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# The History and Development of Doctrine: Loehe's Posture Toward Nineteenth-Century Theological Trends

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Nineteenth-century Germany was a century of science (*Wissenschaft*). The enamor for science embraced the entire populace, inspiring educational reforms across the German lands and creating popular outlets for scientific knowledge, such as museums and popular journals and books. In Prussia, a new conception of the university was created from the bottom up that became a model for university revisions within Germany and even across the Atlantic. Throughout the German lands, the entire edifice of university education was transformed to become *scientific*.<sup>1</sup> No discipline remained untouched. Not even theology. Especially theology. Thanks to Schleiermacher, despite the valiant efforts of figures such as Kant and Fichte, far from expulsion, the discipline of theology enjoyed a place within the scientific landscape of the university. But membership in the university required every discipline to accommodate itself to the tenets of modern science. While efforts at establishing theology as a legitimate science were many, already by the 1830s the most common expression of the scientific character of theology was as a historical discipline. Amid the rise of history as an academic discipline, the importance of the historical character of the history of Christianity and, more specifically, Christian theology, was a logical turn of events.<sup>2</sup> But theology's historical turn was fraught

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1. There is an extensive amount of literature on this subject. By no means exhaustive, the following works are representative studies on the relationship between *Wissenschaft*, theology, and the German intellectual landscape: Thomas Albert Howard, *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Heinz-Elmar Tenorth, ed., *Geschichte der Universität Unter den Linden 1810–2010*, 6 vols. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag GmbH, 2010–15); Johannes Zachhuber, *Theology as Science in Nineteenth-Century Germany: From F. C. Baur to Ernst Troeltsch* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Chad Wellmon, *Organizing Enlightenment: Information Overload and the Invention of the Modern Research University* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2015); Zachary Purvis, *Theology and the University in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Kevin M Vander Schel and Michael P DeJonge, eds., *Theology, History, and the Modern German University* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021).

2. See Johannes Zachhuber, "Theology and Early Historicism,"

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with challenges. The prevailing historical consciousness threatened to undermine the central claims of Christianity. Already by the end of the previous century, the historical claims of the Old and New Testaments were undermined by academic theologians.<sup>3</sup> By the 1835 publication of David Friedrich Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu*, the historical assumptions of prior generations were already well disputed and, by many, denied.<sup>4</sup>

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in *The Oxford History of Modern German Theology*, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022) forthcoming; Zachhuber, "The Historical Turn," in *The Oxford Handbook of Nineteenth-Century Christian Thought*, eds. Joel D. S. Rasmussen, Judith Wolfe, and Johannes Zachhuber (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 53–71.

3. See Michael C. Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

4. In his intellectual biography of Strauss, Frederick Beiser observes that Strauss's next theological work, the 1838 *Glaubenslehre*, sold poorly and did not elicit a reaction similar to his earlier work due to the fact that only a few years later radical authors were no longer novel.

While not exhaustive, the prominence of theological science and the historical turn of theology were catalysts for the rise and the importance of doctrinal development during the nineteenth century. It was chiefly in wrestling with the historical data of Christian history in their attempt at making theology a science that theologians utilized the concept of development in understanding the history of doctrine and dogma. Schleiermacher, Strauss, and Baur, in engaging the historical narrative of Christian doctrine, became convinced that the history of Christian doctrine revealed a narrative defined by ongoing change and development, in contradiction to narratives that presented the history of Christian doctrine as linear, uniform, and unchanging. The study of doctrinal history, as Ulrich Köpf observes, served to relativize the story of Christian theology.<sup>5</sup> As a science, the study of the history of doctrine was a critical historicization that revealed the instability of the legacy of Christian doctrine. Strauss and Baur were keenly aware of the fact that the history of dogma (*Dogmengeschichte*) was a destabilizing force that, if not wholly undermining dogmatic orthodoxy, at least challenged claims of continuity by demonstrating variation and evolution. Baur argued that the history of doctrine revealed Christian dogmatics as little more than a singular moment in the ongoing history of Christian doctrine, a single snapshot from an entire album of images, negating claims of longitudinal uniformity. More negatively, though, dogmatics was the attempt to isolate a single aspect of doctrinal history and claim it as the authentic teaching of the Christian church.<sup>6</sup> Strauss seemed to revel in the fact that the history of dogma, which history reveals to be a history of development, melts the supposed timeless character of ecclesiastical dogma into a host of countless parts. Criticism awakens within the church the need to differentiate the reality of truth from the externalized form given by the church in symbolical texts and dogmatics. History, for Strauss, is the arbiter of truth in sifting the husk from the kernel, for “the true criticism of dogma is its history.”<sup>7</sup>

While the narrative of development that the history of doctrine revealed was utilized as a critical tool by scholars such as Baur and Strauss against traditional dogmatic accounts, not all were convinced that the historical record resulted in a critical dismissal or reevaluation of theological orthodoxy. Perhaps the name most popularly associated with doctrinal development—at least in Anglophone contexts—is John Henry Newman (1801–1890) and his *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845). For

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nearly two decades, Newman wrestled with the historical record of Christian doctrine and the question of how to account for growth and change across history. While Newman could not dismiss the evidence of development, far from forcing him to hold all doctrine as simply accidents of history, Newman became convinced that only the Roman Catholic Church was capable of maintaining doctrinal continuity in the face of development.<sup>8</sup> The history of doctrine and its chronological development produced a critical burden too heavy to bear his justification of the Anglican Church. Far from driving him to an idealistic reimagining of Christianity—à la Strauss—Newman believed that doctrinal development was a validation of the claims of the Roman Church. Newman's idea would eventually find a home within Rome.<sup>9</sup>

Newman's posture toward development, while critical against his understanding of the Anglican Church, was ultimately positive in comparison to Strauss and Baur. But Newman did not stand alone in his positive interpretation of development. Although Germany was home to highly critical and idealistic theories of development, one finds a number of scholars who contested these theories. Figures such as August Neander (1789–1850), August Tholuck (1799–1877), Isaak Dörner (1809–1884), Theodor Kliefoth (1810–1895), and Gottfried Thomasius (1802–1875) promoted their respective theories regarding the nature of doctrinal development. Similar to Newman, these figures illustrate that historical development was not singularly understood as a threat to the Christian church. In fact, each of them was party to the Awakening Movement, and Kliefoth and Thomasius were even figures of the confessional Lutheran revival. For these awakened and confessional theologians, doctrinal development itself did not have to be problematic. History was not an unequivocal critic of orthodoxy.

