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No Development of Doctrine for Us!

† By THEO. ENGELDER †

(Continued)

The second reason why we refuse to have anything to do with developing the doctrine is that the development of the Christian doctrine simply means the destruction of the Christian doctrine. "He who sets out to improve the Scriptural doctrines is losing the doctrines. 'Progress' is here only a euphemism for retrogression; 'development' is a misnomer for destruction." (*Proc., Western District, 1897, p. 68.*) Or, as Dr. Pieper puts it: "That there can be no development of the Christian doctrine is evidenced by the patent fact that whenever men set out to develop the doctrine, they invariably pervert and destroy the Christian doctrine" (*Christliche Dogmatik, I, p. 151*). If you add anything to the Christian doctrine or take anything away from it, if you modify it in the least, it will no longer be what it was. Reconstruction here means destruction. And "we thank God that Walther did not attempt to adjust, modify, make over, change, the old doctrine. Do you know what happens when the modern theologians, in their youthful itch to go beyond the Fathers, set about developing the Christian doctrine? Read the series of articles by Walther in Volumes 21—23 of *Lehre und Wehre*: 'Was ist es um den Fortschritt der modernen lutherischen Theologie in der Lehre?' What these men called development of doctrine resulted in the abridgment or total loss of it." (*Walther and the Church, p. 20.*)

The reconstructionists themselves tell us that they are offering the Church new doctrines. S. P. Cadman: "I should

welcome a restatement of the New Testament faith made in the light of advancing learning. . . . What we need is not less, but better theology, embodying doctrines which ennoble rather than stultify reason, and which satisfy the universal demands of the human soul." (*Answers to Everyday Questions*, p. 264 f.)¹ Let us examine a few of the teachings they offer and see what a vast difference there is between the old truth and "the old truth taught in a new way."

Take the doctrine of inspiration. W. A. Brown: "The Bible, as we have seen, is not a system of doctrine giving us our creed in final form. It is not a Code of laws defining the niceties of conduct. . . . Unique as the Bible is in many respects, it is a human book. . . . The Fundamentalist contends that the Modernist's view of the Bible as a book which contains errors robs its message of authority and certainty. But the Modernist does not consider that the errors in the Bible affect its purpose at all" (*Beliefs That Matter*, pp. 230, 219, 225). And: "What we need in such a textbook is a compendium of simple principles capable of indefinite application and therefore needing *continual reinterpretation in the light of expanding experience*. . . . The theologians have made it a dogmatic textbook, searching its pages for proof texts which could be made a test of orthodoxy." (*A Creed for Free Men*, p. 230.) The Modernist has found, in the light of expanding experience, that the old view of the Bible as the infallible Word of God, given by inspiration, is no longer tenable. H. F. Rall: "We cannot say of every word in the Bible that it is the word of God." The Bible is "not the final authority for our faith." "The Church itself never remained the same in any two generations. . . . Christianity has been a religion of freedom and change and ad-

¹ The radicals openly declare that Christendom needs an entirely new set of doctrines. Bertrand Russell alleges that "religious men and women, in the present day, have come to feel that most of the creed of Christendom, as it existed in the middle ages, is unnecessary, and indeed a mere hindrance to the religious life." (See C. S. Macfarland, *Trends of Christian Thinking*, p. 59.) The "conservative" reconstructionists pretend that they are not depriving the Church of the old doctrine, but that they are only casting the old truth into "new intellectual molds" and setting the Gospel free from "certain archaic wrappings" (Edwin Lewis, *The Faith We Declare*, pp. 182, 224). However, they admit that they are thereby adding something new to the old doctrine, that they aim "to teach the old truth in a new way and, following the guidance of the Spirit of God, to *augment* it" (Von Hofmann).

vance. . . . We do not stop with Christ, but He gives us the line of advance." "Men faced certain facts that made impossible the old theory of a book verbally inspired and infallible" (*A Faith for Today*, pp. 38, 50, 221, 232). The development of doctrine gradually did away with Verbal Inspiration. Geo. A. Buttrick: "In retrospect it seems incredible that the theory of literal inspiration could ever have been held. Literal infallibility of Scripture is a fortress impossible to defend. Probably few people who claim to 'believe every word of the Bible' really mean it. That avowal, held to its last logic, would risk a trip to the insane asylum. Meanwhile we should frankly admit the bankruptcy of 'literal infallibility, and, under guidance of the facts, set out on the long, hard quest for truth.'" (*The Christian Fact and Modern Doubt*; see *CONC. THEOL. MONTHLY*, 1941, p. 223.) And sometimes the change from teaching Verbal Inspiration to whatever the "long, hard quest for truth" will find to replace it takes place very rapidly. It may take only fifty years to accomplish such a development. The Lutheran E. H. Delk tells the sad story: "When I came to the seminary years ago, I fully believed in the verbal inspiration of every book in the Bible. To think of myth or legend in connection with the Bible seemed destructive and morally reprehensible. . . . The Bible was to me an infallible authority in its statements concerning astronomy, geology, anthropology, history, ethics, and religion. . . . What a change has been wrought in the sphere of New Testament scholarship during the last fifty years! . . . In a word, theology is a progressive accomplishment in Christian truth, ever rejuvenated by a fresh study of the Christian facts, the history of the Church, and Christian experience." (See *Theol. Monthly*, 1927, p. 172.)

