

Why Newman Is Not Enough: Reflections on the Gospel and Development

The Rev. Dr. William H. Harrison

Introduction

Since the publication of John Henry Newman's classic, *An Essay on the Development of Doctrine*, in the 19th century, the idea that doctrine develops has become a commonplace of Christian theology (though some theologians still deny that it happens). We tend, however, to have an easier time agreeing that it occurs than being clear about what it is. Clarity about the nature of doctrinal development hinges upon the distinction between *restatement*, *revolution*, and *reappropriation*. The question of same-sex marriage is a question of reappropriation, on the heels of some notable revolutions. To distinguish a "true" development from a "false" (in Newman's language¹) we need helpful criteria; in other words, we must answer the question: "Which developments sustain the heart of the Christian message while incorporating new insights of the Christian church, exercising its intelligence and judgement in relation to its heritage and contemporary situation?" The central criteria are found in the liturgical origin and soteriological relationships of particular developments.

Same-sex marriages are a valid reappropriation of Christian practice, rooted in liturgical practice and a genetic development of Christian doctrine. They are not a matter of core doctrine, since they are not constitutive of our theology of salvation; they are, however, a reasonable development of Christian understanding of marriage, sustaining its relationship to soteriology. Same-sex marriages can participate in the life of creativity to

¹ John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Doctrine*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin/Pelican, 1974), *passim*.

which God calls us, and through which God builds God's Reign. Moreover, such marriages can fulfil the same expectations of stability and consent that the church expects of heterosexual unions. From the perspective of systematic theology, the church ought to proceed with the blessing of same-sex marriages.

Restatement, Revolution, Reappropriation

The first thing to be said is that some development occurs in an attempt at restatement, in different language, of a previous understanding. Restatement, as simple as it may appear, is a highly complex activity that inevitably brings about a shift in understanding. Such shifts occur, to varying degrees, within one language, because the subtle changes in emphasis brought about through the use of alternative words are not insignificant. "The car *moves swiftly* through the streets" is, at one and the same time, similar to and distinct from, "The car *races* through the streets." This challenge of the analogical nature of language is thrown into sharpest relief, however, when we move from one language to another. The Italian phrase, "*Traduttore, traditore*" (Translator, traitor), bears too much truth for comfort. The Greek notion of *logos* is greatly impoverished by its translation into English as "word," and theology which treats Jesus the Christ as the Incarnate Word is richer or poorer to the degree that it is prepared to address Greek understandings of *logos* as cosmic reason, order, and so on.

A restatement, therefore, is not simply something old, a thing more-or-less completely unchanged (like a relay-race baton) in the handing-on. Important changes in meaning can, and do, occur, in the process of restatement. There is a history to the process of restatement, as different people engage in it, in different times and places. It is

a history of greater or lesser fidelity to the original text. It is also a history of finding value in the insight conveyed by the text.

A restatement is not a revolutionary change, however, because of the intention which guides the process of interpretation. The faithful translator strives always to reach as accurate a retelling of the original understanding as possible. The purpose of restatement is to find a form of words that comes as close to the original as can be accomplished. Sometimes, extensive marginal notations are required in order to fulfil the intended purpose. Scholars debate the helpfulness of Dorothy L. Sayers's translation of Dante's *Divine Comedy*; there is, however, something of a consensus that her footnotes are the most useful available explication of Dante's theology, which makes them a decisive contribution to the understanding of Dante because his meaning is obscured to the extent that the reader fails to encounter his theology in his text. In short, the people who read Dante constitute an interpretive community: their efforts to understand and restate Dante are a complex set of attempts to understand and convey Dante's meaning, limiting the range of misunderstandings and transformations that occur in the *Divine Comedy* as it is received by successive generations.

Within the bounds of restatement, therefore, innovation is not welcome — except insofar as it sheds new light upon the original intention of the text under discussion. New insights merely fill out the existing insight. A theological example of just such an effort is the long history of scholars trying to discern the age of the earth from the Bible, using genealogies and other biblical information. The work involved was complex.

It was a difficult job, and its uncertainties account for the discrepancies among the figures obtained. The calculation was done many times over, and by some of the most brilliant people who ever lived. Theophilus of Antioch dated Creation to 5529 B.C., Julius Africanus calculated it to be

5500 B.C., the Venerable Bede got 3952 B.C., Martin Luther got 4000 B.C., Sir Walter Raleigh, 4032 B.C., J.J. Scaliger, 3950 B.C., and Isaac Newton, 3998 B.C. Because until recently the Irish Bishop James Ussher's date of October 23, 4004 B.C. was incorporated into the King James Version of the Bible, it is by far the most famous.²

This is theology done by restatement, with attendant development, as people attempt to be faithful to a received text and work out its implications for their world in detail. They follow an existing authority that appears to answer the question that they are asking.

We know, however, that this particular example of theological development is behind us, because a revolution has occurred in human understanding. The Enlightenment taught some people to be more exacting and literal in their reading of existing authorities than their predecessors had been, in order to find answers to these sorts of scientific questions in a careful reading of the Bible and other traditional texts. However, the same period taught others to find the answers in empirical investigation of nature, while rejecting existing inherited authority.³ Consequently, even as people were pursuing their careful biblical calculations, firmly wedded to this method of determining the earth's age, evidence was accumulating which seemed impossible to fit within the framework of such a young earth. The fossil record and geological evidence suggested that the earth simply had to be older than 4000 years.⁴ The empirical method changed everything, because it led to the discovery of radioactive dating systems. Radioactive dating systems provided a dramatically different set of answers about the earth's age — and many other questions besides.⁵

² Jo Ellen Barnett, *Time's Pendulum: The quest to capture time—from sundials to atomic clocks*, (New York and London, Plenum, 1998), 198.