The question posed here concerning Wilhelm Loehle's posture toward the concept of doctrinal development and his understanding of the history of doctrine seeks to situate Loehle within the century when the history of doctrinal development was, according

See Frederick C. Beiser, *David Friedrich Strauss, Father of Unbelief: An Intellectual Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 147–152.

5. Ulrich Köpf, “Dogmengeschichte oder Theologiegeschichte?,” *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 85, no. 4 (1988): 455–473.

6. Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Lehrbuch der christlichen Dogmengeschichte*, 3rd ed. (Leipzig: Fues's Verlag, 1867), 1–3; F. C. Baur, *History of Christian Dogma*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. Robert F. Brown and Peter C. Hodgson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 47–48.

7. David Friedrich Strauss, *Die christliche Glaubenslehre in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung und im Kampfe mit der modernen Wissenschaft dargestellt*, vol. 1 (Tübingen: C. F. Osiander; Stuttgart: F. H. Köhler, 1840), 70–72. This and all subsequent translations of German texts are my own.

8. See Stephen Morgan, *John Henry Newman and the Development of Doctrine: Encountering Change, Looking for Continuity* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 2021).

9. See C. Michael Shea, *Newman's Early Roman Catholic Legacy, 1845–1854* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

to Martin Wallraff, “the king discipline of historical theology.”<sup>10</sup> It is within this milieu that Loehe was educated, received his theological formation, served in the office of the holy ministry within the Bavarian *Landeskirche*, and penned a host of theological works. For these reasons, it is not surprising to discover that Loehe held to a belief in doctrinal development.<sup>11</sup> In arguably his most famous work, *Drei Bücher von der Kirche* (1845), there are a number of instances that suggest Loehe's openness toward development without addressing the issue directly. Discussing the oneness of the church across time, Loehe utilized two organic metaphors, which not only underscored the vitality of the church as a living organism but also suggest growth and development.<sup>12</sup> More explicitly, while Loehe dismissed current Roman Catholic doctrine as an example of development from the early ages,<sup>13</sup> he argued that the Reformation occurred as a rejection of accrued errors and the recognition of a proper “development and interpretation of apostolic doctrine through history.”<sup>14</sup>

Determining whether Loehe believed in doctrinal development is answered with little challenge. Across a number of his writings, Loehe made utterances similar to those found in *Drei Bücher*, allowing one to conclude that he held to some manner of doctrinal development. What proves more challenging, however, is providing further definition to his understanding of development. Loehe never authored a monograph or essay on the subject. Nor did he ever write an extended history of a specific doctrine that would help illustrate his understanding of doctrinal growth.<sup>15</sup> For these reasons, determining a systematic theory of development—

10. Martin Wallraff, “Evangelium und Dogma: zu den Anfängen der Gattung Dogmengeschichte (bis 1850),” in *Biblische Theologie und historisches Denken: Wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Studien aus Anlass der 50. Wiederkehr der Basler Promotion von Rudolf Smend*, ed. Martin Kessler and Martin Wallraff (Basel: Schwabe, 2008), 256–278, 257.

11. One should not conclude that all theologians influenced by the Awakening or the Confessional revival embraced doctrinal development. Pertinent to the study of Loehe, examples of fellow confessional Lutherans who rejected doctrinal development were C. F. W. Walther and the Missouri Synod Lutherans. See C. F. W. Walther, “On Doctrinal Development, 1859” in *Walther's Works: Church Fellowship* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2015), 29–42.

12. Wilhelm Löhe, *Drei Bücher von der Kirche 1845*, ed. Dietrich Blaufuß (Neuendettelsau, Freimund-Verlag, 2006), 26–29.

13. Löhe, 114. “It can be shown that not in one cathedra, least of all the Roman cathedra (*Bischofstuhle*), has one and the same doctrine been taught and known in an unaltered continuity. It can also be shown that contemporary Roman doctrine could be *no development* from earlier doctrine. For contemporary Roman doctrine contradicts earlier doctrine, and contradictions are *not periods of development* (*Entwicklungsperioden*) of one and the same truth” (emphasis added).

14. Löhe, 160. “One recognized *a development* and interpretation of the apostolic doctrine through history; one understood that the Word, as time progressed, revealed an ever richer abundance” (emphasis added).

15. While Loehe never wrote a history of Christian doctrine, in 1849 he authored a history of the Reformation in Franconia. See Wilhelm Löhe, *Erinnerungen aus der Reformationgeschichte von Franken, insonderheit der Stadt und dem Burggraftum Nürnberg ober- und unterhalb des Gebirgs* (1847), in *Gesammelte Werke* [hereafter GW], ed. Klaus Ganzert, 7 vols. (Neuendettelsau: Freimund-Verlag, 1951–1986), 3.2:523–683.

