world of the Roman Empire where there was no ‘King’ but Caesar.\(^\text{13}\) Jesus’ use of parables, according to Crossan, were therefore deliberately provocative. The imagery invoked by Jesus’ analogy between a mustard seed and the Kingdom of God provides one clear example.\(^\text{14}\) The mustard plant, Crossan tells us, was actually a wild shrub, one that would quite easily grow out of control and pose a danger for the health of the garden or a field of grain. And the notion of the birds nesting in its branches would invoke a sense of dread in anyone who feared for the healthy growth of the seed and grains. The mustard seed grows where it is not wanted, and does so at rapid rates. It is a wild bush that others try to control, having found it an invasive threat, a threat with dangerous connotations.\(^\text{15}\)

According to Crossan, to speak of the Kingdom in this way demonstrates the way in which this notion of an alternative ethical community—albeit a community that is explicitly described ‘politically’ as a Kingdom—presented a political threat and challenge to what Borg has called the “Imperial pre-modern domination system.”\(^\text{16}\) This refers to the system of structural injustice in which approximately one or two percent of the elite urban rulers extract wealth from

\(^{13}\) Borg, Jesus, 259 where Borg refers to a “participatory eschatology.” Crossan, similarly, has phrased this, “present or sapiental Kingdom” or “ethical eschatology.” Their views are quite similar, and both are opposed to “future” or “imminent” or “consistent” apocalyptic eschatologies. Borg claims that NT passages suggesting future eschatology are typically post-Easter interpretations, for example see Borg, Jesus, 255. Some passages Borg or Crossan cite as representative of “imminent eschatology”: “If it is by the spirit of God that I cast our demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you” (MT 12:28; LK 11:20); also: LK 17:20; MT 13:44-45; MK4:26-32; MT 23:13; LK 11:52, as a few representative examples they commonly refer to.


\(^{15}\) John Dominic Crossan, Jesus, 65.

\(^{16}\) Borg, Jesus, 81-92.
the ninety-eight or nine percent of the agrarian peasant population. A system enforced by the Roman military legions (and Herodian or other ‘client’ King’s armed forces) and ‘legitimated’ by Roman Imperial theology.\(^\text{17}\) Within this context, Borg and Crossan describe a Jesus’ movement that was trying to build an alternative “kingdom” through non-violent resistance to the reigning Kingdom of Rome.\(^\text{18}\) The “Kingdom,” for these scholars, is precisely this growing ethical community on earth that is willing to engage in non-violent resistance to the Roman system of oppression.

From this very brief overview of the historical Jesus, the scholarship seems to suggest two, broadly construed visions, of Jesus’s relationship to the concept of “King.” In neither typology does Jesus appear to refer to himself as King.\(^\text{19}\) In the apocalyptic Jesus model, Jesus is announcing the future arrival of God’s Kingdom—a Kingdom ruled by God rather than Rome or Herod. In the “social reform” model of Jesus, the scholarship suggests that Jesus, and the Jesus movement itself, was about constructing an alternative ethical community based on a “participatory eschatology” in which members live out ethical obligations and participate in

---


\(^{18}\) For example, Borg, *Jesus*, chapter 9.

\(^{19}\) For example, James Dunn in examining the “pre-Pauline formula” in Romans 1: 3ff asserts the majority interpretation of scholars is that “the gospel concerning God’s son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of Holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord” was likely an early Christian “apologetic use of Psalm 2:7.” An apologetic use that was saying that Jesus the man was “adopted by God,” and thus an example of “adoptionism.” Since the Psalm 2:7 reference to “son of God” is a messianic title—and an example of an early Hebrew ‘anointing of a new King ceremony,’—applying this title to the post-Easter Christ is an example of how “Kingship” titles such as “Son of God” were *applied* to Jesus, rather than a claim he made in his lifetime. See James D.G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* 2nd ed. (MI: Eerdman’s, 1989), 33-36.
God’s work of bringing a Kingdom of Love, justice, and fairness on the earth. Again, whether Jesus announced a coming Kingdom of God’s justice—one in which we are expected to participate by bringing about justice in the here and now—or if he announced a future event that God would bring about with a restored Israel and Kingdom of Justice is not directly relevant to our project. In either case, the notion of ‘king’ or ‘kingdom’ is quite different from that which will develop in the post-East interpretations. The Christological evolution that occurs, after the Easter event, continues past the councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon where Christ becomes the *Pantocrator*, and is understood as *homoousion* with God. The metaphysical Christ as King is then the condition for the possibility of new developments such as the *corpus mysticum*. From the likely historical beginnings of Jesus as the one who announced the coming of a Kingdom of justice, the prophet from Nazareth becomes the announced: the King and Sovereign *Pantocrator consubstantial* with the Godhead.

This evolution from Jesus who announces the Kingdom, to becoming consubstantial with the monotheistic God of Israel, happened gradually and overtime. Already within the New Testament there are some well-known elements that hint at just such an evolution. Since the time of William Wrede scholars have noted, for example, how Jesus responded to Peter’s assertion that “Jesus is the Messiah” with the strange command to not to tell anyone (MK 8:30). The likely explanation is that Jesus did not claim to be a Messiah during his lifetime but only after the crucifixion did the early “Jesus movement” community began to make this messianic

---

20 Historical consensus exists only around the understanding that crucifixion was a Roman form of execution that was reserved for those deemed “insurrectionists” or other “political threats” to the direct rule of Rome or its ‘client Kings’ such as the Herodian dynasty in ancient Palestine. Jesus was executed by Rome because the Empire interpreted Jesus’s actions and words to be challenging the “Kingdom of Rome.” Jesus announced the “Kingdom of God” which was a rule based on justice represented in the Torah rather than rule by power that characterized the “Roman Imperial domination system.”
proclamation. In other words, the gospel of Mark is already an interpretation, probably attempting to deal with issues in the “Markan” community where people began to ask why it was that the claim (of being the Messiah) did not appear to have been made during the lifetime of Jesus. Similar questions that seem best answered as a result of ‘Christological evolution,’ may also be seen in the development of the gospel of John, which was probably written towards the end of the first century. This gospel presents Jesus as making high Christological claims such as the famous “I am” sayings.\textsuperscript{21} In this case we have the reverse issue of what was observed by Wrede in Mark. Why, one may ask, if Mark was written some forty years \textit{before} John’s gospel, do we not see such high Christological statements in the gospel attributed to Mark? Such assertions were unlikely to be forgotten. Why would the author of Mark leave such statements out?\textsuperscript{22} The point of course, is that such dilemmas, and many others like these, can only be satisfactorily accounted for given the idea of a Christological evolution that begins within the New Testament itself.\textsuperscript{23}

The evolutionary process continued beyond the first century, with thought worlds and cultures merging and interacting in various ways.\textsuperscript{24} The impact of Greco-Roman philosophy,

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{21} Borg, \textit{Jesus}, 47.
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{22} Borg, \textit{Jesus}, 47.
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{23} For clear discussions of the “criteria” used by scholars as well as a clear account of Christological evolution see L. Michael White, \textit{From Jesus to Christianity}, (NY: HarperCollins, 2004). See C.F.D. Moule, \textit{The Origin of Christology}, (UK: Cambridge, 1977) for discussion surrounding the issue of whether it is more appropriate to see these “developments” as “evolutionary”—meaning in this case, the notion of a historical evolution such as I am asserting, similar to the History of Religions school of thought on Christological issues—or should scholars adopt a “Developmentalist” approach that says that people began to become more aware of the fullness of divinity that was always already there in Jesus although people were not able to understand it fully at the time. In other words, the “seed” was already there it just took time to “see it.” This view may be found in Richard Bauckham, God \textit{Crucified: Monotheism & Christology in the New Testament} (MI: Eerdmans’s Press, 1998).
\end{flushleft}
particularly Stoicism and of course, Platonism, Middle Platonism, and Neo-Platonism can hardly be overstated, but are unfortunately outside the scope of this project. The interaction, most especially with Greek philosophical concepts, allowed the application of discussion of “substance,” or ousia, to be applied to the emerging doctrinal constructions of God and the Logos. With the decision surrounding the creed proclaimed at Nicaea, the evolutionary process that we are interested in here has reached its climax. And by 381 C.E., the revised version of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed refers to God as the “all governing [pantokratora]” as well as the “Lord Jesus Christ…of the same essence as the Father [homoousion to patri]…through whom all things came into being…and will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead. His Kingdom shall have no end [telos].” The transition from the Jesus who announced the coming Kingdom into the Christ who is now the sovereign King has, therefore, evolved through the complex interactions and merging of several cultural concepts. The impact of the


27 Notions of “high Christology” occurred before Nicaea, of course. In the New Testament Gospel of John (I am sayings); later letters such as Hebrews, Colossians, Ephesians, for example. And in non-canonical works such as Shepherd of Hermas. Typically, however, the “high-Christology” in these texts convey an identity between the post-Easter Jesus with an angelic figure, some personified attribute of God, or an elevated hero of the Jewish tradition (such as Enoch). The basic point is that Second Temple Judaism had many “intermediary” figures of a semi-divine nature, thus allowing a precedent for situating the post-East Jesus in an “elevated” status. See for example, John Dunn, Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation, 2nd ed. (Mi: Eerdmans, 1989); Larry Hurtado One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 41-92.Also, see Alan F. Segal, “‘Two Powers in Heaven’ and Early Christian Trinitarian Thinking” in The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity. Edited by
doctrinal formulation was enormous. Elizabeth Johnson describes well how this emergent doctrine was interpreted in the world of Roman antiquity.

The image of Christ consequently assumed contours of the male head of household or the imperial ruler, a move correlated with similar development in the idea of church office. Christ was then viewed as the principle of headship and cosmic order, the ruling king of glory, the Pantocrator par excellence, whose heavenly reign sets up and sustains the earthly rule of the head of the family, empire, and church. Obedience to these authorities was obedience to Christ; disobedience to them called into question one’s allegiance to Christ himself. Thus co-opted, the powerful symbol of the liberating Christ lost its subversive, redemptive significance.\(^{28}\)

This is indeed a large evolutionary shift from the Jesus who was calling for a Kingdom of justice and love to replace or reconfigure the ‘religion’ of power that was indicative of Rome and its Imperial domination system. Furthermore, these emergent doctrinal formulations of high Christological sovereignty became a foundation for their novel use in the Medieval world. If the category of consubstantiality articulated at Nicaea enshrined the notion of sovereignty in all subsequent Christological doctrines, then the construction of the “two nature” Christology articulated by Cyril of Alexandria and defined at Chalcedon became the condition of the possibility that allowed morphing these ideas into the concept of the corpus mysticum.\(^{29}\)


example, by 1200 C.E. Simon of Tournai articulated a concept of two bodies of Christ.\(^{30}\) The idea of “two bodies,” Simon explained, described the “individual” as well as the “collective” bodies of Christ—the Church and Christendom. This new “sociological” description of the Church, using the established Christological categories defined at Chalcedon, simply became an elaboration or development that occurred from the shifting political context of Europe at the time. The way in which this complex development of the Medieval Church into the *Corpus Ecclesiae Mysticum* occurred has been brilliantly charted by Ernst Kantorowicz. Kantorowicz explained that although the notion of “Christian society” as *corpus Christi* has its roots in the letters of Paul, the concept of *corpus mysticum* first gained prominence during the Carolingian era.\(^{31}\) It was the monk Ratramnus of the monastery Corbie that first used the term *corpus mysticum* to distinguish the Eucharist from the “proper and true body” (*proprium et verum corpus*)—the “individual” body of Christ.\(^{32}\) It was only in the mid-twelfth century that these terms switched meaning, likely as a result of the debates over the nature of the Eucharist.\(^{33}\) Therefore, by 1150 the phrase *Corpus Ecclesiae Mysticum* was applied to the “organized body of Christian society united in the Sacrament of the Altar.”\(^{34}\) And so it was that by 1302, Pope Boniface VIII issued *Unam Sanctum* stating that the One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church

\(^{30}\) Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, 2016), 198.

\(^{31}\) *Kantorowicz, The Kings’ Two Bodies*, 195-96. For Paul’s use of the term see I Corinthians 12:12.27; For the use of the term by the authors of Colossians and Ephesians see Colossians 2:19; Ephesians 4:4 and 5:13.

\(^{32}\) *Kantorowicz, The Kings’ Two Bodies*, 195.

\(^{33}\) *Kantorowicz, The Kings’ Two Bodies*, 196. The debates ranged over the issues relating to transubstantiation and the “spiritualized” interpretation of the Eucharist such as expressed by Berengar of Tours.

\(^{34}\) *Kantorowicz, The Kings’ Two Bodies*, 196.
“represents one mystical body, the head of which is Christ, and the head of Christ is God.”

And most importantly for our purposes here, this vision of the whole Church headed by Christ—and visibly headed by Christ’s representative Roman Pontiff on earth—was understood to include all the various nascent political entities as *subordinate to and within* this *Corpus Mysticum*. The very notion of Sovereignty was now understood not only as the mystical body of Christ but as the embodiment of legal and economic direction on earth—*Corpus Christi Juridicum*. As Kantorowicz explained, the visible Church was now a “body politic, or a political and legal organism, on a level with the secular bodies politic which were then beginning to assert themselves as self-sufficient entities.”

The next stage of this fascinating evolution takes place in the wake of the Reformation. Although this process of development first occurred in England, it soon emerged throughout European courts. Queen Elizabeth’s lawyers in the later quarter of the sixteenth century borrowed heavily from the symbol of corpus mysticum and transferred it to the nascent state in England. The background and immediate issue for these jurists lay in the potential instability of the interregnum—the period between the death of a monarch and the instillation of a new crown. The lawyers found a solution in the concept of the “King’s two bodies.” The Christological connotations are once again employed in this legal abstraction. Basically, the argument stated that the monarch has two bodies: a natural mortal body as well as a corporate body politic that

---

35 Kantorowicz, *The Kings’ Two Bodies*, 194.

36 Kantorowicz, *The Kings’ Two Bodies*, 194. Also see Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica*, III, QQ. VIII. Articles I-VIII. Aquinas discusses “Of the Grace of Christ as He is the Head of the Church.”