³ Some people — Isaac Newton, for example — fit into both categories. We do not always apply every insight uniformly to all areas of our lives.

⁴ Barnett, 197-239.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 243-312.

A revolution, then, has a rather different origin and intention from restatement. Revolution in thought occurs when a question (or set of questions) arises that cannot be resolved on the basis of existing models; available methods cannot account for existing data. The answer to that question will hinge upon a new insight, which implies a new way of thinking. The new insight will establish a new method, a new set of rules for the discipline — a new “paradigm” in Thomas Kuhn’s language.⁶

Such a new method will include the previous understanding, but will also expand it. The symbols of Nicaea and Chalcedon do exactly this. Nicaea’s “of one substance,” expressing the unity of Father and Son, may fairly be taken as capturing what the Gospel of Matthew intends to say when it speaks of Mary’s child as being from the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18). Similarly, Chalcedon’s “two natures,” declaring the full humanity and full divinity of Jesus the Christ, may reasonably be understood as identifying the ontological consequences of a birth from a human parent and a divine parent.

However, the measure of the change in understanding that has occurred between the biblical text and Nicaea, and then Chalcedon, can be found in two exercises of the imagination: 1) imagine what the New Testament would be like, if the biblical authors had access to these insights; and 2) imagine trying to explain Nicaea and Chalcedon to the biblical authors. The first exercise reveals that the conclusions of Nicaea and Chalcedon are, in fact, debatable on biblical grounds. One might reasonably argue that

⁶ Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, Second ed., Enlarged*. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970), *passim*.

The reference to Kuhn cannot disguise my debt to Bernard Lonergan, whose understanding of theological development stands behind much of this paper. The conversation about insight and its relation to historical change is rooted in: Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, 5th edition, revised and augmented, Vol. 3 in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, (Toronto: Lonergan Research Institute/University of Toronto, 1992, and Bernard Lonergan, *The Way to Nicea: the Dialectical Development of Trinitarian Theology, a translation by Conn O’Donovan from the First Part of De Deo Trino*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976).

the author of Matthew regarded the Son as inferior to the Father, which was Arius's argument, from assertions like: "about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Matt. 24:36); "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want, but what you want" (Matt. 26:39); and "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46). Similarly, the facts of Jesus's need for food and rest, as well as the reality of his death, might be taken as indicators that Jesus was not fully divine and fully human, but was fully human and invested with the Holy Spirit to an extraordinary degree — the Son of God as we are children of God, but more thoroughly so (Friedrich Schleiermacher's argument⁷ and not orthodox, but biblically defensible as a reading of Matthew, especially Matt. 3:1-4:11). Even Matthew's use of the Triune name (Matt. 28:19) does not automatically and necessarily imply Nicaea's "of one substance;" indeed, Matthew obviously lacked such a notion, though Matthew's use of the phrase "Father, Son and Holy Spirit" is one of the decisive clues that would lead Nicaea and Constantinople to their conclusions. Matthew is focusing upon the implications of baptism, rather than the ontological relations of divine persons; he is not making a statement about the nature of divine unity. Besides, unity of the Three is still possible on the assertion of the inferiority of the Son, as Arius insisted.

The point is that the church did not merely try to interpret Matthew's words (and the rest of the Bible) correctly. Instead, it was faced with two viable interpretations and

⁷ Schleiermacher argues that Jesus's divinity consists in his being fully invested with "God-consciousness," while we are only partly so. Jesus represents *a*, perhaps — but not necessarily — *the*, limit case of something that is true for all humanity. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, Vol II, edited by H.R. Mackintosh and J.S. Stewart, (New York: Harper & Row/Harper Torchbooks, 1963), 386-387.

forced to judge which one would best support the gospel, as the church knew it.⁸ The church was forced to turn to other language — indeed, to a principle worked out by a method other than strict interpretation — in order to resolve the conundrum.

Consequently, the narrative logic of the biblical texts, including the Gospel of Matthew, suggests that any effort to explain all of the ins-and-outs of the church councils to the biblical authors would be both pointless and fruitless. Nicaea would make little sense; why not simply tell the story and leave things as they were? Chalcedon, more distant from the biblical era, is even more obviously unhelpful to biblical authors. They did not have the cast of mind, the training, or the questions to match up with such answers. Simply imagine the befuddled visage of Matthew's author, were we to interrogate him as to whether he believes that Jesus the Christ must be "recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved..." He could not have followed the point, because it would come to him as something new, based on background and a structure of understanding that he lacked. Matthew's author did not have the history of the debate; more importantly, however, the way in which the human mind works had shifted, from an essentially narrative method to an approach based in formal logic and metaphysics. After Nicaea and Chalcedon, we know something that earlier Christians did not — and that's a good thing.

⁸ This is exactly the sort of judgement that the "Montreal Declaration of Anglican Essentials" appears to rule out: "The church may not judge the Scriptures, selecting and discarding from among their teachings. But Scripture under Christ judges the church for its faithfulness to his revealed truth." "Montreal Declaration of Anglican Essentials," in *Anglican Essentials: Reclaiming faith within the Anglican Church of Canada*, edited by George Egerton, (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1995), 310.

Developments of this significance do not stand alone, as isolated accomplishments. Instead, they are central to a whole process of reappropriation of previous insights. Consider our earlier example of the move from dating the earth by biblical calculation to empirical method and the use of radioactive dating systems. The consequences are overwhelming. This change has been one of the main forces in a dramatic shift in methods of biblical interpretation, so that very few current scholars are inclined to the biblical approach to doing science. Moreover, the field of geology has changed profoundly, with the recognition that the earth is likely approximately 4.5 billion years old.⁹ Perhaps the most significant impact, however, has been on anthropology, with the discovery that humankind is a very late development in earth's history — having been around for 5 million years, or so.¹⁰ Note something important that this example suggests: revolutions in thought tend to cross disciplinary lines, so that a change in one field can have effects on other fields.