An important point of distinction between Loehe and others is that he was not an academic. This may appear to be a minor point or even irrelevant, but it is important to recall the fact that doctrinal development emerged within a theological landscape preoccupied with matters of science and the historization of the discipline of theology.

or whether Loehe had even theorized a coherent system—proves to be unworkable. In order to ascertain Loehe's thoughts on development, one must examine his thought in a piecemeal fashion and attempt to synthesize a more coherent picture. This process does not reveal a comprehensive theory of development. Instead, I first sketch an outline drawing upon Loehe's understanding of history, the economy of God's salvific actions, and the historical character of the church.<sup>16</sup> Then, to illustrate Loehe's concept of development, I explore two well-known subjects within his larger corpus: Loehe's thoughts on the Lutheran Confessions and his position on open questions, specifically chiliasm. In examining these subjects, we encounter some of the most nuanced statements that help to illuminate Loehe's conception of doctrinal development.

## Loehe's Unhistoric History

Although some theologians utilized development critically against ecclesiastical dogmatic positions, theologians associated with the Awakening and the confessional revival were not antagonistic to the concept of doctrinal development. Loehe's confessionally minded contemporaries Kliefoth and Thomasius, his Bavarian colleague, authored works on doctrinal development. But an

16. Friedrich Wilhelm Kantzenbach convincingly argues for the centrality of the concept of organicism (*Organismus*) within Loehe's thought, illustrating that the historical development of doctrine was a consequence of Loehe's commitment to his overarching organic framework. In many respects, I follow Kantzenbach's path, but I seek to expand the framework in which Loehe's conception of development was situated. I believe that Kantzenbach correctly identifies the relationship between development and organicism; however, Loehe's organic thought and his conception of doctrinal development must themselves be interpreted within a larger theological nexus. The relationship between organicism and development is even more interwoven with Loehe's conception of God and God's historical activity. See Friedrich Wilhelm Kantzenbach, “Wilhelm Löhe als organischer Denker,” *Gestalten und Typen des Neuluthertums: Beiträge zur Erforschung des Neokonfessionalismus im 19. Jahrhundert* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1968), 66–89.



important point of distinction between Loehe and others is that he was not an academic.<sup>17</sup> This may appear to be a minor point or even irrelevant, but it is important to recall the fact that doctrinal development emerged within a theological landscape preoccupied with matters of science and the historization of the discipline of theology. The history of dogma became one of the most prominent disciplines within theological studies. Doctrinal development was studied primarily as a scientific theological discipline. As many confessional Lutherans within the university had challenged notions of theological science by proffering alternative models, figures like Thomasius and Kliefoth engaged the subject of doctrinal history and development within an academic environment, in a scientific matter, in dialogue and debate with other conceptions of doctrinal development.

In contrast to contemporary historiographical enterprises, Loehe openly scorned modern historiography. Loehe saw an untraversable chasm between modern historiography and what he believed constituted a more Christian sense of history. In his estimation, contemporary academic history was the product of rationalism, and was undertaken from a posture of criticism rather than a posture of faith.<sup>18</sup> Loehe aired his antipathy toward contemporary historical methodology in defense of his controversial devotional work for women and virgins, *Rosenmonate heiliger Frauen* (1860). One of the most common accusations leveled against this work was its wholly uncritical attitude toward history since Loehe had reproduced miraculous and supernatural stories that his antagonists retorted were clearly little more than myths and fables. Loehe averred that contemporary historical scholarship, “inundated and determined by rationalism,” was characterized by a critical spirit of incredulity toward the past. Despite many accomplishments of contemporary historicism, its presuppositions about the past were too determined by a posture of incredulity and the absence of faith. Too often the writing of history was interwoven with the interests of particular ideological “parties” influencing historical narratives favorably toward their sensibilities at the expense of the primary sources. Loehe openly admitted to fostering a different “historical judgment” than the historical judgment of his contemporaries.<sup>19</sup> In contrast to the “sins of contemporary criticism,” he preferred the historical judgement exercised by the

17. Although Kliefoth, like Loehe, never occupied an academic post, at the time he authored *Einleitung in die Dogmengeschichte* (1839), he was preparing for academic life, hoping for a university appointment.

18. For a study that situates Loehe within academic context of the German Enlightenment, see Dietrich Blaufuß, “Wilhelm Löhe und aufklärerische ‘Zeitbewegungen,’” in *Wilhelm Löhe: Theologie und Geschichte/Theology and History*, ed. Dietrich Blaufuß, (Nürnberg: Verein für bayerische Kirchengeschichte; Freimund-Verlag Neuendettelsau, 2013), 105–132.

19. Wilhelm Löhe, “Eine Konferenzvortrag in Betreff der ‘Rosenmonate heiliger Frauen,’” GW 5.2:765–767. In this work, Loehe also admitted to having a different “ecclesial judgment” than those of his contemporaries. This was chiefly manifested in the theological tolerance Loehe exhibited to medieval figures and even post-reformation Roman Catholic figures.