37 Kantorowicz, *The Kings’ Two Bodies*, 197.

38 Kantorowicz, *The Kings’ Two Bodies*, 197.
exists eternally. Hence the phrase, “the king is dead, long live the king.” The concept of the “Royal We,” in which the monarch speaks as the eternal representative of the people is also thought to be justified through this legal construction. In this way, the jurists laid a legal construction that allowed for the enduring monarchy, and the unbroken continuation of the state while attempting to cut off challenges to the monarchical succession. Clearly the later failed as the seventeenth century conflicts would prove, although the legal fiction of the “Two Bodies” did allow for the sempiternity of the state itself. In any case, the concept was described by Justice Harper, a jurist of the time, in the following account:

The king… has two bodies, the one whereof is a body natural, consisting of natural members as every other Man (sic) has… the other is a Body politic, and the Members thereof are his Subjects, and he and his Subjects together compose the Corporation…and he is incorporated with them, and they with him, and he is the Head, and they are the Members, and he has the sole Government of them.

The Body Politic delineated the boundaries of the commonwealth, establishing power and transcendent authority over the subjects. The monarch was the sovereign representative of the people, the Head of the state and its members. And just as with the earlier representations of Christ or the Pope, the Monarch’s sovereignty over the state and its members could demand sacrifice, complete faith and trust, and perfect obedience. As the Head and Representative over the sovereign boundaries of the state, the monarch could also define who was “within” or “outside” the body politic. Notice here the theological connotations of sovereignty that have migrated to the secular: obedience, faith, sacrifice, the transcendent authority and power over

40 Kantorowicz, *The Kings’ Two Bodies*, 407.
everyone within the Body, the ability to define who is “inside or outside” similar to God’s ability to define the “elect over the reprobate.”⁴² Sovereigns have the power to tax, demand military service, and to arrest those who do not follow the law. The sovereign, however, is above the law, being its source. Furthermore, the members of the body were “fully” unified and represented under the Sovereign Head of the body. So, when the monarch’s natural body died, the “soul” of the Corporate Body Politic continued, becoming “incarnate” in the next monarch.⁴³

This evolution of the theological idea of Sovereignty thus transitions and disperses within the secular. Nevertheless, political sovereignty continues to bear the traces of the theological concept. Although the first modern liberal nation state emerged in the Netherlands in 1568 after their successful revolt from the Habsburg empire, it is in England, with Thomas Hobbes, that we see an analytic account of a state that seems to me to be a midway place between Monarchy and the emerging notion of national sovereignty.⁴⁴ Importantly, Hobbes insists on a conception of the state that is grounded on a “covenant” or consent rather than Divine authorization. By contrast, the medieval notion of the Corpus Mysticum perceived all “nascent political entities” to be subordinated to and within the universal Church. There were, of course, the previous conflicts over investiture during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, but there was never any serious question over where ultimate authority lay during that period. In Hobbes’ construction, however, the sovereign determines the law as well as stands above the church (in his case, the Anglican

⁴² These attributes of Sovereignty—whether theological or in their secular incarnation—are discussed from multiple angles in Saul Newman, Political Theology (MA:Polity Press, 2019).

⁴³ Kantorowicz, The Kings’ Two Bodies, 13.

Church). Hobbes envisions the state of nature as a brutal and selfish condition. The moral theory he employs is one of relativism:

> But whatsoever is the object of any man’s (sic) Appetite or Desire; that is it, which he for his part calleth Good: And the object of his Hate, and Aversion, Evill; And of his Contempt, Vile and Inconsiderable. For these words of Good, Evill, and Contemptible, are ever used with relation to the person that useth them: There being nothing simply and absolutely so;  

It is for entirely rational, albeit self-interested reasons, that all persons will understand that if they might be able to leave this condition of nature, they ought to. No individual safety or possibility of developing culture could be possible under such brutal conditions. Therefore, Hobbes argues that human beings, being rational as well as selfish, can understand that the natural right (jus), suggests that one is free to seek self-preservation. Furthermore, the natural law (lex), shows that one is obligated to do whatsoever is necessary to secure one’s safety. As rational creatures, therefore, Hobbes suggests one can derive a “fundamental law of nature” that one ought to seek peace if at all possible, otherwise be prepared to defend oneself from all other “selfish” persons. Since no one could possibly defend oneself against all others, Hobbes derives the “rational principle” that one should therefore be “willing to lay down this right to all things; and be contented with so much liberty against other men, as he would allow other men against himself.”

---


so as well. The central point to this thoroughly pessimistic view of human nature is the way in which the social covenant is arrived at out of rational, self-interest, and the consent of human beings. The power of the sovereign is derived directly from the fact that self-interested citizens gave up their right “to all things.” It is irrelevant, for Hobbes, whether the sovereign arose out of conquest or by actual election. Sovereignty is never bound by the law because it is the source and legitimation of that law. Any new implementation of law is, often enough, a violent rupture from what preceded it. Nevertheless, for Hobbes, the Leviathan, is a “mortal god,” and all citizens become a part of this organism of the state. Whether the sovereign is an aristocracy or parliament, monarchy or other form of government, citizens are “personated” by the Leviathan as they become part of the Whole, the Sovereign that rules for them.

The concept of sovereignty has thoroughly transitioned into the state with Hobbes’ theory. The Leviathan, the sovereign secular state is no longer grounded on a Divine will but a secular power over the church itself. In the Leviathan we see Max Weber’s well-known formulation of sovereignty wherein the Sovereign has “a monopoly of legitimate coercion over a given territory.” Furthermore, the Sovereign is said to be the mysterious force that unites the multitude of individual citizens into a Unity. As Hobbes famously phrased this:

The Multitude so united in one person, is called a Common-Wealth, in Latin CIVITAS. This is the Generation of that great LEVIATHAN, or rather (to speak more reverently), of that mortal God, to which we owe under the Immortal God, our peace and defense… the Common-wealth is One Person, of whose Acts a great Multitude, by mutual covenants one with another, have made themselves every one the Author, to the end he

50 Hobbes, Leviathan, Part II, Chapter XVII, 140

51 Hobbes, Leviathan, Part II, Chapter XIX, 151.

may use the strength and means of them all, as he shall think expedient, for their Peace and Common Defense.53

Jean-Jacques Rousseau argued that Hobbes was simply projecting the sickness of modern civilization onto a hypothetical state of nature. In the actual world, Rousseau would claim, it is precisely within the state of nature that humanity may best flourish.54 Only the artificial desires and hierarchies of “civilization” are what create the conditions of competition, violence, and poverty that Hobbes incorrectly identified with “primitive” living. Rousseau was a populist who advocated for a theory of direct democracy. Unlike Hobbes who asserted that one must surrender all rights to the government, or Locke who claimed one should give up only some rights, Rousseau argues that each person should give up all rights to a community of equals. For Rousseau, it is precisely because giving up all rights to all others in the community means that no one is giving up rights to any particular group or individual.55 In this peculiar way, Rousseau is able to claim that society is founded on self-interest (albeit without asserting a pessimistic view of human nature) and yet everyone is able to retain their freedom since they have not surrendered anything except to the community of equal members to which they belong.56 Here we see a direct democracy in which popular sovereignty is expressed in a pure or absolute form. Despite this appeal to democratic populism, however, there remains a specter of authoritarianism in Rousseau’s thought. The goal of this particular form of popular sovereignty is to form a virtuous

53 Hobbes, Leviathan, Part II, Chapter XVII, 140. Clearly, for Hobbes, the potential threat of tyranny is less of a concern than his fear of anarchy.


society. When society is virtuous a communal self or “general will” emerges. This notion is not simply an appeal to the will of a democratic majority. This would imply that persons are voting in terms of their perceived best interests. Rather, the general will is an expression of a whole that is greater than the sum of the parts. Therefore, the general will is the expression of what is in the best interest of the whole. The citizens are sovereign in actively making laws, at least that is, when expressed as the virtuous general will. The laws are then implemented by the elected government (probably a parliament) which also means that the citizens are the subjects of the state. Along with a powerful legislator, censor of the arts, and a deistic civic religion which provides for the sanctity of the state, the system nevertheless is a powerful expression of popular sovereignty. In Book I, chapter 7 of The Social Contract, Rousseau infamously asserts that those who do not act or obey the general will should be “forced to be free.” Rousseau seems to be suggesting a concept of freedom that Isaiah Berlin would refer to as “freedom to” as opposed to a “freedom from” coercion. The former notion implies that freedom is more than a mere absence of restraint. One is truly free when they have discovered the higher virtue or higher purpose that constitutes living according to some true ‘good.’ Freedom, for Rousseau, is not the freedom to do anything whatsoever one wishes. True freedom is found in belonging to the general will, the “republic or Body Politic.”

56 Ibid, as Rousseau explains “In short, each giving himself to all, gives himself to nobody; and as there is not one associate over whom we do not acquire the same rights which we concede to him over ourselves, we gain the equivalent of all that we lose, and more power to preserve what we have.”

57 Ibid, 55.


We have seen how the term “sovereignty” has evolved and transitioned in totally unforeseeable and surprising ways. I would suggest that this emerging concept of a Nation-State, or a Sovereign State, has, as seen in the examples presented here, began to exhibit elements of the “sacred” that was once the province of ecclesial institutions and religion. Similarly, we see this in the Westphalian system articulated in 1648—the first international recognition of the sovereignty of nation-states. Then after the American and French Revolutions, the notion of popular sovereignty, expressed as the “will of the people” moved from theory to reality. Indeed, after observing the civic republicanism of the United States, Alexis de Tocqueville noted that American popular sovereignty appeared to him as if “the people reign in the American political world like God over the universe. It is the cause and aim of all things, everything comes from them, and everything is absorbed in them.”

Again, it is worth looking once more at this concept of sovereignty, both in its theological as well as in its transitioned place in the secular state. My point is not to advocate for any positive position, but rather, to describe something of the evolution and ‘traces’ of sovereignty through its many metamorphoses, especially from the theological into the secular. And, in particular, I hope to point out how the notions associated with (theological) sovereignty “filled” the space left by the absence of explicit ecclesial or public religion. So let us look again at some

---


61 Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, translated by Gerald E. Bevan (NY: Penguin Books, 2003), 71. Tocqueville found the value of equality admirable in the U.S., yet he warned of the danger of a “tyranny of the majority.” For Tocqueville, valuing equality at the expense of liberty runs a danger of an enormous pressure for conformity. It was in voluntary organizations that he claimed such “art of associations” would mitigate dangers of conformity or an over concentration of power from a “paternal state” that people may seek to replace the old European feudal obligations and associations. Popular sovereignty is a good thing for Tocqueville, but the institutions of liberalism and the like were needed to mitigate and make diffuse any concentration of power. Tocqueville thought this was more or less the case in the U.S., as he observed it at least.
of the aspects traditionally associated with the idea of the Sovereignty of God. God understood as a transcendent sovereign authority was traditionally conceived as having the power to create the eternal and natural law as well as having the power to revoke this law temporarily, as in a miracle. The Sovereign God expresses a unified will, and thus establishes power over all things. The establishment of sovereign “borders” over the entirety of the world creates the sense of those who are saved and those who are amongst the reprobate. Sovereignty justifies and demands trust, loyalty, obedience and sacrifice. Therefore, as these connotations of sovereignty transition and disperse within the secular state, the secular sovereign may also exhibit these aspects.

Sovereignty is expressed in the “will” that formulates the law. In the American and French revolutions, for example, it is true that sovereignty grounds the law through violent force that breaks away from the previous context. Is it that Sovereignty flows from the law rather than the other way around? In modern nation states, “we the people” are the legitimating and mysterious power behind the right to demand sacrifice (for example by collecting taxes, sending people to war), or the demand for obedience to the law and so on. Sovereignty, so the argument goes, must be a monopoly of power—individual people cannot take the law into their own hands—and the sovereign is representative, a sovereign power and transcendent authority expressing the unitary “will of the people.” Besides the fact that “all people” (women, non-whites, and for a while non-property holding white males) were never originally part of any concept of “the people,” many forces today, within the neoliberal system of global commerce certainly obscure the understanding and the will of the people. For example, the current neoliberal worldview—which we will briefly turn to next—involves multiple and diffuse biopolitical forces that shape subjectivities through mediatization (including social media), indebtedness, ‘politics of fear’ and
securitization, and through representation (this later idea is seen especially through the revolving doors of wall street, corporations, and Washington)—all of which problematize any simple notion of the “will of the people.”  

However, in order to remain focused on our main point of this section—the evolving transitioning of the theological connotations of sovereignty and unforeseen emergent ethical situations—we must skip rather roughshod over history and look ahead at the emerging situation and tendencies that began to appear towards the end of the cold war. Towards the close of this era, we see the emerging neoliberal proclivity to absorb everything within the global market. Consumerism, medical care, prisons, education, pension funds, even aspects of the military are privatized and absorbed within the market. Even the individual is perceived as a commodity and

\[62\] For discussion of these concepts of indebtedness, securitization, mediatization, and representation and their complex roles in shaping subjectivities and discussion on how to form new subjectivities and new forms of resistance see Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Declaration (NY: Argo Press, 2012), 9-48; Empire, especially 195-198; Multitude. This idea of “disengaging” from ideological or biopolitical power to form “singularities,” or to form new subjectivities is a major theme of much of the interdisciplinary (Biblical, Theological and Philosophical) studies on St. Paul as well.

\[63\] It may be interesting to pause one moment to remember that at the end of the Cold War there was a flurry of new proposals for mapping the emerging global scene. Many argued that some form of Liberal democracy and capitalism were inevitable, all other forms of political/economic models having fallen to their own internal contradictions. The idea being that even if such movements re-emerged they would once again fall. Francis Fukuyama, The End of History and the Last Man, (NY: Free Press, 2006); Thomas Friedman, The Lexus and the Olive Tree, (NY: Anchor Books, 2000). A few examples of alternative suggestions were that it would be ecological destruction and “resource shortages”—water, oil, etc, that would be where conflicts were most likely to emerge. Michael T. Klare, Resource Wars : The New Landscape of Global Conflict (NY: Owl Books, 2002). Added to this is the idea of climate change causing mass immigration, resource shortages, and such that would lead to failed-states and global conflict. Christian Parenti, Tropic of Chaos: Climate Change and the New Geography of Violence (NY: Bold Types, 2012). These notions are important and need to be considered in the background of this project as well, especially the ecological concerns. And there was the claim that conflict would appear along the “fault lines” between civilizations. Samuel Huntington, The Clash of Civilization: and the Remaking of World Order (NY: Simon & Schuster, 2011). Work such as Kathryn Tanner’s, Theories of Culture, from the last chapter is but one of the many critiques offered of this later idea. The point I wish to make here, is that the initial enthusiasm with emerging neo-liberalism has—as we will see more detailed below—led to feelings of resentment (and disappointment their lives did not improve as much as they hoped) as, for example, eastern European countries transitioned to capitalism and meritocracy. Resentment that led many to move to the fringe right-wing, for example in Poland and Hungary. See Anne Applebaum, Twilight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism (NY: Anchor Books, 2020). Similarly, for some in the US, UK, and West Europe, it wasn’t resentment from disappointment over the transition
investment—an investment in education, healthcare, skills and virtually all other aspects of one’s life. Under the tutelage of advocates of neoliberalism, governments began removing or easing up on capital restrictions, environmental codes or agreements, exchange rate controls, and other regulations. The power of the sovereign state was waning as the neoliberal notion of the deregulation of “market forces” became the almost magically preferred way to improve the overall lot of people around the globe. Transnational corporations, financial institutions and insurance companies orchestrated the flow of global capital, while nation states were left with managing local public services on the one hand and becoming mere technocratic facilitators of global commerce on the other. In short, the power of nation states and national sovereignty was receding. Global neoliberalism, however, set the stage for financial disaster. The promise or hope of post-nationalism began to fade. Not only are poorer nations exploited for their resources, to meritocracy, but global changes and demographic and perceived cultural changes that has led to “resentment.”