If you go in for the development of the Christian doctrine, you will have to quit teaching that the Bible is given by inspiration of God. Are you ready to make common cause with the reconstructionists?

What about the doctrine of the total depravity of natural man? That old-fashioned teaching has gone by the board. To quote but one of the reconstructionists, A. E. Garvil says: "Such phrases as natural corruption, total depravity, original sin, have for me become anachronisms." (*The Fatherly Rule of God*, p. 28.) After you have pressed the statements of Jesus and Paul and Moses (Matt. 15:19; Rom. 7:18; Gen. 8:21) into

the "new intellectual molds" and made them to conform to the "dignity of man," they get an entirely different meaning; they mean the very opposite of what the words say. Oh, yes, the majority of the reconstructionists will still speak of sinful acts committed by man, but even such a conception will sooner or later be treated as an anachronism. The more advanced class of the reconstructionists declares: "A criminal is basically a sick person."

The doctrine of the Lord's Supper before and after the development-treatment. We rejoice in the Real Presence, as taught by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul, and we declare with Werner Elert: "The doctrine of the Lord's Supper is perfectly presented in the First Letter to the Corinthians; it is not subject to further growth, and it needs no further development." (*Morphologie des Luthertums*, I, p. 280.) No, no, exclaim the reconstructionists, you cannot know what the real doctrine of the Lord's Supper is before it has gone through the process of development. H. Wheeler Robinson: "Can we think of the Sacraments on grounds of modern experience and modern thought in quite the same way as did the earliest believers? Probably not; for no generation thinks quite in the same way as that before it, and the difference is apt to be increased the further back we go. . . . Religious experience is to be taken as the starting point of theological reconstruction." (*The Christian Experience of the Holy Spirit*, p. VIII; p. 195.) Oliver Chase Quick: "Just as the full truth of the Incarnation and the Atonement were not formulated once for all by the lips of the Incarnate Himself, but gradually emerged in the process of Christian experience and are still capable of further explication; so the doctrine and even the form and matter of the sacraments need not have been laid down in any precise terms by Jesus Himself, but may have been evolved, and still be in process of evolution, as the Church under His Spirit's guidance has learned and learns to fulfill His mission upon the earth. . . . The construction of Eucharistic doctrine demands something other than a meticulous adherence to the letter of our Lord's speech. . . . We need not be concerned to maintain that the whole significance and application of His own words must in every detail have been explicit in the consciousness of Jesus at the time when they were uttered." (*The Christian Sacraments*, pp. 119, 188, 193.) W. A. Brown: "It is just be-

cause the sacrament is capable of so many and such varying meanings that it retains its perennial vitality." (*Beliefs That Matter*, p. 275.) And there are many Lutherans who subscribe to the words of V. Ferm: "Much water has passed under the bridge since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. . . . We might well question whether or not the Christological doctrines of the ubiquity of Christ's body . . . and *communicatio idiomatum* are satisfactory even from a biblical point of view. Even the position which Luther himself took on the interpretation of the Eucharist may fairly be challenged as a necessarily true biblical exegesis" (*What Is Lutheranism?* P. 279 f.). We are asked to give up the certain, the consoling doctrine of the Real Presence, and, engaging in the "long, hard quest for truth," attempt to find which of the dozens and dozens of substitutes offered best fits the need of the present generation; and the following generation may choose a different substitute.