**Loehe's criticism of unbelief in the supernatural was directed against those who dismissed the possibility of the supernatural, not only in Scripture, but within post-biblical church history. Tethering all supernatural activity to the working of God, Loehe was no cessationist. The church's history was not hermetically sealed from God's activity.**

early Lutheran Church, where “Luther and his colleagues who, in general, regarded and treated the reports of earlier ages more faithfully than me, a child of the nineteenth-century, and therefore I am also an heir and participant of the same critical unbelief.”<sup>20</sup>

Ultimately, Loehe presents himself as less critical and more open to the historical records and accounts of Christian history, specifically in his accounting of the supernatural and miraculous:

I believe with all my heart that “the Lord alone works miracles,” although I also confess that I find no reason, either in Scripture or otherwise, to consider the Lord's hand to be shortened at present, or to assume that the well of his miracles has dried up altogether. I therefore reserve the right, in the stories of the ancients, to pass over with silence some things which are told as miracles, to allow an explanation for some, and also to acknowledge some as testimony of God's assistance to his servants and handmaidens, without putting them on a par with divine miracles, but also without expecting others to hold to my judgment.<sup>21</sup>

One could interpret Loehe's statement as representative of the opposition between the rationalists and the supernaturalists that characterized the late eighteenth and early- to mid-nineteenth centuries.<sup>22</sup> To be sure, Loehe was a supernaturalist. But for the issue at hand, it is important to note that this was not merely another chapter in the discussion about the possibility of the supernatural within Scripture: Loehe was not a new Göze fighting Lessing's heirs. Loehe's criticism of unbelief in the supernatural was directed

20. GW 5.2:766.

21. GW 5.2:768–779.

22. Kevin Vander Schel provides a thorough overview of the debate between rationalism and supernaturalism and shows how this debate framed many of the contested issues in nineteenth-century German theology. See Kevin M. Vander Schel, *Embedded Grace: Christ, History, and the Religion of God in Schleiermacher's Dogmatics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 17–43.

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While Loehe's acceptance of the possibility of post-biblical miracles might have made some of his fellow Lutherans uncomfortable—perhaps even suspicious of Romanizing tendencies—it completely segregated him from the proponents of contemporary theological science and doctrinal development. Despite the Hegelian influence, Strauss and Baur maintained an a priori objection to the possibility of the supernatural. Even Schleiermacher's approach could not house the genuinely miraculous and supernatural. This is the central point of departure between Loehe and contemporary historical methodology: credulity versus incredulity toward the supernatural. Modern historiography in its theoretical presuppositionless approach to the study of history objected to any supernatural interpretation. While Baur could maintain that the history of dogma was ultimately “that dogma is only spirit become objective to itself, mediating itself with itself in this antithesis of objective [dogma] and subjective [consciousness],” his was a monistic, Hegelian spirit, excluding the Spirit who is truly other.<sup>23</sup> For Baur, doctrinal development was not a supernatural phenomenon directed by God; rather it was a history of dogma's own “self-movement.”<sup>24</sup> Baur could as little understand development as a supernatural activity, as he—or any consistent proponent of modern historiography—could grant the possibility of the miraculous within Christian history.

### Development and the Economy of Salvation

Loehe's understanding of the supernatural and miraculous within the post-apostolic history of the church was nested within a more comprehensive vision of the relationship between the church, its history, and God. It was not inconsistent or difficult for Loehe to grant the reality of the supernatural and miraculous within the history of the church because the church and its respective history were for him not divorced from God and his providential activity. After the first century, there was neither chasm nor interruption separating God from the church. If the church was the bride of Christ, in which God was present, then it followed that the church and its history were not separate from God. “From beginning to end,” the Christian church is “one holy and blessed community in God almighty. We lack nothing to grasp the fullness of the truth and joy of this thought than that he lives in us, and we live in him.”<sup>25</sup>

This brief digression into the *Rosenmonate* controversy and Loehe's openness toward postbiblical miracles, serves to further

23. Baur, *History of Christian Dogma*, 52–54.

24. Baur, 52. “Of course one cannot speak about the object of the history of dogma without dogma already being viewed as something self-moving, shaping itself in this way or that, becoming determinate in a multiplicity of forms.”

25. Loehe, *Drei Bücher*, 27.

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contextualize Loehe's posture toward doctrinal development. The justification that Loehe offered in defense of the possibility of miracles within Christian history grounds more than his understanding of the supernatural. Like miracles and the supernatural, it is necessary to interpret Loehe's conception of doctrinal history and development within the theological framework of his understanding of the church and its relationship with God. As the miraculous was grounded in God's presence and activity within the church, development transpired not as self-motivated activity (a la Baur), but as the consequence of God's activity within the church. Loehe understood the development of doctrine as another feature of the triune God's history of salvific actions for and within the church.<sup>26</sup> A particularly illuminating series of writings were his 1847 sermons at the conclusion of the festival half of the liturgical year. There Loehe explicated a vision of the intimate relationship between the triune God and the church defined by the presence of God within the church. Across five Sundays and feasts—*Cantate*, *Rogate*, *Ascension*, *Exaudi*, and *Pentecost*<sup>27</sup>—Loehe articulated an ecclesiological vision by ordering it to the moments of the trinitarian economy presented liturgically in the gospel pericopes of the historic lectionary: texts from Jesus' final discourse to his disciples (John 14–16), which function liturgically to demarcate the transition between Christ's passion and resurrection in preparation for his ascension and the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost.<sup>28</sup> Loehe

26. Although Loehe's conception and presentation lack nuance and elaboration, it appears that Loehe held to a *heilsgeschichtliche* understanding of history spanning the Old and New Testaments, encompassing all history, culminating in the eschaton. See Helmut Utzschneider, “Die Bibel und der Sternenhimmel. Beobachtungen und Überlegungen eines Alttestamentlers zum Schriftverständnis Wilhelm Loehes,” in *Wilhelm Loehe (1808–1872). Seine Bedeutung für Kirche und Diakonie*, ed. Herman Schoenauer, (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 2008), 279–296.

27. The Third Sunday after Easter, *Jubilate*, is also included in this series of lectionary readings taken from John 15 and 16. Thematically, however, it does not appear to maintain the same level of continuity as found in Loehe's sermons from *Cantate* to Pentecost.