Newman, *Political Theology*, 134-135. Note also how notions of God’s sovereignty may be interpreted as having transitioned into the economic sphere. The invisible hand of God becoming the invisible hand of the market; the concept of money as having an almost metaphysical aura; And, of course, see Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, translated by T. Parsons, (London, Routledge, 2001). This idea of theological concepts blurring, blending, and leaving their historical effects is important to this expanded sense of doctrinal development; Doctrines, and their effects—ethical and otherwise—are to be taken into consideration. For example—sovereignty—is this a political, philosophical, or theological problem? All of the above, I suggest, and this should be part of the ethical focus on doctrinal development as well.

The global situation is very neatly summarized by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri as a global “Empire” that involves three levels of global commerce. There is the global form of a *lex mercatoria* or the legal contracts signed by multinational corporations to facilitate trade and production. Nation states are essential for enforcing trade rules and formulating bilateral or multilateral trade agreements. Hardt and Negri include the World Trade Organization at this second level. A third level is the “regulatory apparatus of the global economy” which is found in the World Bank, which does try to provide real assistance to countries, although they are often stymied by the concept of National Sovereignty from getting resources directly to people, and the IMF that operates by assigning various levels of austerity measures to nations in order to best serve the global flow of capital. See Hardt and Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (NY: Penguin, 2004), 167-179. Also see Hardt and Negri, *Empire* (Mass: Harvard, 2000).

Sovereignty is more diffuse during globalization. Nation states, the UN, various NGO’s, the World Bank, IMF, and WTO, global financial institutions, transnational corporations, media conglomerates, big tech companies, and other actors may perhaps be thought of as little centers of sovereignty.
and left out of much of global decision making, but in recent years both Europe and the United States are witnessing the much darker and disastrous calls for Nationalism or a heightened “Sovereignty.” A growing number of people seem to be drawn to a re-politicalization of the world in which national borders and walls are built and an imaginary sense of “us versus them” is on the increase. The very best ethical hopes for internationalism, and the apparently emerging ideas of a “post-national” or a “one world” outlook that globalization was beginning to open up, became under a neo-liberal threat. If notions of national sovereignty were giving way to an increasing optimism of a global community, there is now a growing threat from those on the extreme “right-wing” who are calling for “National Sovereignty” based on racial, national, cultural, or religious identity—even though such notions are porous at best and in some ways, simply imaginary. The dangerous right-wing fantasy of patrolled walls and borders and some return to an imaginary earlier time feeds the delusion of establishing some sovereign (and almost transcendent) point of authority that provides meaning and guards against the insecurities of those who feel “left behind” in a rapidly changing world. The concept of sovereignty continues to emerge and re-emerge in new ways—especially in times of crisis. The Reformation and Age of Revolutions were two such previous periods (as we have briefly seen) when crises in the social order emerged and the notion of Sovereignty evolved, transitioned, and left its “history of effects” within the secular realms. Threats (as well as perceived threats) to the global order today may be creating fragmentation, disorder and confusion that is opening a dangerous ‘conceptual space’ for a new distorted form of Sovereignty.67 But first, let us turn briefly to this context

67 I am drawing explicitly on an argument of Claude Lefort, “The Permanence of the Theologico-Political?” in Political Theologies: Public religions in a Post-Secular World edited by Hent de Vries and Lawrence E. Sullivan (NY: Fordham Press, 2006), 148-187. For Lefort, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries witnessed the elimination of divinely appointed monarchies which led to a fragmentation of the unified grounding or “origin of
before returning to our examination of this mysterious and puzzling theological/secular notion of Sovereignty and what this unexpected “emergence” of the original doctrine implies about the way in which we should consider the process of doctrinal development.

**Brief Interlude:**

**Global Context for the Emergence of Recent Calls for Heightened National Sovereignty**

The global context that we turn to involves the 2008 global financial recession. This complex situation had many causes. Pressure to repeal regulations of credit derivative markets and capital requirements in late 1990’s led to dangerous financial activities. Predatory lending by the mortgage lenders, proprietary trading priorities for the investment banks, and the reckless combing of risky subprime mortgages into complex derivatives that were given higher credit ratings than they deserved set the stage. Mortgage lenders were not concerned about the possibility of borrowers defaulting on their debts because they would sell the right to collect on law and knowledge” (161). There is an “empty place”—symbolically—left by the monarchy with the entailment that society is no longer a represented unity of “the people” (159). So, religiously infused symbols as well as representations or concepts of nation, ethnicity, race and so on, may, in times of social crisis or threats of disorder and change—’slip’ into the vacuum, the empty place left by the notion of the transcendent sovereign authority. This idea is also explicated clearly in Saul Newman, *Political Theology*, see especially pages 16-20. For example, Newman states that “the depoliticization of theology leads only to the theologisation of politics” (16). Or again, Newman explains how “religion, in its absent presence in modern societies, creates a space of transcendence in which new forms of power emerge and proliferate. The space left by the disappearance of religion from the public political space is the structural void that modern forms of power try to fill, essentially reoccupying its position of transcendence” (19). It is the concept of “sovereignty” that we have been discussing that transitions, or merges, into ideas of the state or nation. Today, the new “emergence” of some on the fringe of the political rightwing calling for “more sovereignty”—but this time presented in terms of nation, race, or religion—is the precise concern or warning we see in Lefort. This unforeseen “ethical emergence” is what I am trying to get at (in this example) of doctrinal implications and considerations being broad enough to include bringing such developments to mind, explicitly, when we work to construct or re-construct doctrine. What are the implications for how we should think of Christological doctrines? Or of God? More of this later. For now, It should also be noted that the idea of political concepts being basically translations from theological terms over the course of history, as well as the assertion that a “state of exception” in jurisprudence being similar to a miracle as exception to God’s natural law comes from Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, translated by G. Schwab. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 36.

68 For example see Adam Tooze, *Crashed: How a Decade of Financial Crises Changed the World*, (Penguin, 2019)

69 Adam Tooze, *Crashed*, 60-64, 70.
these debts to large investment banks such as Goldman Sachs or Lehman Brothers. Such investment giants would bundle these debts into tranches. These tranches were then packaged into complex derivatives known as collateralized debt obligations (CDO). Unfortunately, the investments in the CDO’s looked safer than they actually were, because they received higher credit ratings than they actually warranted. Securities insurance firms such as AIG would insure these CDO’s by selling credit default swaps (CDS) on them. CDS’s were basically insurance on the CDO’s. Because of the CDS’s, credit rating agencies such as Standard & Poor’s or Moody’s evaluated these bundles of high-risk tranches (CDO’s) and often gave them—incorrectly it turns out—AAA ratings, which in turn, gave Hedge Fund investors, and other investors a false sense of security. But because of having dropped the requirements for the securities insurance firms to have capital set in reserve, when investment banks like Bear Stearns began to default, AIG and other insurance firms were unable to pay for the CDS (insurance on the CDO’s) they had sold. They simply did not have enough money in reserve. Panic ensued. Soon AIG and other firms that sold insurance began to collapse. As the bubble collapsed, the impact reverberated throughout the global financial system. This complex and volatile situation led to the global ‘great recession’ of 2008 and the financial insecurity and ruin that followed. Movements such as Occupy Wall Street, as well as a general feeling of financial insecurity, grew

---

70 Adam Tooze, *Crashed*, 56.
71 Adam Tooze, *Crashed*, 52,56.
72 Adam Tooze, *Crashed*, 149-155.
73 Adam Tooze, *Crashed*, 151-152.
74 Adam Tooze, *Crashed*, 170-184.
exponentially. The sense that nobody really understands the complex global financial system has led to (understandably) profound distrust of transnational corporations—but more ominously, it has also led to increasingly vocal calls for a “return to” heightened forms of ‘national sovereignty.’ As a result of the changes and insecurities in recent years we have seen a global resurgence of this “Nationalist” sentiment.

There should also be a frank acknowledgment of other global shifts as well. In 2003 the US engaged in a “preventative war” in Iraq. The mismanagement, lack of careful planning, and shameless lack of consideration for the cultural and religious complexities of the region were a recipe for disaster. To make the unfortunate situation worse, US officials decided to forbid any Iraqi citizen affiliated with the Baath party a chance to have input or a career in the new regime. This led to understandable frustration, but it also, unfortunately, became one factor that led to the emergence of ISIL-Daesh in the region. The rise of this violent and puzzling group caused countless deaths and suffering in the region. After the bombing of the ancient Al Askariya Mosque open violence between Shia and Sunni erupted. Mass emigration followed. The destabilization of the region has also allowed Iran to extend its influence into Iraq and

---


76 Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr, *War and the American Presidency* (NY: W.W. Norton, 2004), 25. This was not a “preemptive war,” but was indeed a “preventative one.” Iraq had nothing to do with the 9/11 attacks. If they ever had any weapons of mass destruction (as the joke goes) Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz or Cheney would know; they still have the receipts. Nothing was found. These individuals were involved in various ways with the U.S. collaboration with Saddam Hussein in his war on Iran. The CIA provided the means for the devastating WMD attacks on that country.


beyond to support the violent Assad regime of Syria and Hezbollah in Lebanon.\textsuperscript{79} Since the 1979 revolutionary blowback from the 1953 coup, Iran has espoused anti-Saudi sentiments. In turn, the Saudis feel threatened by Iran. As the U.S. provides military aid for the Saudis, the regional geopolitical /sectarian conflict extends into Yemen. The violence, suffering, and mass migration that follows from these events is staggering. And yet this small paragraph barely touches the surface of the conflict in the region. But the mass emigration, changing demographics, and xenophobia that results from these global shifts is enormous.\textsuperscript{80} The mass emigration following this suffering in the middle east has led to an “immigration crises” and added to the rise of anti-immigrant prejudices and calls for a “‘heightened’ national sovereignty” throughout the western world.\textsuperscript{81} And too often politicians and other commentators appeal to various types of ‘politics of fear’ in order to exacerbate this.

\textbf{The Return of a Darker Form of Sovereignty}

Along with—and because of—the tensions emerging from global demographic changes, mass immigration, and the 2008 financial disaster, a dangerous “resurgence of authoritarian,


\textsuperscript{80} John B. Judis, \textit{The Nationalist Revival: Trade, Immigration, and the Revolt against Globalization} (Columbia Global Reports, 2018), 95-96. Judis states that the number of refugees from the wars of the middle east and North Africa rose from 259,000 in 2010 to 627,000 in 2014. In 2015, in response to the war in Syria and the chaos in Libya, the number of asylum-seekers skyrocketed—to 1.32 million in 2015 and 1.26 million in 2016”(95). Judis explains that these, unfortunately, coincided with terrorist attacks, many of which “were credited to the ISIS group”(95). From 2014 to 2017 there were 36 terrorist attacks across Europe and the UK. Judis cites a 2016 Pew poll the “found large majorities in Poland, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, UK, Sweeden, and Greece the thought admitting refugees would “increase domestic terrorism”(96). Further, Judis cites a 2014 Pew poll in the EU that states majorities in Italy, France, UK and 44 percent in Germany wanted less immigration into their countries. Majorities in Italy and France believed “immigrants were taking their jobs and social benefits”(95). Judis continues citing that following these developments, extreme right-wing movements began to emerge across Europe and the UK, all of which in some degree or another are calling for an increase in the type of “National Sovereignty” with anti-immigrant sentiment, building walls, and sometimes a sense of sovereignty associated with culture, ethnicity, religion and downplaying or denigrating liberalism and multiculturalism. The hopeful optimism from the 1990’s for a “post-national” or “cosmopolitan project” is under threat (32).
nationalist and anti-immigrant populism in Europe, the United States and elsewhere represents a major challenge to liberal values of openness, toleration and human rights…the specter of national sovereignty has returned in our midst.”\textsuperscript{82} From Brexit to the democratic threat Derrida refers to as “autoimmunity,” and with the types of blustery rhetoric from figures such as Viktor Orban and his Fidesz party in Hungary, Law and Justice in Poland, Duterte in the Philippines, Putin in Russia, Erdogan in Turkey, or Trump and his most vocal allies in the United States, there is an increasing call for “building walls, nationalism, anti-immigration, and appeals to ‘politics of fear’ and policies of racism—all of which falls under this distorted category of ‘national sovereignty.’”\textsuperscript{83}

I would suggest that this rising issue of “national sovereignty” and its accompanying anti-immigrant outlook (coupled with the global ecological crisis that we will examine in the next section) sets the stage for serious ethical concerns that should occupy the minds of ethicists, theologians, and philosophers. The connotations associated with the concept, “sovereignty,” are both a theological as well as a political philosophical problem. I am not convinced by claims that this a question or concern solely for political philosophy, and not for theology. In fact, it is difficult to keep language of ‘religion’ and ‘secular’ separate. First, the ‘history of effects’ from the Judeo-Christian heritage has certainly left its mark upon all aspects of culture in “the West.”


Ideas blur, and the influence of religion on politics, economics, and culture generally, is quite pervasive. To be sure, we are able to abstract and discuss these ideas in distinction to a degree, but I do think that the two notions “auto-deconstruct” the closer we scrutinize them.