And we will have to give up much more. The reconstructionists ask us to quit preaching about the vicarious satisfaction. The change of social experience changes the doctrine, and so, as Shailer Mathews tells us, "by the end of the revolutionary period of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the political and social presuppositions which underlay the orthodox doctrines of salvation were replaced by newer presuppositions born of the rise of democracy" (*The Church and the Christian*, p. 70). The old doctrine of the vicarious satisfaction is out of date. H. F. Rall: The Atonement must not be made "a courtroom affair, a plan by which a debt can be paid or a penalty remitted." (*A Faith for Today*, p. 188.) When S. P. Cadman was asked to express his view of Henry Ward Beecher's statement that he had come to the conclusion that the doctrine of "vicarious atonement" was a gigantic lie, he said: "Mr. Beecher repudiated what many Christians likewise repudiate, that God punished Jesus in our stead and with the severity befitting our transgressions and that because of this substitution of the Innocent for the guilty we escape the penalty due to our offences. So crude and impossible a conception of the 'Vicarious Atonement' has no sanction from the New Testament." (See the *Lutheran Witness*, 1929, p. 6.) What the New Testament says on this point must be interpreted by our reason. E. Grubb: "Suppose we are in doubt about the doctrine of Atonement and we wish to know what

the Bible teaches on the subject." Find out how much of this teaching "answers the deepest demands of our own reason and conscience." (*The Bible, Its Nature and Inspiration*, p. 240 ff.) The late Professor Hobart: "I cannot see anything understandable or acceptable in the theory that my guilt and my penalty were placed upon Christ, or that Christ's holiness is imputed to me in any way that involves a substitution of His holiness for mine or of His suffering for what was due to me. That view of the theory of the atonement finds no foothold in my consciousness or my reason." (*Transplanted Truths from Romans*, p. 29.) Our Christian self-consciousness (or reason) tells us that "of man, too, it is true that Atonement is primarily not something done for him from without, but something that happens within him." Thus W. A. Brown, in *Beliefs That Matter*, p. 135.

And von Hofmann, a past master in the art of developing the Christian doctrine (it is the business of the theologian "to teach the old truth in a new way and, following the guidance of the Spirit of God, to augment it"), following Schleiermacher, played a prominent part in the rejection of the old doctrine of the atonement and gained a large following among the Lutheran theologians of Germany. He openly declared: "Christ did not suffer in place of man. . . . Atonement does not consist in this, that Christ expiated for our sins in His suffering, but in this, that the communion between God and Jesus Christ proved itself by Christ's enduring to the end the consequences of sin. . . . The Epistle to the Hebrews does not find the need of Christ's death in this, that God's punitive justice had to be satisfied, but in this that it was demanded by Christ's union with mankind, entered into for the purpose of redemption." (*Der Schriftbeweis*, Second Half of First Section, p. 320 sqq.) "My doctrine differs essentially from it [the doctrine of the old Church] in that the Son was not subjected to the wrath of the Father, not even in a vicarious way. . . . The Son did not suffer the punishment of mankind, but He suffered what His entrance into the Adamitic race carried with it." (*Schutzschriften fuer eine neue Weise, alte Wahrheit zu lehren*. See Baier-Walther, III, p. 117.) "Von Hofmann and those that follow him teach Christ saves not through any vicarious satisfaction but by being the head of a new, sanctified humanity" (Pieper, *Christliche Dogmatik*, II, p. 431), and there is no dif-

ference between his teaching on this point and that of the radical theologians who say that Atonement is primarily not something done for man but something that happens within man.²

Is there a Christian who will accept what von Hofmann and W. A. Brown and H. W. Beecher have found in developing the Biblical doctrine of the atonement? Theodor Kliefoth characterizes Hofmann's teaching as "a theological system which does violence to the Scriptures, disfiguring the doctrine of salvation by means of ingenious, but untrue combinations, and destroying the structure of Christian doctrine both by the admixture of philosophical elements to the more theoretical doctrines of God, the Trinity, creation, man, the person, natures and states of Christ, and by weakening throughout the practical dogmas of sin, redemption, atonement, the works of grace, and the appropriation of salvation. . . . Von Hofmann insists that he conforms to the doctrine of the Church, yes, that he is developing and improving the doctrine of the Church through his theology. . . . The only result of such dishonesty will be utter confusion in the minds of particularly the younger generation, and if the theology of the Lutheran Church is no longer willing or able to dissipate such mists, it is no longer worthy of its name, and the last hour of the Lutheran Church has come." (*Der Schriftbeweis v. Hofmanns*, p. 559 f.)