There have been a number of revolutions in the history of Christian theology, the most recent of which is Newman's recognition of the significance of history. The whole story of theology since Newman — and some of the prior story — is about attempts to understand the ways in which history affects, and ought to affect, our thinking. Indeed, the empirical revolution in earth dating that we have discussed has struck theology as part of the encounter with history. It contributes to the large-scale effort at reappropriation to which we are called — a re-examination of our beliefs that treats them as elements in a history of development. We must seek to understand each text that we approach in its own historical context, as much as possible. Plus, we need to make sense of the way in

⁹ Barnett, 279.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 285-312.

which it is helpful in our historical context. This twofold task requires a sort of double-sight, which some people have (so that they cannot understand those who lack it) and some people lack (so that they cannot understand those who have it). Once we have the new insight, we cannot go back across the line and lose it. We must reconsider previous insights as they are affected by the new insight. In our discussion of soteriology, we shall see an example of a reappropriation that is the product of successive revolutions of mind and is, therefore, dramatically new.

The task set for the Primate's Theological Commission is a part of the effort of reappropriation. A simple reading of Scripture will not resolve the question, because there is no such thing as a simple reading of anything anymore. Scripture must be seen in its own context, and in light of the theological developments that have followed its composition. Instead, *the Commission must consider whether a change in the marriage canons of the Anglican Church of Canada is a divinely-inspired and reasonable aspect of the larger effort at rethinking Christian theology in light of the impact of the discovery of history, along with changes in human understandings of marriage and sexuality.*

The Problem With Newman

A development may be something truly new: it need not be simply and logically implied by what went before. It is, however, related to what went before, and that relationship is genetic in nature. The water clock does not logically imply any of the forms of mechanical clock, which certainly do not logically imply the atomic clock, but each system for measuring time finds its genesis in the one before it and in the questions

raised by the functioning of the earlier type.¹¹ One purpose of Newman's investigation into theological development is to find a set of general principles that govern the process of genetic development. This is the reason for his concern about the maintenance of original characteristics in later manifestations of Christianity, as evidenced by his seven tests of true development (which we shall discuss in a later context).

Newman's principles are, however, limited in the degree to which they can help us. That is because they were crafted with an eye to a particular agenda, which is not ours (though some contemporary Anglicans seem to find it attractive). Newman believed that God would not allow development to happen in a messy, open fashion, without a clear, identifiable, earthly guiding force; he identified this force with the Papacy. The ultimate purpose of *An Essay on the Development of Doctrine* is, purely and simply, a defence of the Tridentine Papacy as a true development, which, in turn, guides all further developments. The answer to the question, "What would Newman do?"¹² is, of course, "He would ask the Pope!"

The case then stands thus: that Revelation has introduced a new law of divine governance over and above those laws which appear in the natural course of the world; and we henceforth argue for a standing authority in matters of faith, on the analogy of Nature, and from the fact of Christianity... As creation argues continual governance, so are Apostles harbingers of Popes.¹³

The Anglican Newman identified the *via media* with a refusal to change; he insisted that "a change in theological teaching involves either the commission or the confession of sin; it is either the profession or the renunciation of erroneous doctrine, and if it does not

¹¹ Barnett, *passim*.

¹² The question raised by George Sumner: George Sumner, "What would John Henry Newman do?" in submission to the Primate's Theological Commission of the Anglican Church of Canada, 2008. Available at: <http://www2.anglican.ca/primate/ptc/responses/sumner.htm>

¹³ Newman, *Essay*, 173.

succeed in proving the fact of past guilt, it, *ipso facto*, implies present.”¹⁴ Newman became Roman Catholic when he recognized that change is an unavoidable reality of history but could not see any safe way through the forest of theological challenges — except to submit to the Pope as guide. I understand Anglicanism to have a more complex and diffuse notion of theological authority than is implied in a Tridentine understanding of the Roman *magisterium*. This demands more of us than a partial restatement of Newman.

Moreover, the difficulty with Newman’s theory does not end here. His theory of development is all-encompassing. It fits comfortably with the “seamless web” understanding of Christianity, by which all the parts must fit under one general theory; they are all equally necessary, if not all of the same importance. All changes in the church’s life must meet the criteria that Newman lays out. By necessity, then, his seven conditions of a true development (preservation of type or idea; continuity of principles; power of assimilation; early anticipation; logical sequence; preservative additions; and chronic continuance¹⁵) are quite broad and loose. An agile mind can argue all sides of most issues on the strength of Newman’s principles (including, as it happens, the blessing of same-sex marriages).

Newman might not be particularly disturbed at this assertion. In his mind, the Papacy is a true development — the development that guides all further developments. In other words, having established the correctness of his ecclesiology, Newman requires his seven conditions as advice for the Bishop of Rome and for no further purpose —

¹⁴ John Henry Newman, “Remarks on Certain Passages of the Thirty-Nine Articles (Being No. 90 of the *Tracts for the Times*)”, in *The Via Media of The Anglican Church, Illustrated in Lectures, Letters and Tracts*, (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1899), 270.

¹⁵ Newman, *Essay, passim*.

save, perhaps, a rather vigorous critique of non-Roman approaches to Christianity. Such a broad and unrefined theory will not, however, serve our purposes; unless the ecclesiology envisaged in the first draft of a putative Anglican covenant were to triumph (which would be disastrous for Anglicanism), we lack a central authority empowered to make all necessary decisions on our behalf. Consequently, we need other grounds upon which to judge the theological appropriateness of any particular development and they must be principles which find their genetic roots in our heritage.

Liturgy and Soteriology: The Principles of Development

In light of this, we need to consider two basic Anglican principles, which find their origins in early church developments and are, I believe, fundamental to the development of Christian doctrine, as such: 1) liturgical origin, and 2) consistency with the church's soteriology (theology of salvation).