28. The Gospel readings for these Sundays and feasts were as follows: *Cantate* (John 16: 5–15), *Rogate* (John 16:23–30), *Ascension* (Mark 16:14–20), *Exaudi* (John 15:26–16:4), and *Pentecost* (John 14:23–31).

utilized this biblical and liturgical context to articulate the nature of the relationship between God and the church and the place of the church in the trinitarian economy of salvation. Within this nexus, Loehe addressed the concept of development.

In his homiletical explications of John 14, 15, and 16, Loehe presented a christological and pneumatological description of God's indwelling of the church. The glorification of Jesus and his ascension to the right hand of God the Father does not deprive the church of the presence of Christ; instead, it ushers in a different mode of Christ's presence among his faithful. Resurrected, glorified, and ascended at the right hand of the Father, Christ is present in the church, chiefly in the sacrament of the altar. There Christ is present "in a more glorious and sublime way" than he had been during his state of humiliation.<sup>29</sup> But the sacramental presence of Christ does not exhaust the triune God's gracious presence within the church. Since Pentecost was "the birthday of the church" and its "spread and foundation" through the gift of the Holy Spirit, the church is formed according to the shape of Pentecost (*die Pfingstgestalt der Kirche*).<sup>30</sup> In its Pentecostal shape, the church as the possessor of the word of Christ through the agency of the Spirit is indwelt by the entire Godhead. The church is the faithful in whom God has chosen to make his dwelling, both corporately and individually, for the indwelling of the triune God is "not merely an article of faith, but also an object of the most blessed experience."<sup>31</sup>

But what does the Pentecostal shape of the church have to do with development? For Loehe, it is the pneumatological foundation upon which his conception of development stands. The indwelling of the triune God within the church and its Pentecostal shape characterizes the reality of the church across time. Within this christological and pneumatological relationship, Loehe located the inevitability of development. Consider Loehe's interpretation of Jesus' discourse on the Spirit's work of remembrance as preached in his sermon for Pentecost:

[The disciples] had in the words of Christ everything that was necessary for salvation for them and the entire world. And when the Lord says, "I have still much to say to you, but you cannot yet bear it," it is not to be understood as if there were still anything which is new, [or] different from the content of the doctrine that he had already given. Everything that he still had to say and what they could not yet bear, already lay in the words of Christ, *but embedded (eingeschlossen) not yet interpreted*. For now must come the time of the Holy Spirit, the beautiful time of spring, the time of growth and flourishing.<sup>32</sup>

29. Wilhelm Löhe, "Am Sonntage Cantate," in *Evangelienpostille*, GW 6.2:305.

30. Wilhelm Löhe, "Am Pfingsttage," in *Evangelienpostille*, GW 6.2:339–340.

31. GW 6.2:344.

32. GW 6.2:345; emphasis added.

The glorification of Jesus and his ascension to the right hand of God the Father does not deprive the church of the presence of Christ; instead, it ushers in a different mode of Christ's presence among his faithful. Resurrected, glorified, and ascended at the right hand of the Father, Christ is present in the church, chiefly in the sacrament of the altar.

In explicating the Spirit's work of remembrance, Loehe utilized the organic metaphor of seed and growth to interpret the relationship between what was given to the apostles by Jesus in his word and their later understanding of what was contained within the previously given word. Loehe preached that with the Spirit's advent would follow germination, growth, and flowering, and that in this action the disciples recognized that "the word of the Spirit was only the unfolding (*Entfaltung*) of the words of Jesus."<sup>33</sup> Loehe had already preached something similar in his sermon for *Cantate* Sunday. In his explanation of Jesus' instruction about the Holy Spirit leading the disciples into all truth, Loehe described this as a transfiguring (*Verklärung/verklären*) of Jesus by the Spirit, whereby the Spirit "transfigures Jesus as he interprets his words in [their] full richness."<sup>34</sup> For Loehe, Jesus himself was "the object of revelation" and, therefore, also the "object of the teaching from the Holy Spirit" given to the church for all times. Interestingly, Loehe described this activity as a "progressive knowledge" (*fortschreitende Erkenntnis*) to which the Spirit leads Christians in the course of time. But Loehe is clear to provide a christological restriction to the nature of the Spirit's work of ongoing knowledge, which "is nothing else than a bright appearance, given in their hearts, to recognize the clarity of the face and the person of Christ."<sup>35</sup>

To be sure, within these sermons Loehe has not articulated a theory of development. In fact, one might question whether there is even evidence of a notion of development within these sermons. Restricted to the sermon on Pentecost, such an objection would prove possible. In that homily, Loehe appeared to restrict his discussion about growth and development to the time of the apostles, thereby curtailing any conception of transgenerational development. However, in his *Cantate* sermon, Loehe offered no such limitation to the time of the apostles. In fact, as an illustration of the "progressive knowledge" that the Spirit effects, he points to

33. GW 6.2:345.

34. Löhe, "Am Sonntage Cantate," GW 6.2:310.

35. GW 6.2:310.

the Lutheran doctrine of the ubiquity of Christ.<sup>36</sup> In explication of the emergence of the doctrine of ubiquity, Loehe asked: "At what time before Martin Luther would this holy, comforting, wonderful teaching have been recognized as it has been since then?" Similar to his Pentecost sermon, Loehe credits the Holy Spirit as the agent who brought about the recognition of the doctrine of ubiquity:

Then the Spirit led his [Jesus'] disciples further into all truth, and the same church [the Church of the Lutheran Reformation], which had grasped St. Paul's glorious doctrine of sin, righteousness and judgment, i.e., Christ's further elaborated doctrine, more perfectly than any other time before it, was given the grace also to grasp St. John's favorite doctrine of the divinity of the Son of Man in the most beautiful way, and thus to behold the glory of Christ in the brightest light. More and more, Christ is transfigured; more and more, Christ becomes all in all, so that God may become all in all. More and more, through such knowledge of the person of the Lord, the Holy Spirit draws the hearts that belong to Christ to him, the Bridegroom. More and more, he makes the church adoring before Christ. More and more, the doctrine that raised the apostles so high above all subsequent times, the doctrine of the divine Son of Man and his Person, is again recognized. More and more, this again becomes the favorite doctrine of the elect; and the more this comes to be, the more the church itself is perfected and transfigured into the image of Jesus Christ. Continuation, more complete introduction of the church into the truth, transfiguration of Christ among his own, and completion of his church go hand in hand; this is intended by the Holy Spirit; this is intended by Christ; in this the Father, Son, and Spirit—as in all things—are of one will.<sup>37</sup>

Loehe's explanation is theological, not historical. The Spirit was the agent who guided Luther and his colleagues not into novel truths, but into a deeper and greater understanding of the christological doctrine of the apostles, as an unfurling of the content already latent in the original word and revelation. Within these sermons, Loehe's "progressive knowledge" transpires as an organic unfolding of biblical Christology through the agency of the Spirit within the historical church. While Loehe does not ignore the historical figures, they are minimized. They become merely instrumental agents, working at the direction of the triune God, for whose end development has transpired. For Loehe, the purpose of the path of progressive knowledge was the completion of the church. Doctrinal development is the pneumatological transfiguration of Christ in the body of the church, which is progressively becoming more "perfected and transfigured into the image of Jesus Christ."

By way of summary, in these sermons Loehe has intimated a

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rudimentary understanding of doctrinal development. Development is the product of the triune God's relationship to the church. Development transpires as a consequence of the Spirit's activity within the church, helping the church to grow in its understanding of the revelation of Jesus Christ, as the church gradually undergoes a christological transfiguration. Loehe situates development within the Trinitarian economy of salvation, following the ascension of Christ and the Pentecostal gift of the Holy Spirit. As a feature of the economy of salvation, the process of development is always Trinitarian, with a strong christological impression shaping its content. Already anticipating features that will be more pronounced in later writings, Loehe believed that the church's growth in knowledge will continue throughout successive ages, until the church comes to possess that knowledge in its fullness:

And from one age to another, truth and knowledge continue to flow. Each age that follows a preceding one has its own gift of knowledge, and the closer the church comes to the end and the heavenly transfiguration, the richer and fuller its harmonious knowledge, which originated in antiquity, becomes. Always one, the church always advances from one clarity to another; the longer, the more it becomes similar to the vision, until finally the vision arrives which surpasses everything, even the last, highest level of knowledge. For all knowledge on earth is only piecemeal; but when the perfect comes, then the piecemeal ceases.<sup>38</sup>

The church is part of the economy of salvation. For this reason, Loehe's conception of church history supersedes any mere empirical study of the church. If the church is an agent of the salvation of the triune God, then church history is part of salvation history. The history of Christian doctrine and its development is not simply the study of the development of theological content, it is the history of the Spirit's successive guidance and leadership into greater knowledge and participation in the divine life of the triune God.

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36. GW 6.2:310.

37. GW 6.2:310–311.

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38. GW 6.2:310.



## The Process of Development

With the exception of the 1860 explanation of the *Rosenmonate* controversy, the writings thus far considered originated during the mid 1840s: *Drei Bücher* (1845) and the sermons of Eastertide (1847). At the end of the decade, one sees the persistence of the concept of development within Loehes thought. Written during the last six months of 1849—but finalized early the next year with the supplemental *Zugabe*—Loehes critical evaluation of the Bavarian territorial church, *Unsere kirchliche Lage im protestantischen Bayern*, was published in the spring of 1850.<sup>39</sup> While certainly not a treatise on development, key sections of this work engaged the historical character of doctrinal development, if only tangentially. Already within its first pages, Loehes responded to criticisms leveled against him for his criticisms of the Bavarian state church, in particular the lack of doctrinal agreement within the church. His critics had asserted that the level of theological agreement that Loehes—and other like-minded pastors—were demanding was a historical novelty, wholly absent in the early church. Therefore, it was unhistorical and improper to insist upon a level of doctrinal consensus unknown in the early church.

Loehes conceded that there was a less than extensive doctrinal consensus within the first centuries of the early church, but the reason was not due to theological laxity, indifference, or an intentionally less rigorous basis for unity. Loehes argued that the church of the nineteenth century was able to demand greater theological agreement for church unity because the church of the nineteenth century enjoyed greater knowledge of doctrine than the church of previous centuries. The nineteenth-century church was the heir of a development of doctrine that had transpired across the history of the church, resulting in a historical expansion of the churchs theological confession. To gaze back into the history of the church and invoke an earlier theological consensus as constitutive would be to discount the fruits of theological development that had transpired within the churchs history. Because the historical development that had occurred through controversies resulted in greater and more precise theological knowledge, Loehes admitted that “the unity of the first centuries and that of ours is a completely different kind of unity, and it must be so.”<sup>40</sup> But the disparity between doctrine and doctrinal consensus across the centuries was no grounds for indifference to the historical development of the churchs doctrine. The church of a particular time was tasked with cultivating its doctrinal heritage:

The first fathers were united and zealous for the divine truths that, in the first age, were won in heated battle of truthful human conception. And what has been handed on to us from the battles of the ages, what eighteen centuries have achieved and won—upon this we agree; we uphold it, we strive for it, and we do not question

39. Wilhelm Löhe, *Unsere kirchliche Lage im protestantischen Bayern und die Bestrebungen einiger bayerisch-lutherischen Pfarrer in den Jahren 1848 und 1849* (1849/50), GW 5.1:371–492.