If man is not saved through the Vicarious Satisfaction, he must procure his salvation through his own endeavors. And the final outcome of the development of doctrine is salvation by works. "These theologians are willing to pay the price of their rejection of the vicarious satisfaction. The price is nothing less than the rejection of the Christian doctrine of justification. . . . Kirn is willing to pay this price: 'We are compelled to make the transformation of man a factor in the work of the atonement.'" (Pieper, *op cit.*, II, p. 430.) Ed. Baker is ready to pay the price. He wrote in the *Christian Century* of Jan. 19, 1944: "God does not demand of us any hocus-pocus or blood offering for sin, but rather that we do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with Him." Other voices: Shailer Mathews: "What the world requires of the churches is not a revival of

² Hofmann (and Schleiermacher) also denies original sin. His "independent" faith — consciousness knew nothing of such a thing. (See Pieper, *op. cit.*, I, p. 74.)

fourth-century Christology, but the impregnation of economic and political processes with love. . . . The churches must make theology secondary to morality embodying the spirit of Jesus." (*Op. cit.*, p. 105.) James D. Smart: "In relation to the God and Father who rules over all our days, forgiveness is the overcoming of our rebelliousness and the reconciling of our will to His will for us." (*What a Man Can Believe*, p. 193.) Henry J. Golding, a leader of the New York Ethical Society, in an address delivered in St. Louis on Feb. 21, 1927, described Dr. H. E. Fosdick as "the man who has liberalized Liberal Christianity" and quotes him to this effect: "There are two types of Christianity. One is the religion which Jesus Christ Himself possessed and by which He lived. His filial fellowship with God, His purity, unselfishness, sincerity, sacrifice, His exaltation of spiritual values, and His love for men—the religion of Jesus. The other consists of things said of, and believed concerning, Jesus, theories to account for Him, accumulated explanations and interpretations of Him—the religion about Jesus." And, says Golding, "it is Fosdick's business to substitute the former for the latter." Dr. F. H. Quitman, the Lutheran rationalist, said in a jubilee sermon, delivered in New York in 1817: "Es sei eben Zeit und Erfahrung von noeten, die Dinge zur Vollkommenheit gedeihen zu lassen; so sei auch die lutherische Lehre nach und nach und unvermerkt 'verbessert und vervollkommnet' worden; die Reformatoren haetten die Wahrheit nicht gleich in vollem Glanze und ganzer Ausdehnung schauen koennen," and that, after the doctrine had been developed and put in its final shape, we now know that what the Reformers meant to teach was justification by works: "Der wahre Sinn jedoch, welchen die Reformatoren mit dem Wort 'Glaube' verbanden, geht noch deutlicher hervor aus dem XX. Artikel der Augsburgischen Confession, wo sie ausdruecklich erklaren, dass *der Glaube, welcher gute Werke hervorbringt*" (italicized by Quitman) "den Menschen vor Gott rechtfertigt." (See A. L. Graebner, *Geschichte der Lutherischen Kirche in Amerika*, p. 653 f.) And the "conservative" Hofmann has developed and augmented the doctrine to make it say that the reconciliation with God depends, finally, on the work of man. "Hofmann and those that follow him teach that Christ saves, not through any vicarious satisfaction, but by being the head of a new, sanctified humanity. . . .

Dorner correctly evaluates Hofmann's theory thus: 'It is sanctification which at bottom effects our reconciliation' " (Pieper, *op. cit.*, II, p. 431 f.).

We say with William Blake: "If Christianity were morals, Socrates is the Savior." (*The Living Church*, Jan. 14, 1933.) We say with Schmauck-Benze: "Our modern religious thought, especially that which considers the old confessions to be antiquated, makes man himself the central and most important figure in religion, and, in this connection, permits the introduction of all kinds of Pelagian and rationalistic error." (*The Confessional Principle*, p. 137 f.)

We have shown that developing and amending the Christian doctrine means falsification of the doctrine. Walther was certainly right in declaring that the theory that the doctrine can be improved is "the *πρῶτον ψεῦδος* of modern theology; it is merely a daughter of Rationalism appearing in Christian dress, a sister of Romanism hiding behind a Protestant mask, and a *fruitful mother of large families of heresies*." (See *CONC. THEOL. MTHLY.*, 1939, p. 307.) We are not charging all reconstructionists with all the errors mentioned. God in His grace has kept many of those who have set out to improve this and that doctrine from applying their theory to all doctrines. But what the development of doctrine leads to has been stated by Dr. Muenkel, as quoted by Pieper, *op. cit.*, I, p. 151, in these words: "There is hardly one doctrine left which has not, in a marked degree, been subjected to recastings, additions, and eliminations. Starting with the Trinity, proceeding to the doctrine of the person and the office of Christ, to the doctrines of faith and justification, of the Sacraments, and of the Church, down to Eschatology, you will scarcely find anything in its old form and with its former value. . . . The death of Christ is no longer permitted to be taught as satisfying for our sins and reconciling us to God. The righteousness of faith, consisting in God's declaring us righteous, is said to be too wooden and external; in a covert manner the works are again brought in, Law and Gospel are again being churned together. . . . Would anyone dare to speak of development of the Lutheran doctrine when the most important parts of the Lutheran doctrine are swept out of doors like old rubbish? . . ." And there are many reconstructionists who are proud of the fact that the Church has found a domicile in its midst for "large families