I never cease to be amazed at the overwhelming extent to which the issues that cause dissension in Christian ranks arise from the worship context. This ought not to be surprising; in worship the community is most intensely present with itself and with God who animates the church through the transformative activity of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, the "*lex orandi, lex credendi*" principle, stating that the law of prayer is the law of belief, may — indeed, should — be little more than a statement of the obvious. Anything that is of real importance ought to touch the church's deepest moment of praise and thanksgiving. If the liturgy does not draw out our and the world's concerns, then the liturgists are not doing their jobs.

Nonetheless, the ability of liturgy to force us to consider serious theological matters is immense and not always predictable. The earliest church's use of the three-fold, Triune name, combined with the worship of Jesus the Christ as God, makes extensive discussion about the relation of the Son to the Father very probable. We can hardly imagine a world in which the debate could have been avoided. Nonetheless, the idea that it would lead to the sort of dissension, sometimes extending into outright war, that surrounded the Council of Nicaea is very difficult for us to believe. Nicaea was a meeting almost entirely composed of eastern bishops to discuss an eastern quarrel that arose in Alexandria; it was hardly universal in its origins, though it has become so in its reception. The western church was not really interested, so that its representation at the Council was slight. Theological reflection upon liturgical issues is always important and often divisive, even when the controversy begins because of local concerns.

The challenge placed before us is that many Christians, both within the Anglican Church of Canada and beyond, find a place for the blessing of same-sex marriages in their liturgies. This is much more significant than a mere quiet acquiescence to some social or political development. It represents a change in their public life of prayer, the place where they stand before God and the world and say the things that are closest to their hearts. This is the supreme moment of self-definition for the community and all the particular persons who, taken together, form that community. It is the decisive moment of openness to the Holy Spirit's leading. The shift, then, is as important as the ordination of women, blessing of the marriages of previously-divorced persons, and the burial in consecrated ground of those who die by their own hand (all of which are recent changes

in our liturgical life). We must listen seriously and carefully to both the fact of the change and its justification, simply because it arises as a liturgical development.

The second principle draws its inspiration from two places: the early church councils and Richard Hooker. The early church had a variety of understandings of salvation. On the other hand, it also had a single, clear soteriological principle that guided its conciliar deliberations and grounded further theological developments: “that which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved.”¹⁶ Jesus the Christ had to be fully God, in order to accomplish the salvific work of uniting creation with the Triune God — leading to Nicaea’s assertion that the Father and the Son are “of one substance.” Similarly, he needed a full human nature, retaining its full integrity as human, if he were to accomplish the salvation of all creation in its vegetative, animal and rational aspects — leading to Chalcedon’s declaration of the full two natures. The decisive consideration, throughout all of the early councils (not merely the two outstanding examples on which I have concentrated), is the church’s message of salvation. To the early church, a development was a true development if it supported, or was consistent with, the church’s good news of salvation and an error if it threatened to undermine the gospel.

The gospel should be our central consideration today, for it is the gift that the Holy Spirit brings to the world through the church. The good news of salvation in the work of the Triune God is the heart of what we have to say. Our challenge is to articulate

¹⁶ Gregory of Nazianzus, *To Cledonius the Priest Against Apollinarius (Epistle CI)*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume 7: Cyril of Jerusalem and Gregory Nazianzen*, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 440.

the central principles of soteriology so that they convey the fullness of what God is saying through us.

This is a tremendously awkward task for us, because we are only slowly shaking loose from our bondage to Anselm and his progeny. Anselm's theory of salvation, explicated in *Cur Deus Homo*, is a case of reappropriation that is truly radical, having (by Anselm's express intention¹⁷) little visible relation to previous soteriologies. Its roots are in two revolutions of mind: the turn to philosophical categories from narrative presentation that occurred in conciliar Christology, and the focus upon systematic relation and presentation of Christian doctrine that characterizes medieval thought. The driving force is medieval political theory — the relationship between lord and vassal. The resulting theory is brilliantly clean, clear and logical, as well as being overwhelmingly influential. Anselm can be seen behind Luther's emphasis upon justification and Calvin's priority of God's greatness and inscrutability; Anselm is also visible in the reception of Calvin that emphasizes the complete fallenness of creation (total depravity), and the various soteriologies that focus upon Jesus the Christ as a bloody sacrifice for our sins — though Anselm would shudder at these last, since they stray in directions that he found repulsive. Through various Reformation voices, Anselm has also made his way into the Anglican tradition, most notably in the *Book of Common Prayer (BCP)*.¹⁸

Anselm might even be peering through the Jerusalem Declaration of the Global Anglican

¹⁷ Chapters I-X are a sustained critique of received soteriologies. Boso raises the possibilities that seem to predominate in Anselm's time and Anselm explains their inadequacies, prior to developing his own position. Anselm of Canterbury, *Cur Deus Homo*, in *St. Anselm: Proslogium; Monologium; An Appendix in Behalf of the Fool by Gaunilo; and Cur Deus Homo*, Trans. by Sidney Norton Deane, (Chicago: Open Court, 1903), 178-201.

¹⁸ The Prayer of Consecration and Prayer of Humble Access display Anselmian influence. *The Book of Common Prayer*, (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1959), 82-83. Although this reference is to the contemporary Canadian *BCP*, the 1662 *BCP* shows the same theological influence in substantially the same prayers. The *BCP* of 1662 is available online at: <http://www.eskimo.com/~lhowell/bcp1662/>

Future Conference (GAFCON), which speaks of our redemption as being accomplished through Christ's "atoning death and glorious resurrection."¹⁹

Penal substitutionary atonement theories, focusing upon Jesus's death as payment for our sin, have many drawbacks — one of the more significant being that they are not really Trinitarian in character, because they are so Christological in focus that they make little sense of the Father and the Holy Spirit. Our most immediate concern must be, however, that they do not allow us to think of human life as related to salvation, except as incurring debt. The only purpose of living is that it deepens the debt which we owe to Christ for saving us (or those of us whom he chooses to save — for people of some Reformed persuasions).