40. GW 5.1:393–394.

Even though he appeared hesitant, even dismissive of the term “development” (*Entwicklung*), Loehes clearly held to a belief in a historical development of doctrine that transpires throughout church history. Loehes maintained that the catalyst for development was theological controversy.

it again; we accept it as a grown, living plant that now has to produce new blossoms and not reproduce old blossoms.<sup>41</sup>

Loehes evaluation of doctrinal development did not undermine theological awareness of the past, nor did it delegitimize theological growth by imposing an ahistorical authority from an earlier age. Earlier fathers were neither intentionally naïve or simplistic, nor was later development simple accretion or the convolution of an earlier, pristine confession. Historical development of doctrine provided a “richer and more complete” understanding of theology and, subsequently, a foundation for theological unity. Illegitimate and anti-historical were those who endeavored to cast aside the churchs creeds and symbolical writings in order to return to the alleged unity of the less embellished Apostles’ Creed.<sup>42</sup>

While these statements do not permit one to sketch a comprehensive system of development, still certain points are discernable. Even though he appeared hesitant, even dismissive of the term “development” (*Entwicklung*), Loehes clearly held to a belief in a historical development of doctrine that transpires throughout church history. Loehes maintained that the catalyst for development was theological controversy. In other words, controversy gives occasion for further clarification and more precise articulation of the churchs theological witness. Loehes underscored this point in the final section of this document (*Zugabe*), which addressed the heated debates among confessional Lutherans in America (i.e., Grabau versus Missouri Synod). There he observed that, while heated and contentious, “struggles of development” regularly give rise to “the peaceful fruit of righteousness, the pure doctrine over the contentious points.”<sup>43</sup>

Loehes maintained that development was a positive occurrence within the church. Like others within his milieu, Loehes under-

41. GW 5.1:394.

42. GW 5.1:394.

43. Wilhelm Löhe, “Zugabe über den kirchlichen Differenzpunkt des Pastors Grabau zu Buffalo, New York, und der sächsischen Pastoren in Missouri,” in *Unsere kirchliche Lage*, GW 5.1:457.



stood genuine development to be organic.<sup>44</sup> Development did not represent a rupture or departure from precedent, but a faithful elaboration and expression of the doctrine confessed within the church. Through its historical expression, the doctrinal heritage of the church represents a tradition within the church that is to be enthusiastically received by later generations. While the notion of a living and organic history entails that one can neither summarily dismiss the past and its theological expressions, conversely, it assumes that one cannot arbitrarily determine one epoch within the history of the church as universally normative in all aspects of the church's doctrinal articulation. There is no single period of church history that can be isolated from its context and elevated as the norm by which to measure all periods of doctrine. Loehle's refusal to standardize any period and its confession is a principle to which he returns in his later ruminations and in the theological controversy that develops around his own understanding of development.

In the second part of this work, Loehle responded to a series of criticisms from the Fürth pastor Lorenz Kraußold (1803–1881) over the nature of confessional subscription. In addressing the issue of subscription, Loehle had occasion to speak concretely on the matter of historical development. While Loehle had objected to those who sought to distinguish the confession of the Lutheran Symbols from the Symbols themselves (e. g., “Confessions and confession,” or “the confession is contained in the Confessions”), Kraußold accused Loehle of hypocrisy. While Loehle had challenged those who sought to maintain some level of confessional subscription while not adhering completely to the Lutheran Confessions, Kraußold maintained that Loehle himself had created a confessional differentiation, downplaying some parts by highlighting their historical character over their confessional value. In response to Kraußold, Loehle asserted that within the Confessions he differentiates between “what is confessedly spoken (*was bekennend gesagt ist*) and, therefore, what is not spoken [confessedly].”<sup>45</sup> Loehle even goes as far as to say that an absolute holding to the letter of the Confessions is liable to make one guilty of idolatry of the Symbols. To illustrate why such a distinction was necessary, Loehle took up Luther's *Smalcald Articles*, which as a personal writing of Luther, was written in the style of a personal confession. As such, the *Smalcald Articles* was characterized by a style of “heroic self-indulgence,” absent the “objective style” that should characterize a confession. For these reasons alone, Loehle concluded that a *quatenus* subscription “could sometimes be advisable here.”<sup>46</sup> But

Loehle's criticisms were not simply stylistic. More importantly, Loehle found Luther's confession of faith wanting in two areas. First, Loehle held Luther's identification of the Roman papacy as *the*—not *an*—antichrist impossible to uphold. Loehle did not dismiss the biblical warrant for Luther's position, but he found the exclusivity with which Luther identified the pope as the lone antichrist absurd. In his estimation, Luther's writing was overly characterized by his specific relationship to the pope. While one can and, indeed, must state that the papacy was an antichrist or part of the kingdom of the antichrist, Loehle evaluated Luther's particular theological confession as extreme, and peculiar to Luther, not appropriate as a theological standard of the Lutheran Church. According to Loehle, exchanging Luther's exclusive identification for a more generic one does not undermine the nature of a *quia* subscription, “for who can be bound to stamp the seal upon every original utterance, even if it is Luther's?”<sup>47</sup> Loehle's second objection was directed at Luther's belief that Christ gave the office of the keys to the entire church, rather than to a single person.<sup>48</sup> Characterized by Luther's quips and some of his idiosyncratic theological positions, the *Smalcald Articles* were, in Loehle's view, too determined by “originality and individuality,” thereby justifying his distinction to uphold “what is confessedly spoken.”