Furthermore, I would argue that the sense of doctrinal development, that we discussed in Chapter Three, is an expanded model—one that can be extended in such a way, as to recognize and include, the way in which doctrines, or any ideas, not only have no “enduring essential core,” but also evolve and interact with their environment in unpredictable ways. And if we take seriously our commitments to an integration of ethics and theology it seems, to my mind at least, theologians should indeed examine both the origins of this concept of ‘sovereignty,’ its sources, and the ways in which it has received theological justifications. Sovereignty is a theological idea in its origins after all. Therefore, I would suggest that the theological and political concepts of sovereignty are topics that should be of great concern for theologians and ethicists. The point of this section is to provide one example of an evolution of a doctrine—one that moves towards the limits of what traditionally constitutes theology, challenges those borders, and provides an extreme example of how a doctrine can evolve in totally unexpected and unforeseeable ways. By tracing the development and transitioning of this doctrine we can see the ‘bottom up’ emergence of a new ‘top down’ threat in the form of potentially violent, racist, calls for Sovereignty. (It does not matter whether this is essentially “theatrical” if the very real threat exists amongst the growing number who ‘believe in it’).84 To my mind, theologians should look at doctrines as “flows of information” and not as having an essential “res.” And when we do so, we can see how doctrines do interact with the environment and change in unpredictable ways. Perhaps in this

---

expanded sense of development, this is roughly analogous to J.H. Newmans’ ‘type of logical sequence’ development. For Newman, additional doctrines such as ‘purgatory’ or ‘reconciliation’ develop as a ‘logical’ development from the doctrine of ‘baptism.’ Although this probably could be used to ‘justify’ any development when viewed in hindsight historically, perhaps an expanded non-res information flow sense of doctrinal development could accept the ‘blurring’ of boundaries I am thinking of here. At any rate, any discussion of doctrinal development today should indeed also include a recognition of how the doctrine of sovereignty has multiple ethical implications. If we continue with my suggestion of considering doctrinal development along the metaphors of “information flows” rather than res-like ossified essences, then it is not a surprise that such a doctrine could evolve in such unexpected ways. And at the same time, we may be able to discuss the need to edit and revise such a doctrine as well as consider the ethical implications as they have emerged in the ‘secular’ spheres. Furthermore, it is vital that we see the importance of choosing between a retreat into nationalism, isolationism, and anti-immigration stances (associated with the concept of “Sovereignty”) on the one hand, and striving towards a ‘one world solution,’\textsuperscript{85} or perhaps moving towards one day a ‘federation of the world’\textsuperscript{86} on the other hand. Global problems require a global approach to solutions.

Theologically, we should be willing to think ‘otherwise’ in terms of religion and doctrinal formulations in the early twenty-first century. Doctrines that contribute to such problems need to be addressed.

\textsuperscript{85} Peter Singer, \textit{One World Now: The Ethics of Globalization} 3\textsuperscript{rd} edition. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016)

\textsuperscript{86} Richard Rorty, \textit{Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth century America} (MS: Harvard University Press, 1999), 3.
Because of space, all we may do here is look briefly at some of the ways that thinkers have proposed dealing with a rethinking of sovereignty. It must be brief because it is not the point of the chapter. Entire volumes are dedicated to proposing solutions to issues of political theology. The point of the chapter was to trace out the unexpected development of doctrine and show how the model outlined in Chapter Three may be able to accommodate both the radical evolution of this particular doctrine of ‘sovereignty’ and the emergent ethical implications manifest from its development. What follows is merely a brief sketch of some possible avenues that one could pursue in any attempt to re-construct any doctrine, associated with ‘sovereignty.’ The idea is to do so with the express purpose of having an ‘ethical lens’ (this is intentionally a broad term here) in mind when doing so.

At risk of oversimplification, I think it fair to suggest that attempts to deal with this issue may be said to either appeal to the Sovereignty of God to critique injustice, or they seek to reimagine the idea of God as immanent, and without “Sovereignty” as such. A third approach argues that no political theology whatsoever is possible without the some smuggling in of Sovereignty and the problems associated with that concept. Due to space, other than the brief

---

87 For example, we see this view in Radical Orthodoxy and Liberation Theologies. The Radical Orthodoxy position seeks to revitalize pre-modern ideas to provide a robust Christian worldview and seek social justice. Starting with the idea that the ‘secular’ is a constructed concept that tragically rejected the truth of a graced world, a mistake that led to various “pagan” religions of power such as unrestricted capitalism, political ideologies, the sciences, and especially the “atheistic” social sciences that have left humanity empty and without purpose. Radical Orthodox thinkers argue for an Augustinian-Platonic “illuminationist” epistemology and a metaphysics of participation where there is no distinction between natural and supernatural grace. For these thinkers, the world is already filled with God’s grace. They argue that only a return to a strong ecclesiology, liturgy, and theology can counter the dangerous effects of National Sovereignty, capitalism, or other issues of social justice. We must counter national sovereignty with the Sovereignty of God.

88 Mark Lilla, The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West (NY: Vintage books, 2008). Also see Saul Newman who asserts that political theology will only ever end up sacralizing “political sovereignty.” In his judgment there can therefore never be a “radical political theology.” Newman, Political Theology, 40. Newman utilizes Max Stirner’s anarchistic politics of egoism here. Any attempt such as Feuerbach’s move to reconcile the contradiction produced by the “projecting” of concepts that truly belong in the human community onto a projection
footnote references, I will speak on the second option. These approaches often appeal to Pantheism, or Process Thought, or a combination of the two. This is a natural maneuver given that the turn towards immanence is conducive to countering the transcendence associated with ideas of sovereignty. Spinoza’s thought follows a precise logical deductive method: Numbered definitions and axioms are followed by numbered propositions that are logically derived from those definitions and axioms. Starting with the idea of substance, Spinoza defines his concept of God. Spinoza explains that “By substance I understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, that is, that whose concept does not require the concept of another thing, from which it must be formed.” Substance, for Spinoza, is sui generis, infinite, and unconditional. God is absolutely infinite, consisting of an infinite number of Divine attributes that are expressions of the eternal essence of God. Our human minds, being limited in understanding, are only capable of screen of Divine perfection back within the human community, will, according to Stirner, only end up “divinizing” some humanistic concept such as “the People,” “Human rights,” and so on. These later concepts drown out the individual person, the singularity, or in Stirner’s terminology, the unmensch. Stirner would likely claim that any attempt to subsume the radically singular individual under any “identity claim” would be to absorb all the distinctiveness and leave only a “series of representable categories, to be legally inscribed within the liberal state or catered for by the capitalist market,” from Newman, Political Theology, 57.

89 There is very interesting work in Mary-Jane Rubenstein, Pantheologies: Gods, Worlds, and Monsters, (NY: Columbia University Press, 2018). Rubenstein’s study of Pantheological thinking stresses the way in which pantheistic ideas of God level the hierarchical dichotomies of transcendent/immanent, mind/matter, reason/body, and so on that are tainted with both gender and racial biases. Her work here is also connected with recent discussions of “new materialisms” for example, Catherine Keller and Mary-Jane Rubenstein editors, Entangled Worlds: Religion, Science, and New Materialisms (NY: Fordham Press, 2017).

90 Interesting work inspired by both Process Thought and Darwin found in John F. Haught, The New Cosmic Story: Inside our Awakening Universe, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017); Also very interesting work that combines this with concern for ecological ethics, Catherine Keller, Political Theology of the Earth: Our Planetary Emergency and the Struggle for A New Public, (NY: Columbia University Press, 2018).


92 Spinoza, Ethics, Part 1, Definition 6.
of cognitively grasping two of these attributes: thought and extension. Importantly, for Spinoza, everything that we see is a modification of God, which again, is the sole existing substance. In other words, there is One Substance, while everything else is a mere mode of the being of that Infinite Substance. Furthermore, as Spinoza explains “Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God.” All people and events are modifications of this One, Infinite substance. Just as steam, ice, and liquid water are “phase transitions,” or “modes of the being of H$_2$O,” all things whatever, may be thought of as “modes” of God’s infinite being.

If the transcendence and unity of God are inextricably connected with the concept of ‘sovereignty,’ than the scholar Clayton Crockett intentionally draws upon the legacy of Spinoza in order to counter this tendency. Crockett states that for Hobbes, “sovereignty is constructed by opposing the unity of the sovereignty to the multiplicity of the multitude.” Crockett seeks to utilize the theology of Spinoza to produce a “counter-theology of the Multitude.” In fact, for Crockett, Spinoza is the “paradigmatic representative of popular sovereignty.” By deconstructing ‘sovereignty’—both theologically and politically—Crockett turns Hobbes or Schmitt upside down in order to urge forth a radical political theology.

---

93 Spinoza, Ethics, Part 2, Proposition 1.

94 Spinoza, Ethics, Part 2, Proposition 2.

95 Spinoza, Ethics, Part 1, Proposition, 14.

96 Spinoza, Ethics, Part, Proposition, 14.

97 Spinoza, Ethics, Part 1, proposition, 15

98 Clayton Crockett, Radical Political Theology (NY: Columbia University Press, 2013), 60-76. Crockett’s reading of Spinoza draws upon Deleuze and Negri in order to think creatively about ‘deconstructing’ the Sovereignty of God as well as the ‘sovereignty’ of States.

99 Clayton Crockett, Radical Political Theology, 47
Theological suggestions for re-thinking the idea of sovereignty associated with Christological doctrines are also voluminous. Such maneuvers may or may not require the immanentization that Crockett argues for. A “low” historical Christology could certainly accompany an insistence on a “permanent Revolution” towards doctrine that we saw in H. Niebuhr, K. Tanner, or Tillich for example. Space precludes the attention that this re-thinking deserves, but I think that the Christological constructions of liberation theologians and feminist scholars suggest something of several possible approaches here. In short, perhaps a reconsideration of “kingship” and the kind of “sovereignty” associated with Biblical images of Jesus that suggest a King “that comes to serve, not to be served” provide the type of thinking that may stave off and help avoid the negative aspects of sovereignty traced in its evolution above. We may read this imagery in Elizabeth Johnson’s Trinitarian study and suggestion of “Jesus-Sophia.” When James Cone explains that “to know Jesus is to know him as revealed in the struggle of the oppressed for freedom,” we read the kind of Christological emphasis that would certainly help in any re-thinking of the Christological aspects of ‘the doctrine of sovereignty.’

---

100 Clayton Crockett, *Radical Political Theology*, 47.

101 Crockett and Robbins, however, have been adamant that any form of theological transcendence (Radical Orthodoxy, Liberation Theology, Neo-Orthodoxy, for example) will not be capable of leading to real social justice because of the dangers inextricably associated with “sovereignty.” Radical democracy must be coupled with “immanent theological thinking” according to Crockett or the former will fail. For example, see Crockett, *Radical Political Theology*, esp. 49.74.

102 For example, Matthew 20:28.


Evolving Doctrine of Creation

In this section we will begin with a brief overview of Aquinas’ deep and Sacramental Universe-encompassing Doctrine of Creation in which “the whole universe together participates in the divine goodness” and in which “every grade of being” adds to the “perfection of the universe.”\(^{105}\) Next we will look at Jose Casanova’s argument that as the Medieval overarching framework of Christian thought over all other disciplines and domains of knowledge declined—through a complex process of the “differentiation” of those disciplines into their own “spheres of influence” and individual methodologies—the robust Medieval Doctrine of Creation also receded in influence.\(^ {106}\) After the Enlightenment, much of theology became devoted to more epistemological concerns and the Doctrine of Creation devolved into apologetics. These changes encouraged “Creation” to be viewed as a “stage” in which Divine-human encounter and Salvation history is to take place. Charles Taylor describes these processes as “nature shorn of the sacred.”\(^ {107}\) With the rise of industrial capitalism and increased pollution much of Christian theology had an emaciated Doctrine of Creation inadequate to meet the challenge of ecological degradation. With the synergistic moves of some conservative Christian belief and Big Oil and corporations, a dangerous trend emerged. Fortunately, in more recent times, we are seeing a resurgence of ecologically responsible notions of the Doctrine of Creation. The point of this section is not to provide “solutions” so much as to, once again, trace the evolution, de-evolution, and development of this doctrine. The model of doctrinal development outlined in Chapter Three provides, to my mind, a more adequate account of these evolutions then models that discount (1)

---


that doctrine understood as “rules” or “principles” can and do evolve since there is no enduring or unchanging essence somehow immune to development within them; (2) the importance of the irreducible intertwining of any doctrine with everything else within the “environment” involving a bottom-up and top-down evolution between any doctrine and all else within “culture”; and (3) the importance of always keeping a critical eye or ethical turn in mind when analyzing, judging, or constructing any doctrine.

The medieval theological worldview contained a much more robust and encompassing vision of the Doctrine of Creation than one tends to find espoused today. It should suffice to look at Thomas Aquinas’ understanding of ‘creation’ in order to illustrate something of this point. As a student, Aquinas absorbed the lectures of his Dominican teacher Albert of Lauingen whose lectures probably first exposed him to the Neo-Platonic ideas of pseudo-Dionysius, Augustine, and Proclus.108 The Platonic or neo-Platonic idea of “emanation,” provided a useful metaphysical metaphor for expressing the idea that (1) God created all things; (2) that coming from God they are good; (3) that all things in some sense must “participate” in this emanating power of God. And Aquinas would also have heard Albert lecture on Aristotle, Avicenna and Peter Lombard’s Sentences.109 This helps us understand the way in which Aquinas’s massive Summa Theologica expresses elements of Neo-Platonic “Emanationism” and “Participationism” as well as the more Aristotelian emphasis on the immanent and embodied material reality. It also illustrates how Aquinas’ theological system exemplifies the all-encompassing value of the entirety of

---

107 Charles Taylor, A Secular Age, 80.


creation.\textsuperscript{110} The whole universe comes from God as Creator, and it returns to God as Redeemer.\textsuperscript{111} All things ‘participate’ in the Divine source of grace and receive their being and ground in God. And by drawing upon Augustine’s work on the Trinity, Aquinas stressed the way in which all creation bears something of a “trace” of the triune God within their being.\textsuperscript{112} One can see how each created being has goodness in and for itself, “or for other creatures, or for the whole universe, or for the glory of God.”\textsuperscript{113} For Aquinas, every creature, and indeed the entire Cosmos, has an intrinsic goodness and purpose. Everything receives its being by participating in the very life of the living God. Aquinas expresses the fullness of the Medieval concept of the doctrine of Creation by explaining that

\begin{quote}
...the principal good in things themselves is the perfection of the universe; which would not be, were not all grades of being found in things. Whence it pertains to divine providence to produce every grade of being (ST, 1a. Q 22.art 4).
\end{quote}

Aquinas articulates the notion that the doctrine of creation reflects something important about the reality of God. If God is unsurpassably Good and is the \textit{ipsam esse subsistens} that sustains all else, how could any \textit{one} entity ever reflect this Divine Perfection? There needs to be a multitude of varying beings in order to express something of the Goodness of the Whole. All beings reflect something of the perfection of the Creator which allows us to speak analogically of

\begin{itemize}
\item[110] Aquinas ST. 1a. Q 6, Art. 4. God alone is perfectly good as pure act but all of creation is good by participation so that by “the similitude of the divine goodness belonging to it, which is formally its own goodness, whereby it is denominated good. And so of all things there is one goodness, and yet many goodneses.” Also see ST 1a. Q8 art. 3 where Aquinas states that “God is in all things by His power.” And building on this “For all existing things, in so far as they exist, are good,” ST 1a. Q 20, art. 2.
\item[111] O’Meara discusses this \textit{Exitus et Reditus} scheme and implications in, \textit{Thomas Aquinas}, 56-64
\item[112] Aquinas, ST 1a. Q 45. Art. 7.
\item[113] Aquinas, ST 1a. Q,70. Art 2.
\end{itemize}
God (the *analogia entis*). Aquinas explains how the condition of the possibility of expressing God’s goodness adequately requires a multiplicity of variation in the order of being:

For He brought things into being in order that His goodness might be communicated to creatures and be represented by them; and because His goodness could not be adequately represented by one creature alone, He produced many and diverse creatures, that what was wanting to one in the representation of the divine goodness might be supplied by another. For goodness, which in God is simple and uniform, in creatures is manifold and divided; and hence the whole universe together participates in the divine goodness more perfectly, and represents it better than any single creature whatever (ST, 1a. Q 47 art. 1).