The church has a much richer heritage than this, however, as Loren Wilkinson points out in what might be the least read and most important of *Essentials* essays, "Rediscovering the Closeness of God." Wilkinson has, in concert with many contemporary theologians, rediscovered Irenaeus and his soteriology of recapitulation.²⁰ Irenaeus requires that we think of salvation as the transformation of all creation. This occurs through the action of the eternal Word becoming united with the created order in the Incarnation. Jesus the Christ's birth is important; so is his death and resurrection, by which he conquers the powers of destruction and death — declaring the victory of God's creative power.

Perhaps more immediate to our purposes, however, is the significance that this soteriology gives to Jesus's life, teaching and preaching, which are almost irrelevant to the strictly forensic, justifying approach of penal substitutionary atonement theories. The

¹⁹ Global Anglican Future Conference, "The Jerusalem Declaration," para. 5. Website: http://www.gafcon.org:80/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=79&Itemid=29

²⁰ Loren Wilkinson, "Rediscovering the Closeness of God," in *Anglican Essentials*, 237ff.

things that Jesus accomplishes during his earthly life are valuable because our lives are important: our lives are the context of God’s transformative work. The eastern tradition, building upon Irenaeus, speaks of the Triune God’s work in the world as “deification” or “divinization.” This approach is evident in Irenaeus’s presentation of the primitive soteriological principle that we spoke about above: “The Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who did... through his transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself”²¹ Divinization language does not mean that we become God; one cannot become eternal, or take on fully any of the characteristics that are intrinsic to God. Instead, it speaks to the Holy Trinity’s activity of transforming the whole of creation — including humanity — into the divine image and likeness and, thus, incorporating us into the divine life. As Wilkinson rightly notes, this approach links creation and salvation, while reminding us that salvation is “reconnection and reintegration, not only with God, but with our very nature and with the rest of God’s creation.”²²

This understanding of salvation is a much richer presentation of the message that the church seeks to proclaim; it is the fundamental reason that the doctrines of the Trinity and the two natures of Jesus the Christ are so necessary. In addition, this soteriology enables us to make sense of a world in which theological development occurs. Through the Holy Spirit’s leading, we can grow in our understanding of what God is doing and what God wants of us, as well as deepening our awareness of the theological conditions of these things. This does not make progress inevitable — for decline is always possible,

²¹ Irenaeus, *Irenaeus Against Heresies*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers (Vol. 1): The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus*, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, revised by A. Cleveland Coxe, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), V, preface, 526.

²² Wilkinson, 238.

and may occur at the same time as progress — but God is working through history on the transformation of history. Moreover, we are called to participate with God in this transformation. Our growth and our actions have cosmic meaning. As Dorothy L. Sayers points out, we are called to live as creators, in the image of the Creator God.²³ This is what the Holy Spirit empowers us to do.²⁴

The fundamental test of a true development must be that it is consistent with, and supportive of, the church's message of God's salvific work in the world. The Commission, therefore, must consider the question: "Do same-sex unions constitute a form of participation in God's salvific work in the world?" No other question (and certainly not the trite, "Have we done it before?") is worthy of theological consideration, in this context.

Salvation and *Adiaphora*

If, however, we allow the church's message of God's salvific work to be our guiding principle, we need to introduce a set of distinctions that will allow us to clarify the relationship between the central truths of the gospel and the particular questions that the church faces. In this task, Richard Hooker, the primary Anglican thinker about issues of development, can help us somewhat. Hooker distinguishes between "laws of supernaturall duties,"²⁵ by which he means key doctrines that, taken together, construct and support the church's message of salvation, and "things indifferent,"²⁶ which are

²³ Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker*, (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1979), 21-31.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 35-45, 111-124.

²⁵ Richard Hooker, *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiasticall Politie*, in *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker*, Vol. I, general ed. W. Speed Hill, (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977), I, xiv, 1; 1, 124.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, II, iv, 3; 1, 154.

matters of legitimate concern to the church that grow out of laws of supernatural duties and other forms of law (laws of nature and the law of reason²⁷).

Hooker argues that “things indifferent” can be changed, even if Scripture takes a firm position on them. The church must make the judgement about the nature of any particular biblical rule and its applicability to the church’s contemporary circumstances.²⁸ Moreover, different churches, responding to different historical situations, can vary on these matters. Each national church must have freedom to incarnate the gospel in its place and time, so long as it remains faithful to the central tenets that create and sustain the church’s message of salvation. The Holy Spirit empowers the church to make these decisions, addressing the church’s intellect and its heart.²⁹

Hooker did not believe that the church’s core beliefs could change; he understood these as being more-or-less directly available from the Bible and permanent in their content. “Touching pointes of doctrine, as for example the unitie of God, the trinitie of persons, salvation by Christ, the resurrection of the body, life everlasting, the judgment to come, and such like, they have been since the first hower that there was a Church in the world, and til the last they must be believed.”³⁰ Following Newman, we are aware that Hooker was wrong on this point; the doctrine of the Trinity, for instance, took several

²⁷ *Ibid.*, I, v-x; 1, 72-110.

²⁸ “When scripture doth yeelde us precedents, how far forth they are to bee followed; when it giveth naturall lawes, what particular order is thereunto most agreeable; when positive, which waye to make lawes unrepugnant unto them; yea though all these shoulde want, yet what kind of ordinances woulde be moste for that good of the Church which is aimed at, al this must be by reason found out.” *Ibid.*, I, ix, 1; 1, 236.