of heresies." *The Northwestern Christian Advocate* of Dec. 22, 1927, published the following: "To believe in the Holy Ghost is to believe in growth in our perception of Christian truth; for the Spirit is constantly taking the things of Christ and revealing them to men. . . . The growing understanding of Christ's mind has necessitated changes in the statement of Christian truth. Doctrines have again and again had to change their form because of the advance of knowledge. *The heterodoxies of one day became the orthodoxies of the next.* . . . Once again the Church finds itself in a time of vast and far-reaching change. New discoveries have necessitated new statements of our faith. Our views of the Bible, our ideas as to God's relationship to the world have got to be reconstructed. . . . The Church that will not get out of its groove will find its grave. . . . What I pray the Church may always be is a Church that is ever loyal to the central Gospel, but which, because it believes in the Holy Ghost, will always be frank and open-eyed and hospitable to new truth. . . ." These reconstructionists are actually asking us to eliminate the term "heresy" and to treat the "heterodoxies of one day" as the orthodoxies of our day!³

And because development of doctrine means the falsification of the doctrine, we can have nothing to do with it. Every Christian hates every false doctrine. "I hate every false way. . . . I hate vain thoughts." (Ps. 119:104, 113.) Doctrine is not something indifferent to us. It is a matter of life and death. True doctrine is the way to eternal life, false doctrine leads to eternal death. We renounce the idea that man may be saved

³ We cannot understand why the reconstructionists persist in calling the old, revamped heresies "new" truths. They ought to know that every student of the history of dogma can easily recognize the old heterodoxies, even though they be dressed up in new, most unintelligible, phrases. Dr. Walther suggested in his lectures to us that Hofmann's *Schutzschriften fuer eine neue Weise, alte Wahrheit zu lehren* should bear the title: "*Alte Weise, neue Wahrheiten in Cours zu bringen.*" What F. Bettex wrote in *The Fundamentals*, IV, p. 82, applies here: "Nothing new in these 'new' views. Those critics claim for their peculiar views that they are 'new theology' and the 'latest investigation.' But that also is untrue. . . . Even eighteen hundred years ago Celsus brought forward the same objections as those now raised by modern criticism. . . . Also there have been other noted heretics, such as Arius, who denied the divinity of Christ, and Pelagius, who rejected the doctrine of original sin. . . . It certainly does not argue for the spiritual progress of our race that such a threadbare and outworn unbelieving kind of science should again, in these days, deceive and even stultify thousands of people."—"Progress" in doctrine is retrogression.

by believing any kind of doctrine.⁴ The saving doctrine is but one, and we heed the word of the Apostle: "Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines," Heb. 13:9.⁵ These new doctrines, ever changing, cannot stablish the heart, and we do not want to be "chlidren, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine," Eph. 4:14, "ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of truth," 2 Tim. 3:7; we cling to "the faithful Word," Tit. 1:9, "the sure Word as taught" (Rev. St. V.). We abominate the pride and self-conceit which seeks to improve the doctrine "which was once delivered unto the saints," Jude 3, and want to remain humble "catechumens and pupils" of the Apostles and Prophets, simply repeating their words of saving wisdom.

Let us heed the warning of Luther: "Das habt ihr davon [the loss of the saving truth], wenn ihr jene hoeren wollt, so etwas Anderes und Koestlicheres ruehmen und vorgeben" (VIII:1100). "And if they establish new things with regard to faith and works, be assured that the Holy Spirit is not there, but only the unholy spirit and his angels" (XVI:2249). No development of doctrine for us! "We fabricate nothing new, but retain, and hold to, the old Word of God" (XVII:1324).

(To be concluded)

⁴ We would like to get an answer from the reconstructionists on the question as to the ultimate fate of all those generations of Christians who believed in the Vicarious Atonement, the Verbal Inspiration of Scripture, and things of that sort. Were they saved or lost? The present generation says that the former generations harbored false beliefs. We presume that the answer would be that their false faith did them no harm; a man may be saved by believing any kind of doctrine—if he only leads a moral life.

⁵ Lenski: "By varicolored and strange doctrine be not carried aside.' One doctrine must be ours, one changeless doctrine, that which presents the changeless 'Jesus Christ.' . . . This divine 'doctrine' cannot change, because the saving facts it presents are changeless. . . . 'Strange' doctrines are the inventions of men, not the Rock of Ages, the eternal, immutable truth from the eternal God. All they do is 'to carry aside,' off the true, safe course—whither, one can only guess, certainly not to God."