So, for Aquinas, every creature, every entity, and indeed the whole of the Cosmos has an intrinsic goodness and a place and purpose within the Divine plan. This is a sacramental and cosmological outlook that views the interrelatedness of all creatures and the entire universe as part of the divine plan moving from creation to the final redemption of the whole of reality. Here we glimpse the making of a robust Doctrine of Creation that might have prevented or mitigated the ecological degradation that would occur centuries later, first on the European, and then, American continent. So, what happened? The causes for how this rich and all-encompassing doctrine of Creation receded over time is complex.\textsuperscript{114} I will discuss only some of the events and conceptual changes that led to this diminishing of the doctrine.

Jose Casanova and Charles Taylor provide an analysis of the intricate processes involved in the deeply interconnected areas of secularization and modernization.\textsuperscript{115} The world of Medieval and Renaissance Europe was a world infused with Christianity. Christendom constituted the culture and intellectual climate of the era. In the universities, theology was understood to provide


the over-arching framework for all other areas of inquiry and all other disciplines. The trivium and quadrivium of a liberal education as well as disciplines of law or medicine were interpreted, studied, and pondered within the larger encompassing zeitgeist of Christian thought. Similar to the medieval sacramental cosmology just examined, the medieval academic worldview understood every topic as related and ultimately to be understood in reference to God. When the Reformation erupted on the continent, and the universal authority of the Church became questioned as well as weakened, we may interpret these complex occurrences as the beginning of certain changes to the intellectual and cultural climate that would soon affect theology and all academic disciplines. For example, the call for individual liberty (for example, in religious conscience), the emerging autonomy of the Monarchy, and the nascent stirrings of nation-states, all can be traced, in part, to this era. And with the many intellectual currents such as nominalism and voluntarism already in the background, the observation of contingent nature and empirical a posteriori knowledge rose in acceptance. With the religiously motivated re-emphasis on all aspects of nature within the arts, many shifts were occurring, shifts that would lead to the age of reason.

It was the age of Enlightenment that first witnessed what Casanova refers to as the

---


117 There were many schools of thought in the era. Nominalism, of course, was only one such view. See Alister E. McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation*, 2nd ed. (MA: Blackwell, 2004); also, Heiko A. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Later Medieval Nominalism* (MA: Harvard University Press, 1963).

118 Taylor, *The Secular Age*, 93-95.

119 Here again, I am running rapidly and roughshod over important and subtle changes and varying emphases, but for the sake of time and to stay focused on our goal—tracing the doctrine of creation and its de-evolution, this is regrettable but unavoidable.
“differentiation and secularization of society.”\footnote{Casanova, Public Religions, 20-25.} In short, Casanova asserts that the various disciplines began their gradual “differentiation” from under the all-encompassing framework of Christian theology and oversight. Science, economics, politics were the first to separate and begin to develop their own “internal and lawful autonomy.”\footnote{Ibid, 20. Casanova is quoting Max Weber here.} The various arts, medicine and other disciplines soon followed suite. Each area of thought began to develop its own methodology and legitimate procedures. This of course led to the rapid advancements of modernity as well as the fragmentation of disciplines and various domains of knowledge into their own autonomous spheres. And unfortunately, along with many advancements, the rapid changes led to ecological degradation and multiple social problems brought about by the industrial revolution and rapid urbanization. The natural sciences became autonomous and largely detached from theological concerns. And for our purposes here, I wish to note how the scope and influence of Christianity receded into the realm of the private. Both the study of nature and the way in which it was typically interpreted—the cosmos and the world of nature on earth—became increasingly autonomous of any theological consideration.\footnote{Casanova, of course, continues in his work to examine several case studies in which the “secularization thesis” does not seem to be entirely settled. Further, he suggests that religion is not—now—entirely private. Religion in varying ways certainly has public influence. My point is to suggest something of how the doctrine of creation evolved or perhaps, de-evolved into epistemological concerns. As religion receded, the more robust and rich medieval doctrine of creation also receded. And with the influence of enlightenment thought, the doctrine of creation becomes more about epistemology, apologetics, (eventually ID theories), and attempts to organize}

Taylor may be interpreted as providing a deeper look into the conditions of the possibility of the processes of differentiation described by Casanova. For Taylor, the way of understanding the complex and multiple changes arising between, for example, 1500 C.E. and the
contemporary worldview, requires that we must avoid simple “subtraction stories.” For example, when charting the underlying changes leading to the receding of a sacramental cosmological outlook, it is not sufficient to assert that “superstitious” beliefs or practices where merely “subtracted” as empirical knowledge accumulated. In direct contrast to this view, Taylor asserts that new “social imaginaries” needed to be constructed in order to begin to see the world in secular terms, rather than a mere “sloughing off” of religious ideas. As a series of intricate perspectives on the nature of “self,” “time,” “society,” and the “cosmos” became newly constructed, a new social imaginary began to replace the older, previous “medieval imaginary,” with its sense of an “enchanted” and sacramental universe. These newly constructed concepts were the condition of the possibility of perceiving the cosmos within “immanent frameworks” such as “exclusive humanism.” Only with these significant

“chronologically” the events of creation—a perspective that leads to res-like ossified notions of the doctrine of creation as we will see below.

Taylor asks the question “Why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?”, A Secular Age, 25.

Taylor, A Secular Age, 22.

Taylor, A Secular Age, 171-176.

Taylor, Secular Age, 30-41.

Taylor, Secular Age, 55-59; Taylor also describes a “two-tiered religion” (63) operating on a “multi-speed system” (66) in which Medieval society was organized so that the laity (in the sense of secular) worked and primarily focused on worldly concerns while providing for the ‘religious.’ In turn the ‘religious’ prayed for society. This state of affairs, according to Taylor, led to calls for either more rigorous asceticism for the laity on the one hand, or a more lax attitude on the other from preachers of “reform” (77). The more heightened the calls for generalized asceticism (63), the more Protestant preaching pushed the laity away and opened the greater possibility of humanism (75-82).

Taylor, Secular Age, 41-42

Taylor, Secular Age, e.g, 60.

Ibid, 25-43.
alterations allowing the new “social imaginary” to emerge, was the possibility of conceiving the universe and nature itself as a mere “stage” for human action—or perhaps for Divine-human interaction—and as the theologically significant arena for salvation. In other words, the emergence of the new “social imaginary” allowed the development of a viewpoint of Nature as an autonomous sphere where human action and any Divine-human interaction may occur. It is at this juncture that Casanova’s key concept of the “differentiation process” really accelerates. And as a consequence, Christianity and Christian theology in particular may be seen as turning to more anthropological concerns. Many complex processes were at work in the gradual construction of the new social imaginaries besides the changes to the underlying assumptions behind ideas of self, society, nature, and time cited above. The differentiation of various disciplines and the possibility of viewing the world in terms of an “immanent framework” emerge through this convoluted process, but it is important to note, that much of these changes were instigated by Christian thinkers. Many of the shifts in assumption and perspective of the changing imaginaries were prompted by Christian thinkers pursuing Christian concerns. For example, for purely theological reasons, a sacramental disenchantment developed during the

---

131 Taylor, Secular Age, 542-557 for a discussion of how the changes of a “porous self” into a “buffered self” as well as the other changes in outlook behind the concepts of society, time, and the cosmos have been altered to allow for seeing the world in an “immanent frame” thus enabling a view of secular 3, with its accompanying notions of a “buffered self” leading to “cross pressures” from traces of transcendence as well as immanence, and “fragilization” and then the nova effect of numerous existential possibilities or worldviews. (see especially, 302-304). See pages 19-21; 242-269 on “exclusive humanism.”

132 The Protestant Reformation heightened the emphasis upon the Divine-human encounter as central to Christianity. The so-called turn to the self in philosophy is fairly clear with Descartes, and by the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries we see further anthropological turns such as Kant with the grounding of theology within the boundary of practical rationality, Schleiermacher with the grounding in gefühl, followed by Ritschl, Harnack and others. Interestingly, with Hegel and then with Troeltsch, there is a re-focus on reason (understood historically). This later perspective (of Hegel at least) recovered discussion of the Trinity that had gone out of fashion in the Enlightenment. And a recovery of a deeper, more robust return to a doctrine of creation is possible in Hegelian thought. Certainly, there are some signs today with Jurgen Moltmann and Peter Hodgson.
Reformation in which notions of Church rites, sacraments, and ecclesial art, come to be seen as “black magic” by figures like Jean Calvin.\(^{133}\) By emphasizing the transcendence of God while simultaneously seeking the elimination of any sacred presence within nature, it became possible to re-conceive the world of nature as “shorn of the sacred, and the limits it set for us, to re-order things as seem best.”\(^{134}\) As Taylor explains, from this shift in emphasis, humanity felt a new freedom to “rationalize the world, expel the mystery from it,” thus allowing “a great energy to re-order affairs in secular time.”\(^{135}\)

This gradual emergence of a sense of nature “shorn of the sacred” is the way in which the scope and influence of Christianity receded into the realm of the private. Both the study of nature and the way in which it was typically interpreted—the cosmos and the world of nature on earth—became increasingly autonomous of any theological consideration. The process of differentiation described by Casanova leads to the condition of the possibility of both scientific advancement and the industrial revolution. These processes, however, are ethically ambiguous. Along with the amelioration of some suffering, other forms of suffering arose from those same advancements. Furthermore, the effects stemming from these changes allowed the expanding pillaging of natural resources and the subsequent profusion of pollution back into the environment. For the purposes of this project, we must stay focused on the way in which these complex changes described above are relate to this later concern. The main point here, is that as


\(^{134}\) Taylor, *Secular Age*, 80.

\(^{135}\) Taylor, *Secular Age*, 80.
Christianity receded into the private realm, so too did the robust Medieval Doctrine of Creation recede, becoming shaped and influenced by the Enlightenment epistemological concerns that we have mentioned throughout this work. Nature, “shorn of the sacred,” led to profound changes in the way that the Doctrine of Creation became articulated. The Age of Reason valued the idea of correct methodology, discovering the sources of reliable knowledge (whether empirical and inductive or a priori axioms and deductive), individual self-determination, and in general, the rational defense of any claim to having justified, true beliefs. As early as the seventeenth century, we find theologians such as Francis Turretin developing a systematic theology that is purported to be “scientific” and “propositional” in structure.¹³⁶ Turretin was the inspiration for the later “Princeton School” of theology whose nineteenth century exponent was Charles Hodge. Hodge also sought a “scientific theology,”—one that would counter the influence of Hume, Kant, and Hegel so prevalent in most other American and especially European schools. In order to achieve this, Hodge looked to the “direct realism” of the Scottish Philosopher, Thomas Reid. The Princeton theologian described his “scientific” and “propositional” approach to theology in the following terms:

> The Bible is to the theologian what nature is to the man of science. It is his (sic) storehouse of facts; and his method of ascertaining what the Bible teaches, is the same as that which the natural philosopher adopts to ascertain what nature teaches.¹³⁷

Although there are multiple avenues that we could pursue, the direction that I will follow here will examine the intellectual heirs of Hodge and his general approach to theological doctrine. To

---


my mind, much of theology from the Enlightenment through the nineteenth century (at least in America) and well into the twentieth century has adopted this epistemological and propositional emphasis and approach to doctrine. With the shrinking of the organic, rich, and full Medieval doctrinal approach to Creation, most ecclesial denominations have shifted to a more anthropocentric or personalist theology. Creation is reduced to a mere “stage” where the drama of Salvation History takes place. And in particular, many Evangelical theologies focus on a conception of the Doctrine of Creation that reflects these changes most clearly—and I believe with dire consequences. In many Evangelical circles, for example, pondering the mystery of “Creation,” is more about defending the notion that God is the cause of the Cosmos, rather than the much richer organic sense of God as interrelated with the universe as Creator, Sustainer, Transformer, and Redeemer. This later notion values the plenitude of created beings—their value in and of themselves, the value in relation to one another, and the value to the rest of the Cosmos—and finally the value of everything in reference and relation to God that one finds in Medieval doctrines of Creation. For example, when discussion of Doctrines of Creation are reduced to arguments such as the Kalam cosmological defense, or current “Intelligent Design” assertions, certain tendencies will almost surely follow as we will see. Much contemporary thought regarding the doctrine of creation tends to focus on the epistemological questions surrounding God’s causing or fine-tuning the universe, the laws of nature or initial conditions

---

138 This trend towards a diminished doctrine of creation and emphasizing epistemological concerns can be found in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Catholic theology as well. This was especially the case with the Neo-Scholasticism of the time. See Fergus Kerr, Twentieth Century Catholic Theologians (MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 1-16. Also Fergus Kerr, After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism (MA: Blackwell, 2002), 17-34 for the concerns addressed here. There were many other schools of thought of course. For example see Gabriel Daly, Transcendence and Immanence: A Study in Catholic Modernism and Integralism (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).
immediately after the inflation of the universe, the origin of life, or evidence of design in life itself.\textsuperscript{139}