²⁹ “Wherefore albeit the spirit lead us into all truth and direct us in all goodnes, yet bicause these workings of the spirit in us are so privy and secret, we therfore stand on a plainer ground, when we gather by reason from the qualitie of things beleevd or done, that the spirit of God hath directed us in both; then if we settle our selves to beleeve or to do any certaine particular thing, as being moved thereto by the spirit.” *Ibid.*, III, viii, 15; 1, 233.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, III, x, 7; 1, 244. In this context, “doctrine” does not refer to all doctrinal issues, but helps to define the core of Christian belief.

hundred years to develop. We know something that Hooker did not, for Newman's insight is an important example of a revolution in Christian theology.

In spite of the advances which have occurred since he wrote, Hooker has bequeathed us a useful distinction. There are central matters — “core doctrines,” in current parlance — which constitute the church's soteriology. On these, all Anglicans (at least — preferably, all Christians) must work in common, so that we can recognize and preach a common gospel. There are a great many other matters to which the church, rightly, turns its attention: social structures, politics, economics, and sexuality, for example. Such matters are doctrinal, as well as disciplinary — which is why Hooker does not draw the doctrine/discipline distinction, noting only that his Puritan opponents do so.³¹ Moreover, “things indifferent” are truly important (I often suspect that the name — even in its Greek form, as *adiaphora* — is unhelpful, because the significance of such issues can easily be obscured by the categorization). On these matters, we need to be in constant conversation with others, whether Christian or non-Christian, Anglican or non-Anglican. As sisters and brothers of Anglican and Episcopal churches throughout the world, we owe them a special hearing on these matters. We need not, necessarily, all agree on these things, however.

We must be clear that a distinction like the one that Hooker draws is an absolute necessity of life for Christian churches. If we reject such distinctions formally, then we will employ them informally and, very likely, unawares. Hooker needed the distinction to help him explain that the English church could be faithful to God's mission, while maintaining a polity different from those adopted by Genevan-style presbyterians. Note that refusal to identify some matters as “core” and others as “consequential” places us in

³¹ *Ibid.*, III, iii, 2; 1, 210.

the same awkward position as it would have placed Hooker. We must ask which church is truly faithful in its polity: is it Rome, Geneva, Canterbury, Azusa St., or none of the above? We cannot escape the recognition that our soteriology is directly constituted by certain central assertions (effectively, those Trinitarian and Christological doctrines established by the first seven ecumenical councils — although Anglicans have tended to focus especially on the first four councils) and only consequently related to other beliefs and actions.

The church's message of salvation is not built upon any particular assertion about marriage or sexuality. For a significant part of the church's history, marriages have not ordinarily been performed within the ecclesiastical context.³² The church's attitude to marriage has often (especially, but not only, before the Reformation) reflected the ambivalence that appears in Paul's writings: marriage is an honourable estate, but celibacy is superior. Jesus the Christ remained unwed and, as far as we know, chaste. The early church's conciliar discussions, so important to our understanding of the basic architecture of Christian theology, turned on questions of Trinitarian theology, Christology and theological anthropology. Issues surrounding marriage and sexuality have played significant, often ambiguous, roles in Christian life (Remember Henry VIII?), but they cannot really be regarded as fundamental to the Gospel. Even the treatment of marriage as a sacrament is debated, and the *Articles of Religion* insist that marriage cannot be called a "Sacrament of the Gospel." Instead, it fits into that

³² Frances and Joseph Gies, *Marriage and Family in the Middle Ages*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 39-40 and *passim*.

Though weddings outside, then inside, church buildings became common in the Middle Ages, they were not required for a valid marriage in England until the Marriage Act of 1753. This change in the law was intended to deter people from running away from their families and marrying partners deemed unacceptable by others, as well as to prevent polygamy — which was regarded as both common and easily arranged. Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800*, Abridged, (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 32-33.

ambiguous (that word again!) category of ecclesiastical practices “such as have grown partly of the corrupt following of the Apostles, partly are states of life allowed in the Scriptures; but yet have not like nature of Sacraments with Baptism, and the Lord’s Supper, for that they have not any visible sign or ceremony ordained of God” (Article XXV).

Marriage and Sexuality

Issues of marriage and sexuality, then, have only an indirect and unclear relationship to the Christian Gospel. The linkage has traditionally occurred in four places: 1) the insistence upon male headship and superiority; 2) the centrality of creativity to Christian living; 3) the priority of stability, both personal and social; and 4) the necessity for consent.³³ Maintaining the valuable parts of this linkage sustains a genetic relationship to earlier versions of Christian thinking about marriage; the birth of a contemporary reappropriation of doctrine on marriage can be seen to have its genesis in earlier understandings, while the vital characteristics of older statements of the doctrine are maintained.

The emphasis upon male dominance in marital relationships is part of many traditional societies and, for Christians, it has been validated and sustained by the biblical (Pauline or deutero-Pauline) insistence that “Christ is the head of every man, and the

³³ The church has also been concerned with issues of consanguinity. This has been essentially a practical and administrative issue, arising out of the kind of unity that marriage is understood to create, rather than a soteriologically-significant theological issue. It has, nonetheless, been the dominant ecclesiastical issue regarding marriage for notable portions of the church’s life. Michael M. Sheehan, “The European Family and Canon Law,” in *Marriage, Family, and Law in Medieval Europe: Collected Studies*, (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1996), 253-256.

husband is the head of his wife” (I Cor. 11:3). Many of the greatest of Christian thinkers, including such luminaries as Augustine and Aquinas, have reiterated the fundamental assertion of male dominance as decisive. Male headship has been seen as basic to the world, because woman is seen as derivative from man by nature (Gen. 2:18-23), subject to man as a consequence of sin (Gen. 3:16), and dependent upon man for salvation (I Cor. 11:2-10, Eph. 5:24, I Tim. 2:11-14). Indeed, male dominance has come to be seen by many people as soteriologically necessary, as is evident in the ongoing debate over the ordination of women.