When the function of doctrine is considered as primarily propositional and epistemological, the theological imagination becomes almost exclusively focused on the universe, the human and non-human animals, and nature as if they are isolated created ‘things.’ Things that we are trying to assure ourselves and others, \textit{really are} “caused, designed, and sustained” by God. This takes our attention \textit{away from the value} of nature itself. The doctrine becomes reduced to an intellectual activity of analyzing propositions about parts of nature—alleged irreducible complexity, probabilities of information patterns—and arguing about the conditions under which they may be verified or falsified. The consequence, however, is nature interpreted as being basically “other” or apart from the transcendent God, and the immanence of God is diminished or interpreted as God’s ability \textit{to act} in the world. This later admission is all that prevents the Doctrine of God—considered in light of this notion of ‘Creation,’—from being essentially Deistic. At any rate, the result of these shifts in the perception of this doctrine is that nature becomes “shorn of the sacred.” And the point that I wish to emphasize is the way in which this rather large shift in the Doctrine of Creation has contributed to the neglect of ecological concerns on the part of Christian theology—until relatively recently. As this Doctrine of Creation has transitioned into these thinner forms—in the wake of the differentiation process that shifted ‘religion’ into the private role of ‘spirituality’—the sense of an embodied sacramental and cosmological understanding of the interrelatedness of both human and non-

\textsuperscript{139}See for example, Katherine Sonderegger, “Creation,” in \textit{Mapping Modern Theology: A Thematic and Historical Introduction}, edited by Kelly M. Kapic and Bruce McCormack (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 97-120. This chapter and the entire book is really very excellent. I find this textbook very useful in many ways.
human life existing interdependently within the broader ecosystems of the world, has been severely diminished. In short, this emaciated Doctrine of Creation takes attention away from the intrinsic value of nature. The world is reduced to a mere “stage” where salvation history occurs between God and humans. Furthermore, thinking of the doctrine of creation as referring to propositions about “intelligent design,” or “irreducible complexity” within cellular structures, or seeking to identify some version of Big Bang cosmology with a doctrine of creatio ex nihilo, are often merely slippery rhetorical moves that are only exposing theology to the problems associated with any “God of the gaps” maneuvering.140

Moreover, this type of “essentializing” of doctrine—the turning of doctrines into ossified propositions that end up “weaponized” against other denominations, or religions—runs the very real risk of becoming another tool of exclusion and provides ideological cover for certain types of political and business interests. It is no coincidence that big oil companies, certain large

corporations, several well-funded think tanks, and some conservative Christian churches have found common purpose.\(^{141}\)

This is important for our discussion because the ecological crisis facing all of us will require a serious collective response if we hope to stem the dangerous tide away from further devastation and towards sustainability and health for the whole world. The claim that there exists human induced ecological degradation hardly needs any further empirical support, nor is it the purpose of this chapter to attempt to do so. Yet it needs to be recognized that the 2015 Paris Climate agreement expressed the need for the world to actively work to reduce atmospheric warming to at least 2 degrees Celsius with the express goal and urgency of encouraging a (more hopeful) 1.5 degree Celsius temperature limit above preindustrial measurements.\(^{142}\) Yet when the United States, under the Trump administration, decided to leave this agreement, the impetus and moral urgency for other industrialized nations to remain in the agreement lost much of its force. Following this development in which the U.S. abrogated its responsibilities, a U.N. report noted that “even if countries meet their pledges to cut emissions…warming would be more than twice the 1.5 degree target.”\(^{143}\) As of the time of this writing, the U.N. once again has had to warn that atmospheric warming is “on track to warm by more than 2.7 degrees Celsius” by the end of the


\(^{143}\) Ibid.
century if the “action plans” most recently articulated by the 191 nations is all that is implemented. It remains to be seen what comes of the United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26), as well as what action it will produce. A new administration in the U.S., and global talk of pledges to end deforestation, as well as cutting methane emissions by 30 percent by 2030, for example, will be tested as time proceeds.

In keeping with our narrow focus on the developing forms of the Doctrine of Creation, however, it is an interesting and positive development that within a numerically significant area of academic theology there has been a resurrection of sorts of a deeper form of the doctrine that emphasizes the value of nature and the interconnectedness of all things. To my mind, any new formulation or discussion of a Doctrine of Creation should involve this perspective of an explicit ecologically focused notion of Creation. It may well be the case that any retrieved or reconfigured Doctrine of Creation will require the formation of new, creative metaphors in order to assist both our imaginations as well as our motivation to take the declining health of our planet seriously. In order to do this, Sallie McFague’s theology may be viewed as an attempt to encourage Christians to conceive of God in Panentheistic terms for the sake of our planetary survival. Christians can contribute to environmental sustainability, McFague contends, by first changing their notion of the Divine. It is through the changing of potentially dangerous and “time-hardened” metaphors in our theological imagination that will allow Christianity to positively contribute to our current environmental crisis. By recognizing the metaphorical

---


character of all language, we may begin the development of new theological metaphors and models.\textsuperscript{146} The essence of metaphorical theology,” writes McFague, “is precisely the refusal to identify human constructions with divine reality.”\textsuperscript{147} Metaphors utilize a concept from one context and apply it onto another. This is why metaphor “always has the character of ‘is’ and ‘is not’: an assertion is made but as a likely account rather than a definition.”\textsuperscript{148} McFague claims that religious language understood in terms of metaphor is both theologically appropriate and conducive to ecological sensibilities. Because notions of God, self and the world have been constructed in various ways in different times, they are amenable to being re-constructed anew. As McFague puts it “Language that supports hierarchical, dualistic, external, unchanging, atomistic, anthropocentric, and deterministic ways of understanding these relationships is not appropriate for our time.”\textsuperscript{149} Outmoded models and metaphors that construe God as monarchical and patriarchal while conceiving of nature as existing solely for human purposes are theologically wrongheaded and dangerous in our current era. Such models are no longer viable in this age of environmental degradation. In light of an increasing recognition of an ecological, relational, organic, and evolving universe, McFague claims that it is most appropriate to reconceive God in terms of divine immanence. This theology of creation involves considering God as Divine indwelling with a new model: the Universe as God’s body. New metaphors


\textsuperscript{147} McFague, \textit{Models of God}, 22.

\textsuperscript{148} McFague, \textit{Models of God}, 33.

\textsuperscript{149} McFague, \textit{Models of God}, 13.
McFague proposes are the rather ‘personal’ concepts of God as Mother, Lover, and Friend. A less ‘personal’ or anthropomorphic metaphor McFague utilizes is the notion of Spirit. McFague especially suggest the idea of Spirit since it “undercuts anthropocentrism and promotes Cosmocentrism.” The metaphor of the Universe as “the body of God” is meant to suggest the divine guiding of the evolutionary process and concern for all of nature. By way of contrast to the image of God as a distant King ruling over a world empty of the Sacred, the universe conceived of as God’s “body,” is a metaphor that turns towards a sacramental-incarnational theology. It is important to note that McFague is not reducing God to a mere identification with the universe. She prefers to speak of an “Immanental Transcendence.” This new model encourages a way of thinking about our relationship to nature and other non-human animals. If we meditate on the idea of the divine indwelling in all things, we might begin to grasp the profoundly “interdependent” aspect of all life and accept the “responsibility for other forms of life and the ecosystem, as guardians and partners of the planet.” We are seeing a re-imagining of our theological resources in various ways in order to develop just such an ecologically relevant Doctrine of Creation. Again, unfortunately there is no space for further discussion of possibilities, nor is it the point of this chapter to attempt to provide solutions to a reconstruction of our theological resources in various ways in order to develop just such an ecologically relevant Doctrine of Creation.

---

150 Ibid, 78-87.
152 Ibid, 137.
154 See James A. Nash, Loving Nature: Ecological Integrity and Christian Responsibility (TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), 143. Here Nash suggests the extension of Christian love of neighbor—a theme recurring in this project—to include an ecological awareness so that “our neighbors” include non-human animals and ecosystems. Catherine Keller, Political Theology of the Earth; Also, see Michael S. Northcott, A Political Theology of Climate Change, (MI: Eerdmans Press, 2013); Denis Edwards, Jesus the Wisdom of God: AN Ecological Theology (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995).
of an ecologically relevant doctrine of creation. The aim of this section was to chart something of the evolution of this doctrine over time—how it evolved and what unforeseeable ethical consequences would emerge from it.

Summary of Previous Section: Examination and Evolution of Two Doctrines

Turning to our first historical example where the meanings and connotations associated with Christ announcing the “Kingdom” or “Sovereignty” of God transitioned over the centuries until the most recent manifestations of “Sovereignty” morphed into strident calls for National Sovereignty, we can see how ethical concerns emerged that really could not have been predicted from the earliest points. We are perhaps at a point where talk of Sovereignty (either theological or political) has become dangerously apparent, and to my mind, demands ethical reconsideration, and thus provides reasons to ‘edit’ this doctrine. When a doctrine such as this becomes used as a justification for dividing people into us/them categories, when it becomes exclusive, and when it becomes solely focused on power—whether in the theological or political realms—then we should be sensitive to the ways in which the idea of ‘Sovereignty’ has become contrary to Caritas. Whatever critical analysis or ethical lens we bring to this doctrinal examination matters little to the thesis of this chapter. The point of the chapter is to attempt to demonstrate the evolution and emergence of doctrines that manifest in ways that demand moral decision making. Nevertheless, we must find ways to re-construct our ideas of sovereignty when discussing God, Jesus, as well as in the broader political arena.

Similarly, in our examination of the history of the Doctrine of Creation, we saw how doctrines may devolve as well as evolve. With no essential or enduring core, doctrines may both influence and be influenced by the changing cultural environment. And at certain points of
complexity, unexpected aspects emerge that have moral dimensions and demand moral decision making. Here I would claim that theology needs to continue the hopeful emphasis on intentional reconstruction, and imaginative new metaphors that are conducive to promoting a sacred sense of the Universe, and all the life and ecosystems intertwined within it. We saw the moral implications when the Universe-spanning sacramental Doctrine of Creation receded, and new doctrines of creation become more about apologetics and epistemology then a sense of the sacred interconnectedness of all. This ‘reduced’ sense of the doctrine is very much with us still today. There is still a tendency for certain conservative Christian groups to be closely aligned with Big Oil interests, and politicians that ignore the disastrous ecological impacts that certain policies will have on the health of the planet. If this Doctrine of Creation focuses only on defending the existence of God, and if some strands of Christianity continue to encourage only human concern for salvation, and if Nature itself, is continually viewed as a “mere stage” for the human-Divine encounter, then we are facing potentially disastrous consequences. Furthermore, if the doctrine of creation is understood only in terms of ossified propositions where Christians use all their energy arguing with each other about whether evolution occurred, or when Adam appeared in the process, or if there even was an Adam, then doctrines have hardened, devolved, and have become the ‘real’ “res” of the faith. As we saw with Augustine, ‘doctrines’ should not be the focal point of Christianity—rather, love of God and neighbor is the summation of the Law and the Prophets, as Jesus explained, and Augustine reiterated. Focusing on organizing doctrinal propositions into the historical chronology of the Bible takes one’s attention into a dangerous, exclusive, and wrong direction.
Some Concluding Thoughts

In this chapter we have looked at the unpredictable, evolving histories of two doctrines, and the unexpected moral dilemmas, effects, and concerns that emerged from them. At certain unpredictable points in doctrinal evolution, situations of moral decision making are forced upon us. It is my assertion that any critically based contemporary approach to doctrinal development needs to continually keep an ethical lens focused on doctrine, its unexpected developments and evolution, and be prepared to ‘intervene’ and reconstruct any doctrine that is contrary to the formal principle of *Caritas*. As we saw in the first chapter, Professor Wiles argued for doctrinal development to be

loyal to the past, in the important sense of ‘loyal,’ if we think not so much in terms of the translation of old formulae into new sets of words, as in terms of the continuation of the same task of interpreting the Church’s Scriptures, her worship and her experience of salvation.\(^{155}\)

Here I think we should add “ethical considerations,” as a further criterion to Wile’s necessary conditions of “exegesis, worship, and experience of salvation” for any “loyal” constructions and development of doctrine for the contemporary context.\(^{156}\) With the non-enduring, non-essentialist view of doctrinal development that I have suggested, development is unpredictable, and has no predetermined teleological end. We must ensure that doctrine reflects the “double commandment” to love God and neighbor. This is in line with the ideas of Kathryn Tanner that we examined in the last chapter. She stated that ‘motifs’ such as “Jesus as ‘the Christ,’ ‘dying and rising,’ ‘God as maker of heaven and earth,’” and the like, are the kinds of

---


\(^{156}\) It is, however, important to point out that, to my mind, criteria such as worship, exegesis, or experience of salvation, transformation, liberation etc are themselves—in Tanner’s words—“borrowed materials.” Likewise, any
themes that are important to Christian ways of life and ways of speaking.\textsuperscript{157} There does not need to be agreement amongst Christians over the precise interpretation of these ‘motifs’ (or I would say doctrine), rather, there is general agreement that the motifs themselves are important to the Christian way of life.\textsuperscript{158} Remember, Tanner asserted that these ‘motifs’ or ‘forms’ may themselves be called into question if they lead to some form of idolatry or injustice. It is worth quoting here again on this:

Christians claim that Jesus is God; that does not mean however, that some Christians might not decide in the process that the central and overriding significance that Jesus continues to have for human life would be less misleadingly expressed some other way. In short, while they set the terms for argument, the forms themselves are not immune from questioning as the argument proceeds.\textsuperscript{159}

Doctrines (or motifs) may be guidelines to Christian thinking, but we must guard against making assertions into “stable identities” or allowing them to become “reified”. Again, like Tanner who suggests that we need continual self-critique in guarding against doctrinal idolatry, we need to be open to new voices and the “borrowed materials” from the culture and others around us. As I stated in the last chapter this is, to my mind at least, similar to what H.R. Niebuhr’s “Permanent revolution within Radical Monotheism,” or Tillich’s “Protestant Principle,” were getting at. In Tanner’s words:

…we must make God, rather than some human account of God the center of one’s life. Doing otherwise, making a Christian identity a matter of allegiance to certain meanings,

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{157} Tanner, \textit{Theories of Culture}, 124.  
\textsuperscript{158} Tanner, \textit{Theories of Culture}, 125.  
\textsuperscript{159} Tanner, \textit{Theories of Cultures}, 127.}
threatens to put human ideas about God in the place that only God should fill in Christian life.¹⁶⁰

By keeping our attention open “to where the Spirit may blow,” as these thinkers suggest, we will be aided in our attempt to avoid “ossifying” doctrine. And with a purposeful intention to keep an “ethical lens” focused on every doctrine, its evolution, and its unpredictable emergence that presses on us a situation of moral decision making, we may be encouraged to reconstruct or edit any doctrine that is contrary to Caritas.

¹⁶⁰ Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 126.
CHAPTER FIVE

ASTROBIOLOGY AND THE FUTURE OF DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT

In the Introduction to this project, I stated that any new discussion of the theological category of doctrinal development should recognize certain trends that have emerged in recent decades. As noted in the Introduction to this work, it should not be surprising that the category of doctrinal development would find itself in need of development. What is curious is the fact that previous discussions of this category have basically faded from any sustained or serious discussion. To be sure, there have been historical works that deal with the historical fact of changing doctrine, but there has been little focus on the ‘process,’ or ‘theory’ of any development of doctrine. Nor has much attention been given to the question of what doctrinal development is, or how it works, in the last few decades. The reasons for this are multiple and we examined several in the first chapter.

Before looking to the summary of this project, I would like to take a moment to consider three elements that have been lurking in the background of this project: (1) First, the awareness of the changes in global social patterns. This trend involves at least two elements. One, the rapidly changing religious sensibilities and religious demographics in the world. Two, the move towards greater interconnectedness and a sense of being citizens of one world. (Here too we might include the rising of the opposite trend, in the form of the emerging threats—or reaction—to any post-national or other such developments of moving towards a cooperating global community, as we pondered in Chapter Four). (2) Second, the ubiquity of evolution. We are
becoming ever more aware of the fact that everything evolves. The entire universe is constantly evolving. And scientists are even exploring possibilities that our universe is but one of an infinite ensemble of evolving universes. (3) The special role of information theory, and in particular, the key property of transformability.

To begin with, let us briefly look at the first element—also mentioned in the Introduction—and that is of the changing social demographics. As the world becomes more interconnected Christianity must acknowledge that it is only one of many religions in our rapidly changing world. We looked at some of these statistics in the Introduction. While the number of people who self-describe as “Christian” decrease, the number of people who identify with no religion whatsoever increases. Christians comprise only a little more than thirty-one percent of the global population. And the number of people who identify as having “no religious affiliation” is about “one in six” or 1.1 billion (16%) of the worldwide population.¹

The second element I wish to briefly mention has emerged time and again throughout this project. Namely that we live in an age after the time of Darwin. Newman’s theory of doctrinal development was written more than a decade before the publication of Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection. Nevertheless, most contemporary discussions of this concept still largely ignore biological evolution even while continuing to utilize organic growth metaphors. I suspect that previous discussion of doctrinal development has intentionally shied away from any explicit language of ‘evolution’ precisely because of the concern that such talk leads to the possibility of a religion evolving to such an extent that it may morph into something else.

entirely. We will turn to this concern later in this chapter.² And finally, the third trend I wish to re-emphasize is the emerging role of information theory across disciplines. Information has an almost quasi-metaphysical aspect to it. Although I do not wish to push this idea too far, I will elaborate on what seems to be the ambiguity of information. On the one hand, information is always physical. Any communication or exchange of information requires some physical medium. Whether in the form of electrical pulses, light or radio waves, magnetic pulses, or written marks on a page, some physical medium is a required condition of information movement. At the same time, however, the ‘information itself’—the inherent meaning or message—is not entirely reducible to any physical medium. A key element of information is its transformability. In this sense, information is quasi-metaphysical, intangible, almost ‘nothing,’ yet it conveys meaning and significance. It is this aspect that I suggest may assist us in any move away from rigid, ‘res-like,’ or ossified notions of doctrine as we have seen, especially in Chapter Three. And the way in which information movement, flow and clustering may reach certain points of complexity, allowing unexpected emergent properties to produce initially unforeseeable top-down effects, was elaborated in Chapter Four. In that chapter, we saw how instances of ‘ethical emergence’ is an inextricable aspect of any complex movement of information, including doctrinal development. But before moving on, let us note how information theory is transforming many different domains of knowledge. The notions of mass/energy + information

² The concept of evolution is ubiquitous. We see it in cosmic as well as technological evolution and in interpretations of “big history.” I view this trend as connected with the emerging paradigm of information theory in so far as this later domain of knowledge is shedding much light on the former. For only a few examples, see Jared Diamond, Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies (NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 1997) for the argument that geography, geological, mineral, or material wealth and context rather than inherent ability have allowed some cultures to dominate globally. Ernest Gellner, Plough, Sword, and Book: The Structure of Human History (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Robert Wright, NonZero: The Logic of Human Destiny, (NY: Vintage Books, 2001) where Wright argues that “nonzero dynamics” allow for both biological and historical evolution that may lead to an ever more connected global world.
is increasingly viewed as the key to understanding the evolution of nature. Likewise, claims of informed chemistry or, in other words—chemistry + information = life—are hinting towards an emerging paradigm that may potentially reach across many disciplines. Likewise, cosmic, chemical, technological, and biological evolution are all being revolutionized by insights from contemporary information theories.

These three elements of changing social realities, the ubiquity of evolution, and the emerging awareness of the role played by the almost intangible and transformable information movement and flow underlying cosmic, chemical, biological, technological, and even cultural evolution, are key to the ideas laid out in this work. These three elements and their implications and possibilities are in the background of this project.

**Brief Summary of the Chapters**

Previous discussions of doctrinal development often operated with a pre-Darwinian set of categories including those of teleology and an assumption of some internal “essence” underlying all significations or representations. And as we have seen, the idea that there is some ‘res’—some ‘thing’—some unchanging enduring substance or stable Truth underlying our doctrinal representations may be part of the problem. Many of the theologians that we examined in the first chapter—as scholars writing in the wake of the Enlightenment—wrote with an emphasis upon issues of epistemology, semiotics, and doctrine conceived of as “referencing” a quasi-metaphysical “res.” This focus on doctrine as “res,” may be understood in at least two ways. First, there is the notion that doctrine itself is the “Res” of the Christian faith. Secondly, doctrine may be understood to have a res. Although there are many ways in which theologians may differ.

---

on the *process of development*—organic growth, pneumological, tradition and reflection, logical explication, dialectical, paradigm shifts, post-structural and so on—many of the authors we examined work within frameworks that consider doctrine as essentially propositional. The exceptions, of course, are Wiles and Tanner. Wiles views doctrine as something like an interesting hybrid of an instrumentalist perspective and a coherence theory of truth. Tanner, as we have seen throughout the project, may perhaps be tentatively described as working with a “radical hermeneutics,” although she describes her project simply as utilizing postmodern anthropological perspectives. Finally, in that chapter, I suggested three ‘ideal types,’ not to place any one thinker in some rigid category, but rather to enable certain salient aspects to be abstracted. Any future discussion of doctrinal development should therefore have respect for (A) tradition, (including at least Wiles’ criteria of scriptural exegesis, experience of worship, and experience of transformation, liberation, salvation for example), (B) organic metaphors, (although I suggested in Chapter Three these should be ‘updated’ or reconfigured), and thirdly, (C), the possibility of considering doctrines as hypotheses. (I tentatively suggest that thinking of doctrines as “hypotheses,” may be fruitful for a few reasons. First, the connotation of hypothesis suggests the provisional aspect and continual openness to revision. Second, the possibility of testing for coherence and seeking “theologically relevant dimensions” in an interdisciplinary sense is implied with the term, hypothesis. Suggesting that these particular and potential aspects of “doctrines as hypotheses” are potentially useful does not however, entail a complete and uncritical acceptance of other dimensions of Pannenberg’s thought). The fourth criteria (D) that we looked at especially in Chapter Four, is an ethical consideration. Any serious new discussion
of doctrinal development should include a criterion of an ethical awareness or dimension. We will review a bit of this notion of an “emergent ethics of belief” shortly.

In the second chapter we noted that although discussions of doctrine are dealing with only one dimension of religious phenomena, it is nevertheless an important one. Doctrines are about beliefs, and beliefs have consequences. For Augustine, doctrine is not the “res” of the faith. The language of Scripture or indeed any ‘systems of signification’ that we encounter in the world suggest a certain open-endedness to reference and meaning. It is Caritas that for Augustine is the hermeneutical key serving as a type of guardrail limiting an otherwise indefinite number of interpretations that may appear. Furthermore, using Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana* as a type of heuristic device we were able to see how many previous formulations and discussions of doctrinal development tended toward an overly epistemological/quasi-metaphysical, and “res-like” focus. Related to this awareness is the insight that although doctrine may be considered in various ways, most articulations assumed that doctrines do ‘have’ a “true res,” however distant this infinite truth may be from our limited and finite minds. In the second portion of this chapter, this heuristic model was used to ponder two theologians whose thought are, in a sense, “inversely related” to one another. Wolfhart Pannenberg and Jon Sobrino both develop a dialectical approach to history, although the former may be said to represent the German and Hegelian idealist tradition, while the later writes from a perspective shaped by the social sciences and especially from experience drawn from the deep poverty and “neo-dependent” context of Central and South America. In this chapter, we considered Pannenberg’s notion of doctrine as revisable hypotheses with an eschatological verification. I argued that the “res” is something ‘future’ for Pannenberg, a perspective that allows him to construct a deeply interdisciplinary
approach to doctrinal construction. Sobrino, to my mind, may be interpreted as viewing the “res” of religion as being one of attending to the marginalized poor—to “Take the crucified people down from the cross”—and I suggested that although very different notions of the ‘res’ are present in these thinkers, Sobrino’s vision is much closer to Augustine’s conception of Caritas as the “res” of the Christian faith.

In the third chapter I attempted to “update” the guiding metaphors of doctrinal development with the hope that we may begin to move discussions of “doctrine” away from an over-emphasis on epistemology and ossified notions. It is the unique—almost quasi-metaphysical, yet almost ‘nothingness’—properties of information that makes the concept appealing for our goal of moving discussions of doctrine away from the over-emphasis on epistemology or ‘res-like’ aspects. The central property of transformability associated with information theory provides the key to its ‘intangibility.’ As we saw, information requires any physical medium—marks on a page, electrical impulses, light, sound, or magnetic waves—but at the same time, information is not reduced to any physical medium. For example, any information may be encoded in binary form, but any physical media may relay this information.

Since most all discussions of doctrinal development after Newman accept his tropes of organic botanical, or biological growth, it seems natural to appeal to more contemporary ideas of biological evolution. And as we saw, because biology functions computationally—and from a “systems” approach, behaves similar to software,—we turned to an examination of the logical and mathematical ‘foundations’ observed in these biological processes. Here is where the ideas from information theory help to develop our reconfigured model. First, the paradoxes of self-referentiality were examined, most especially with Turing’s “decidability” problem. Self-
referential paradoxes of undecidability and incompleteness “open up” room for novelty in the form of emergent properties. One example, we may recall came from the research being done with Cellular Automata. We saw how the use of basic and simple rules—regardless of whether referring to chemical or an electronic version of a mathematical algorithm—and the interaction of neighboring states (or cells, entities)—allow unexpected emergent “rules” (whether genetic code in organisms, or higher-order algorithms within a computer) to appear. These rules are examples of patterns of information that emerged from other streams or flows of information. No ‘essence’ or ‘res-like- entities are involved. Rules emerge, guide behavior, and are in turn affected by their environment. In this way, we can speak of flows of information and “state dependent rule evolution” as defining features of contemporary biological sciences.

Finally, in this third chapter we turned to Kathryn Tanner and George Lindbeck. I argued that Tanner’s critique of post-liberalism is quite close to what I am suggesting as a reconfigured doctrinal development. She is using what she refers to as postmodern anthropological categories, and I am appealing to contemporary information theory and the underlying metaphors of information flow, transformability, incompleteness, undecidability, and open-endedness. Nevertheless I suggested that the projects are quite similar. In either case, I argued that there are serious implications for Lindbeck’s “rule theory of doctrine.” If one appeals to this rule theory of doctrine, we may claim that the research on “state dependent rule evolution” that we examined, may be utilized as a “corrective” to Lindbeck’s model. In other words, if doctrines are considered analogous to rules in a game (or grammar to a language), we should carry the analogy through to its logical conclusion and accept that “rules evolve.” Rules may not change rapidly, but in complex interaction with “environmental factors,” they can and do evolve. (This applies
to the concept of grammar as well.) And to carry through a further analogy with biotechnology, we may step in and “edit” a genome if needed. Therefore, I concluded that, just as Sobrino is closer than Pannenberg to Augustine’s vision, Tanner is closer than Lindbeck.

In the Chapter Four, we looked to continue drawing further implications for a reconfigured model of doctrinal development that takes seriously the current information theory contributions to evolutionary thought. In this fourth chapter we especially turned to the key ideas of “information flow,” complexity, emergence, and top-down causation. Just as we may view the phenomena of ‘complexity’ and ‘emergence’ everywhere, from flocks of birds to traffic jams, we looked specifically to how complexity leads to unpredictable occurrences that emerge quite unexpectedly from a process of development. It was suggested that in this process, we may find ourselves in a situation of an “emergent crisis point,” one that “opens up” the space for a serious consideration of an “ethics of belief.” We looked at two examples, or traditions, in which unexpected emergent ethical developments occurred—first in the evolution of a concept of ‘sovereignty,’ and second, with the doctrine of ‘creation.’ Following through these strange and convoluted developments, we witnessed how from innocuous beginnings, unpredictable and complex developments arose, producing unexpected emergent features that then produced top/down effects. These were effects that were unforeseeable from the outset, but in current circumstances, may well demand a re-consideration. In precisely this way, a kind of ‘ethics of belief’ emerged from these doctrinal developments. Therefore, we saw in this chapter that doctrines do emerge, evolve, and may be intentionally edited.

As promised above, I would like to take a brief moment to look at what seems to me to be the chief concern that many theologians express when discussion of doctrinal development
utilizes explicit language or metaphors of evolution or Darwinism. Most contemporary
discussions of doctrinal development largely ignore terminology drawn from biological
evolution even while they continue to utilize organic growth metaphors. I suspect that previous
discussions of doctrinal development have intentionally shied away from any explicit language
of ‘evolution’ precisely because of the concern that such talk leads to the possibility of a religion
evolving to such an extent that it may morph into something else entirely. I suggest that we may
be able to deal with this concern not by ignoring contemporary science, but rather, but drawing
another concept from evolutionary biology. In evolutionary biology, scientists such as Douglas
Futuyma and Ernst Mayr have expressed that evolution happens in a teleonomic rather than a
teleological manner. Briefly put, whereas teleology deals with final end-goals, causes, and ideas
of some innate essential direction present within an organism, teleonomy acknowledges that
certain “rules,” conditions, specific physical and environmental contexts, phenotypic constraints
or phylogenetic constraints, may all act as limiting principles to evolutionary development. For
example, an evolutionary biologist would not appeal to teleology but rather natural selection to
explain the evolution of an oak tree. And yet teleonomic limits ensure that an acorn will grow
into an oak tree and not a cat. This does not suggest, however, that the genetic “rules” that
govern the development of the acorn cannot, over fundamentally long periods of time, evolve
and allow the eventual emergence of a new “speciation event.” Rules that govern evolution may
themselves evolve although there are limiting aspects to this development. In this way, I am
suggesting an analogy for our purposes regarding the development of doctrine. I propose using
the notion of a “teleonomic Caritas” that is, in a sense “uncontrollable,” and even “un-
deconstructable,” and which can provide a “limiting influence” to what might otherwise appear
as totally open-ended conceptions of doctrinal change. To my mind, it is Caritas that provides the guardrails to prevent a religion from evolving into something potentially unrecognizable. I would suggest that this is an Augustinian concept in contemporary terms. As we saw in Chapter Two, it is Caritas that is the ultimate hermeneutical key for interpreting Scriptures for Augustine. For Augustine, the Infinite Love of God has revealed an indefinitely rich Word into history and time. And given the endless play of signification possible in both Scripture and the World the only controlling limit is the uncontrollable hermeneutical key of Caritas. It is neither doctrine nor scripture that constitute the “res” of Christianity for Augustine. Once again, it is Caritas which for Augustine is the true ‘res’ of the Christian faith. This is what enables Augustine to boldly assert that once one understands the double command to love as the end of all Scripture, one cannot interpret those Scriptures incorrectly (DDC. 1.36.40). We will have occasion to return to this Augustinian point in the next and final section of this project.