This aspect of theological concern, which has tended to cause a woman’s participation in human and divine life to be seen as dependent upon — and occurring through — male leadership, has been formally rejected by the Anglican Church of Canada. The *BCP* and *Book of Alternative Services* (BAS) have both moved away from the vow in the original *BCP* service, in which the woman committed to “obey” and “serve” the man,³⁴ and the *BAS* leaves no room for a man to “give” the woman to a new master.³⁵ We have come to recognize that male dominance is not a vital characteristic of marriage; indeed, there is ample evidence that marriage in the contemporary world has been harmed substantially by the insistence upon male dominance. The importance of this aspect of Christian thought about marriage, then, is that we can see that our current position on marriage is already a reappropriation of the doctrine as it has previously been understood. A revolution has occurred in our thinking about the relationship between men and women, leading to a fundamental shift in our understanding of marriage.

³⁴ Compare “The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony,” in the 1662 *BCP* (<http://www.eskimo.com/~lhowell/bcp1662/occasion/marriage.html>), with “The Solemnization of Matrimony” in the Canadian *BCP* of 1959 (p. 565).

³⁵ “Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage,” in *The Book of Alternative Services of the Anglican Church of Canada*, (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1985), 530-531, 543-544.

Creativity has always been a priority for Christian living. In married life, creativity has generally been seen as a function of procreation — the getting and raising of children. This is, of course, a truly ancient concern and rightly so, for life has often been uncertain; the continuity of personal and communal life is dependent upon the birth and survival of offspring. The emphasis upon this form of creativity shows up in the context of the first creation account in Genesis (“Be fruitful and multiply” Gen. 1:28) precisely because of the need for humanity to strengthen its fragile toehold in a complex and difficult world. However, this is not even the first aspect of human creativity to be emphasized in the text, nor is it alone in its context; it is embedded in the discussion of humanity’s call to stewardship of creation. The text does not seem to imply that the bearing of children is the sole reason for the appearance of more than one kind of human. And, indeed, the second creation account seems to emphasize partnership and mutual support, rather than simply procreation, as the reason for the plurality of humans and kinds of humans (Gen. 2:18). Thus, the *BCP* speaks of “the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, in both prosperity and adversity” as part of the reason for marriage.³⁶ The *BAS* makes the point even more strongly, by speaking of “mutual comfort and help,” as well as knowing each other in “acts of love,” while making any mention of procreation optional.³⁷

Society, help, and comfort in what? Christian theology in the West has been strong in its sense of vocation for clergy and religious, but has not made sufficient effort to articulate a theology of work that reaches beyond explicitly “churchy” activities.

Anselmian soteriology is partly at fault for this, because it automatically implies that any

³⁶ *BCP*, 564.

³⁷ *BAS*, 528, 541.

efforts on our part must be seen as attempts to earn salvation. Irenaeus, however, reminds us that God is transforming all of creation into God's own image, inviting the whole *cosmos* into participation in the divine life. Sayers emphasizes this point, suggesting that God uses all of our creative efforts, whether they be in school-teaching or blanket-making or book-writing or hospital-visiting or — fill in the blank — in order to build God's Reign.³⁸ Part of the good news is that we can participate in God's Reign, by doing our work in fidelity to our craft and to the glory of God.

As contemporary North Americans are aware, gay and lesbian persons are fully as capable of this sort of creative participation in God's Reign as are heterosexual persons. Openly homosexual persons provide leadership and make great contributions to society in all walks of life, from politics (The Hon. Scott Brison, M.P., former Minister of Public Works and Government Services, and Receiver General of Canada) to athletics (Mark Tewksbury, former Olympic swimmer) to music (Tegan & Sara, pop singers/songwriters/musicians). Refusing Christian marriage to such people on the grounds that their creativity is inadequate would be to suggest that our theology of creativity is insufficient, for God can use all of these gifts to build God's Reign.

The fundamental value of marriage is that it is a social structure that supports and sustains all kinds of human creativity, whether or not couples can have children. This is an important aspect of the unity between Christ and the church that marriage symbolizes (Eph. 5:25-32, *BCP* service, and *BAS* service³⁹). Marriage provides for a level of mutual commitment that may not be possible to sustain in any other way. It allows a manifestation of intimate love, out of which can come strong partnership and, thence,

³⁸ William H. Harrison, "Loving the creation, Loving the Creator: Dorothy L. Sayers's Theology of Work." *Anglican Theological Review* 86.2 (Spring 2004) 239-257.

³⁹ *BCP*, 564; *BAS*, 528, 541.

strong community. In this context of intimate love, true creativity, which always finds its origin in true love, can flourish.

This is an important reason that the church supports every effort to maintain marriages. The vows are intended to be permanent, as a means of sustaining both personal and social stability and pointing to God's constant gift of love. The life of building-up, however it is manifested, can be undermined by a situation of constant unease. Relationships that are fundamentally temporary and conditional are unlikely to give rise to the intimate, mutual love, and consequent trust, that we seek in the marital relationship. This impedes creativity in all sorts of ways, not the least of which is in the raising of children. Thus, the church blesses the marriage bond and sees in it an image of God's permanent fidelity to God's people.

Nothing about the nature of gay and lesbian relationships suggests that they are incapable of the same degree of permanence that characterizes heterosexual relationships — which is, as we know, often a lesser degree than the vows call for and the church desires. Gay and lesbian persons are able to enter into permanent, stable, marital arrangements, as the state has come to recognize. Thus, homosexual persons are choosing to marry, even when there is little or no immediate social or economic benefit from doing so. The church should welcome and support this effort, as a symbol of the loving gift of self that occurs in marriage.