**George Coyne and Some Implications for Future Discussions of Doctrinal Development**

At the close of this text, I would like to approach the issues dealt with in this project from a different angle. I suspect that it might shed light on the issue in a new way, and perhaps even point to some possible avenues for future research related to the overall aim of this project. I will begin with a close reading of an article by the director of the Vatican Observatory, George Y. Coyne, S.J.⁴

Coyne begins by noting the ambiguous influence between ‘science,’ and ‘religion.’

Modern science in the “west” emerged in the seventeenth century amongst scholars that were

---

motivated and influenced by theological thinking. Consider the debates in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries between Newton and Samuel Clarke on the one hand, and Leibniz on the other, regarding the nature of space and time.\(^5\) For Newton, (and Clarke), both space and time were thought to be absolute forms, almost like fixed ‘containers,’ where God’s omniscience and omnipresence could be understood. In other words, God provided the absolute reference point for all change and motion. All relative motion or change is measured against the background of these stable ‘forms’ of God’s omnipresence and omniscience. According to such a view, space and time exist as “substances” in their own right, regardless of whether any physical objects or events are “in” them or not. Thinking of space and time as God’s \textit{sensorium} in this way led Leibniz to accuse Newton and Clarke of coming dangerous close to Spinoza’s pantheism. There is a certain irony here, because whether one interprets Leibniz’s monads as either a type of idealism or panpsychism—If God is understood as the Ultimate Monad whose awareness includes the experience of the infinity of all other monads, is this not in some way similar to Spinoza’s notion of \textit{everything} as “modifications” of some One Substance?\(^6\) Nevertheless, Leibniz’s monadology specifically implies the nonexistence of space or time. According to Leibniz, space and time refer to relations, changes, and measurements only. Furthermore, the infinity of monads are predetermined by God’s providential and counterfactual knowledge thus exemplifying the “best of all possible worlds.”\(^7\) So, in this all too brief survey,

\(^5\) Coyne, “Evolution of Intelligent Life,” 177.


\(^7\) For a fascinating study of Leibniz’s theodicy in relation to Nicolas Malebranche and Antoine Arnauld see Steven Nadler, \textit{The Best of All Possible Worlds: A Story of Philosophers, God, and Evil} (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008).
we may see that Leibniz’s philosophy, just as in Newton and Clarke, is dramatically influenced by their theological commitments and assumptions.

But it is the emergence within the seventeenth centuries of the concepts of “method” or “theory” that Coyne perceives as having had a deleterious effect on the discipline of theology. The notion of method in the Enlightenment (as we have seen in various places in this work) interpreted knowledge as universal, and properly founded upon ‘rational grounds.’ The idea is that if one got the correct methodology, then when properly applied, true knowledge could be established. According to Coyne, when theology began to think in terms of God as primarily an “explanation”—as that which is “needed to explain what we cannot otherwise explain”—that theology began the unhelpful detour from a more fitting understanding of God.⁸ Debates over whether God is a necessary hypothesis for explaining the universe is to miss the point of Christianity. Concentrating on God as a potential “explanation” is to be asking the wrong question about what God is.

As Coyne points out, God in Scripture and Tradition is revealed as Love “poured out” into the world.⁹ God is Love and not explanation. God as Love “poured out” into the world is the primary point of revelation for Coyne. The Psalmists, and Prophets, and authors of Genesis speak frequently of the beauty and goodness observed around them, all of which resonated to them of their experience of liberation and the transforming power of love in the Exodus event. Coyne contends, therefore, that the Hebrew Scriptural praises of the experience of goodness and beauty in the world should be read as declaring “more about God than they are about the

---

⁸ Coyne, “Evolution of Intelligent Life,” 177.

universe and its beginning.”\textsuperscript{10} The appreciation and awareness of beauty in the universe is a first moment that leads to a secondary reflection and search for discovering “a rationality innate in the universe.”\textsuperscript{11} Only in this second moment was it possible to wonder at the resonance between the elegance of mathematical equations and the underlying structure of the Cosmos.

So, for Coyne, religion and science together may provide a deeper and more profound understanding of the universe than either of these disciplines could do alone. Yet it is clear that Coyne wishes to remind his readers that God is primarily love “poured” out into the world, and that to treat God as an explanation, or as Mind, or a transcendent Platonic mathematical Theory of Everything, is to miss this absolutely key understanding of the revelation of God. Coyne expresses these ideas in the following extended quotation:

In our age, perhaps more than at any other time, the scientific view of the world has been the principal spur to a more unified view of the world. It has opened our minds to the vast richness of the universe that cannot be appropriated by any one discipline alone. Science invites us to that vision. It also cautions us not to absolutize scientific results. We must be aware of a serious temptation of the cosmologists. Within their culture, God is essentially, if not exclusively, seen as an explanation and not as a person. God is the ideal mathematical structure, the theory of everything. God is mind. It must remain a firm tenet of the reflecting religious person that God is more than that and \textit{that God’s revelation of himself in time is more than a communication of information}. Even if we discover the Mind of God, we will not have necessarily found God. The very nature of our emergence in an evolving universe and our inability to comprehend it, even with all that we know from cosmology, may be an indication that in the universe \textit{God may be communicating much more than information to us}. Through the limitations of science we might come to see the universe as a unique revelation of God, \textit{that He is love}\textsuperscript{12} [italics mine]

Is there not a similarity or resonance in this passage to what has been argued in this text? What I

\textsuperscript{10} Coyne, “Evolution of Intelligent Life,” 183.

\textsuperscript{11} Coyne, “Evolution of Intelligent Life,” 183.

\textsuperscript{12} Coyne, “Evolution of Intelligent Life,” 186.
mean is, like Augustine, Coyne is arguing that God is love. But moreover, Coyne, similar to Augustine, is maintaining that God is *more* than the mere dissemination of *information*

Augustine, we will recall, in his *De Doctrina*, asserts that the Infinite Love of God has revealed an indefinitely rich Word into history and time. Given the endless play of signification possible in both Scripture and the World the only *controlling* limit is the *uncontrollable* hermeneutical key of *Caritas*. And the most significant point of similarity may be that, for Augustine, neither Scripture nor doctrine constitute the “res” of Christianity. Rather it is *Caritas* that is key, *Caritas* is the “res” of the Christian faith. Doctrines, theology, and Scripture are all “signs,” or “pointers,” gestures on to the ineffable God of Love. In Chapter Two of this text, we examined Augustine’s claim that as soon as one understands that the double command to love is the end of all Scripture, one cannot interpret those scriptures incorrectly, even if one does not understand correctly the original (human) authorial intention (DDC 1.36.40). Therefore, “A person strengthened by faith hope, and love,” Augustine explains, “has no need of the scriptures, except to instruct others” (DDC 1.39.43). Is there not a resonance here with Coyne’s assertion that God, as Love poured out into the world, is *more* than a “communication of information?” As I have tried to argue in this project, doctrine should be thought of as information flow given the mutable and intangible quality it exhibits. The metaphor of information may hopefully avoid turning doctrine into a “Res”—either the “Res” of the faith itself, or by conceiving of doctrine as *having* a res. May we say, using Coyne’s phrase, that doctrinal development conceived of as information movement, may point beyond itself towards God. And God as Love—in a sense perhaps as the expression of Caritas—is more than the doctrines could express. Considered in this way, perhaps we may begin to think of doctrine (and by extension doctrinal development) as ‘signs’ gesturing
towards God—and doctrine as the transformable intangible flow of information—so that we do not “confuse the finger pointing towards the moon with the moon itself.”

Let us continue with this exploration of Coyne’s thought. Now, God’s revelation to us involves a certain anthropocentrism. How else could human beings encounter God? God pours out God’s Love into the world that we evolved in. The Divine-Human-Nature encounter would be the necessary “point of contact” for any revelation or experience. But does this anthropocentrism entail exclusivity? Interestingly, Coyne answers, “no.” Coyne makes this point through the elaboration of two factors. First, there is the complexity of the universe and the unpredictable elements of evolution. In reference to the precise and finely tuned initial conditions that emerged from the Big Bang, Coyne asks whether an exact knowledge of these fine-tuned parameters would allow for an accurate prediction of the emergence of life. As Coyne puts it “I am asking whether, given antecedently all the physical constants and conditions necessary for life from our a posteriori knowledge of it, could we have predicted that it would have to come to be?” Even with knowledge of the “Mind of God,” a full unified theory, would we really “understand life?” “As I understand it,” Coyne explains, “there is no intentionality associated with the mind of God of the new physics. Can life be understood without that intentionality?” The unpredictable emergence of life, and especially conscious life is truly remarkable. And in reading Coyne’s account, I am also reminded of Stephen Gould’s thought experiment of

---

15 Coyne, “Evolution of Intelligent Life,” 186.
16 Coyne, “Evolution of Intelligent Life,” 186.
“replaying life’s tape.” In such a scenario such as if we could (hypothetically) return to the “seas of the Burgess Shale” and observe the process of evolution unfold all over again—we would be struck by the radical contingency (or perhaps unpredictability) of it all—the likelihood of an utterly different development of fauna is very high indeed.

The second factor Coyne considers is the probability of life evolving elsewhere in the universe. Coyne argues that the probabilities are quite high. I think it is worth reading this is Coyne’s words:

Since there are about $10^{11}$ stars in the Galaxy and $10^{11}$ galaxies in the universe, there are $10^{22}$ stars in the universe. From our knowledge of the distribution of stars by mass in the galaxy, we can estimate that about 30% of stars are solarlike. We know that about 30% of stars are double or multiple, a fact that may, for dynamical reasons, exclude the formation of planets. It would be difficult to estimate the percentage of solarlike stars that would have developed a planetary system, but from our knowledge of the formation of the solar system we know that the probability is neither 0 nor 100 percent. Let us say it is 10 percent. How many of these planets would be like the Earth: its mass, distance from the Sun, an atmosphere, and so forth? This may be even more uncertain, but again from geological knowledge of the formation of the atmosphere, we know that there is a finite probability. Let us say it is 2 percent. Now, if we put all these considerations together, we have, from these statistical considerations, $10^{17}$ Earthlike planets in the universe.

Now, first let us sum up the preceding two factors from Coyne’s text: (1) the radical contingency of the evolution of life and the possibility of laws and physical constants being radically different (either at different points or places in our universe or throughout a multiverse where perhaps an infinite number of universes arise throughout hyperspace; and (2) the quite high probability of life evolving throughout the universe.

---


The theological implications following from the preceding two factors can be very complex indeed. To begin with, let us briefly consider the possibility of life evolving under radically different conditions in our universe. For example, what might the experiential “apparatuses” or cognitive processes be like for life that evolved near the surface of a neutron star? Would these categories of sensation/experience, or cognitive abilities be so different as to be quite unrecognizable to us? Very likely they would. Or again, what might they be like if life evolved in an atmosphere toxic (to us) such as in a gas giant? This is the stuff of science-fiction, but the theological implications are vast. What might such implications entail for our discussion of doctrinal development? For example, what is the implication under such conditions for the doctrine of Incarnation? Or soteriology? Or any other doctrine? Such life might well have a very different sense of time and other experiential and thinking processes too. Or again, what if we consider the very different conditions that may have evolved within other universes, and that might exhibit very different laws of nature? We might well paraphrase or adopt a version of the saying that God is not only different, stranger, and unexpected that we think, but God is different, stranger, and more unexpected than we CAN think!

Yet I think that Coyne would also claim that this would not be quite true. I suspect that Coyne would assert that we can know the transforming power of the God who “pours” God-self out into the universe, and thus we may be confident of the Love and Caritas of God, regardless of the manifestation or articulation of this revelation. Again, does this not present something of another analogy to this work? For instance, doctrines might evolve or develop in totally different ways under very different situations. And we may accept this even if we restrict our theologizing
to this “pale blue dot.” The overarching principle that Coyne suggests, and as we have seen, is quite Augustinian, which is the insistence upon the centrality of the Love of God. This is a constant in both of their texts. And it is this centrality of Love that I have been suggesting should be “expanded” in our theological musings over the category of doctrinal development to the type of teleonomic Caritas that provides the sole guardrail to any future development of doctrine. God is more than a source or dissemination of information—including doctrine conceived of as transformable flows of information. Just as Augustine asserts that doctrine and scriptural interpretation may be open-ended and uncontrollable—limited only by the double command to Love—we may include an “expanded” appreciation of Caritas to include an emergent ethics of belief, and thereby provide an irreducibly important aspect or criterion for any future discussions of the categories of doctrinal development, criticism, or construction.

---

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Borradori, Giovanna. “Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides—A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida.” In *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jurgen Habermas and


—. *Philosophy of Right*. Translated by T.M. Knox Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964 [1821]


—. *Luther’s Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther’s Theological Breakthrough.* Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1990.


—. *Consequences of Pragmatism* Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1982.


VITA

Dr. Jeff Campbell graduated with honors from Aquinas College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He majored in Philosophy and Theology and was awarded “outstanding undergraduate” in both disciplines. After graduating from Loyola University Chicago with a Master’s degree in Theological Studies, he continued his studies at Loyola as a PhD candidate in Integrated Studies in Ethics and Theology. He was the administrative assistant in Loyola’s Center for Interdisciplinary Thinking and has been a research assistant to many professors. Dr. Campbell was assistant to the director of the Peace, Conflict, Justice Program (formerly known as Peace Studies). Dr. Campbell enjoys tutoring all age groups in reading or mathematics as well as teaching theology, philosophy, ethics, or religious studies at the university and college level.