The element of choice — even radical and sometimes unsafe choice — that is part of contemporary homosexual marriage is theologically significant. An emphasis upon the need for consent on the side of both partners for a marriage to be valid has deep roots in Christian thinking. Together, Gratian and Peter Lombard caused a significant

development in the notion of consent, in the 12th c. Prior to Gratian, consent was understood primarily in familial terms, because of marriage's role in cementing relationships between households. Gratian changed this situation — in the church's official stance, if not in the concrete lives of everybody.⁴⁰ He created a doctrine of “active consent,” whereby the partners could not be compelled, even by parental vows, to marry unless they so chose.⁴¹ Peter Lombard extended this notion, by insisting upon “words of the present,” so that early family promises cannot make a union valid.⁴² Only a firm declaration, made in the present by the two consenting partners entering a union, can create a valid marriage. Indeed, the decisive reality of the church's theology of marriage seems to have become the focus upon consent.

In broad terms, the resulting view of marriage can be set out as follows:
 1) The matrimonial bond was created by consent; neither consummation nor formality of any kind was required for validity. 2) It was the consent of the couple that created the marriage bond. Whatever the role of the family or the lord may have been, it was secondary and dispensable. 3) It was preferred that the marriage bond be created in a public setting; but inasmuch as external formalities were developed and imposed, they were located within neither familial nor seigniorial structures but in the local community considered in its religious or parochial capacity. 4) There was a desire to internalize the marriage relationship. Theologians emphasized the bond of charity between the spouses and the possibility of its growth as a reason for their choice of each other. 5) Throughout the discussion by both canonists and theologians the point of view was one that focused on the couple: by and large, lordship was ignored; the wider family circle and even the children born to the couple received little attention.⁴³

This significant shift in the understanding of marriage created a need for new rules and procedures. As a result, the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) “called for endowment of

⁴⁰ Peter Fleming reminds us that this theological change certainly did not govern the lives of the general population or even the church hierarchy, where the official stance “was as far as possible ignored in favour of the admonition to obey one's lords and elders.” Peter Fleming, *Family and Household in Medieval England*, (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2001), 13.

⁴¹ Gies, 137-138.

⁴² Gies, 139.

⁴³ Michael M. Sheehan, “Choice of Marriage Partner,” in *Marriage, Family, and Law in Medieval Europe: Collected Studies*, (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1996), 91-92.

brides and public weddings, in church, with declarations of consent by both parties, and publication of banns,⁴⁴ thereby setting the pattern into which marriage slowly settled over the following centuries.

Developing this understanding of consent, the church has firmly allied itself with the notion that marriage is something more than, perhaps *other* than, a business or political arrangement between households. Instead, it is intended to be a relationship of partnership and mutual support, for the purposes of creativity. The church has also set a course that may reasonably be understood as leading directly to the blessing of same-sex marriages. A person who is genuinely gay or lesbian cannot truly consent to a heterosexual marriage of the sort that we have discussed above (even by medieval standards of consent, which certainly do not match current expectations), since such a person cannot fulfil the marital vows and expectations, in any satisfactory way. A marriage entered into as a direct result of pressure from family, society or church is not really a marriage; indeed, the Roman Catholic Church considers this sort of force as grounds for an annulment of marriage.⁴⁵ Unless homosexual marriage is permissible, this leaves gay and lesbian persons no option but enforced celibacy and chastity, which is a clear abuse of the gift of celibacy. Gay and lesbian persons who have no gift for celibacy are left with the choice between illicit liaisons, which must be kept secret from the church, or loneliness, with the potential consequences of pain and despair. The only marriage to which a gay or lesbian person can reasonably consent will be homosexual in nature. Such a marriage can support the growth in appropriate commitment and common feeling that the church intended when it took upon itself the responsibility for marriage.

⁴⁴ Gies, 141.

⁴⁵ Colin B. Donovan, "Annulment – Invalidity of Matrimonial Consent," http://www.ewtn.com/expert/answers/marital_consent.htm#force

The church needs to recognize this and support such marriages with all of its resources, starting with a clear blessing of the relationship.

Many gay and lesbian persons are entering into married relationships. They can see the possibilities for intimate love and long-term commitment, with the consequent opportunities for creative living. Gay and lesbian persons offer much to the church and society; they possess the divine creative gifts that those of other sexual orientations possess and are equally capable of living creatively. Many are finding that marriage is the context in which those creative gifts can best be fostered and supported. They are choosing to provide the stability of marriage for one another, children (adopted, or from previous marriages), and society. These marriages are entered into with consent — perhaps more truly than previous marriages that were heterosexual but inconsistent with the natures that God has given to these homosexual persons.

Marriage is precisely what the church ought most reasonably to ask of homosexual persons. The question at issue is not the possibility of child-bearing, nor the mechanics of sexual activity — neither of which have been theological grounds for support or rejection of particular marriages in the past. The church is not, after all, planning to refuse marriage to male/female couples who are clearly unable to have children (we still marry couples who are in their 70s) or male/female couples who engage in forms of sexual activity (in the privacy of their bedrooms) that make us uncomfortable. Instead, the question must be whether God's life can be seen in the joined lives of gay and lesbian persons: Can they, as couples, participate in the creative life that is the Triune God's gift to the world? The answer to this question is affirmative, beyond debate.

The church is empowered to make changes of the sort that is envisaged in the blessing of same-sex marriages. She has made much more radical shifts in the past. Doing something new is not merely a possibility for Christianity; instead, it is a historical reality and a gospel imperative. The church must always be open to the direction of the Holy Spirit, and prepared to consider developments in the nature of the faith. History is the context in which God is building God's Reign; to ignore it is to lose the joy of participation in God's life, eternal life. The blessing of same-sex marriages is altogether consistent with the church's gospel message, as it relates to marriage. There is no theological impediment to this practice, and substantial theological justification for undertaking it.