Explaining the difference between himself (“I accept what is confessedly spoken [i.e., spoken in a confessional way] in the confessional writings”) and Kraußold (“I accept the confession in the Confessions”), Loehle argued that Kraußold's position was subjective and unhistorical: it subverted the historical character of the Symbols' confession by allowing individuals and “the current generation(s)” to capriciously determine the confession contained within the Symbols. Loehle positioned himself on the side of objectivity—accepting the Confessions as the confession—and history:

whoever...confesses the Confessions and what is confessedly spoken in them (=what is the fruit of the Lutheran Reformation and its battles), confesses the *result of history, of the historical development*. For the Lutheran confessional writings, in what they confess and maintain, are the historical results of the last significant dogmatic battle of the church. In their results, they have peeled themselves free from the misery and strife of their time, and now, before our eyes, they stand discernable and in beautiful splendor.<sup>49</sup>

The Lutheran Confessions represented the authentic, historical development of the church's doctrine as the result of sustained

44. See Kantzenbach, “Löhe als organischer Denker,” 66–89. For a more detailed overview of organicism, see Charles I. Armstrong, *Romantic Organicism: From Idealist Origins to Ambivalent Afterlife* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Wilhelm Maurer, “Das Prinzip des Organischen in der evangelischen Kirchengeschichtsschreibung des 19. Jahrhunderts,” *Kerygma und Dogma* 8 (1962): 265–292.

45. Löhe, *Unsere kirchliche Lage*, GW 5.1:428–429.

46. GW 5.1:429. With respect to the Lutheran Symbols, *quia* (because) and *quatenus* (in so far as) refer to the particular posture of confessional subscription. The former designates a subscription without reservation, while the latter indicates a more

limited subscription. One subscribes to the Confessions “because” (*quia*) they are in conformity with the Scriptures or “in so far as” (*quatenus*) they conform to the Scriptures.

47. GW 5.1:429–430. Loehle made a similar argument about his posture toward Luther's position on the papacy in the *Smalcald Articles* in his 1861 *Kirchliche Briefe*; see GW 5.2:852–854.

48. This issue will be addressed later in the essay.

49. Löhe, *Unsere kirchliche Lage*, GW 5.1:432–433; emphasis added.

controversy; they were not simply the theological ruminations of individuals. In subjecting the Confessions to his personal evaluation, Kraußold unilaterally dismissed the church's process of historical development.

When these writings are synthesized, a more nuanced depiction of Loehe's conception of development gradually emerges. Loehe maintained that the church on earth is to arrive at a fuller realization of the truth under the guidance of the Spirit through the means of strife and opposition. The Spirit guides the church not so much into new truth—or completely new truths—but into “ever more beautiful development” achieved by “faithful adherence to the development that has already appeared.”<sup>50</sup> The immutable source for the church's development is its ongoing engagement with the word of God, from which God continues to shine ever “greater light and a more beautiful clarity.”<sup>51</sup> The word of God does not change, but God directs the church to a greater understanding of its unfathomable meaning. This results in an ecclesial identity that is neither rigid, nor indefinite. On the one hand, founded on the word of God, the church is solid and firm (*fest*); but since it has not arrived at the fullness of truth, the church cannot be stagnant, it must also be “flexible” (*fügsam*) and “striving” (*strebsam*).<sup>52</sup>

According to his schema, Loehe considered the confessional writings to be examples of legitimate doctrinal development. They were theological witnesses produced through the fire of controversy, and—with minor exceptions—they expressed the faith of the church, not idiosyncratic positions or mere expressions of theological discourse. “They are the result of [the] history” of the church; but a history that had not ceased because the church on earth had yet to arrive at the fullness of its vision of God. The church's history was still ongoing. In his debate with Kraußold, Loehe was not only concerned with a proper reception of the church's past, but he also believed that one's reception of the past helped determine the present and one's way into the future. “Whoever wants to confess historically now, to stand close together with antiquity, and to have the future for himself must stand on the foundation of the *Concordia*, which mediates the continuity of the past to the new age.”<sup>53</sup> The Lutheran Confessions were not a tombstone that marked the end of the history of development; they were a living landmark that witnessed to previous victories, while guiding the church in its future development.

Loehe did not see a contradiction between fidelity to the past and openness toward future development. In the foreword to the second volume of *Der evangelische Geistliche*, Loehe commended his readers to be faithful to tradition without becoming rigid and closed to the ongoing activity of God:

Remain faithful to your teachers and forefathers, but not

50. Wilhelm Löhe, “Zuruf aus der Heimat and die deutsch-lutherische Kirche Nordamerikas” (1845), GW 4:81.

51. Wilhelm Löhe, “Brf. Löhes an Pastor Gruber v. 13. März 1857,” in “Erläuterungen,” GW 6.1:833.

52. Wilhelm Löhe, “Warum bekenne ich mich zur lutherischen Kirche?,” GW 4:224.

53. Löhe, *Unsere kirchliche Lage*, GW 5.1:433.

Loehe considered the confessional writings to be examples of legitimate doctrinal development. They were theological witnesses produced through the fire of controversy, and—with minor exceptions—they expressed the faith of the church, not idiosyncratic positions or mere expressions of theological discourse.

in a way that you would not keep proceeding on our way. Keep what you have, but if the Holy Spirit gives new blessings for the older ones or revives among you what we have forgotten, do not imagine that we will be angry with you over this in eternity.<sup>54</sup>

Progress is possible because it is impossible for the church to comprehend the infinite God who “is an immeasurable sea of knowledge for the creature.” The ontological chasm between the creator and the creature results in the possibility of “an eternal progress in the knowledge of God.” But forward development does not happen as a consequence of indifference or dismissal of the past. The church must maintain the “same seriousness and emphasis toward the future (*Vorwärts*) as to the past (*Rückwärts*).” Both the past and the future belong to “the so-called Lutheran, that is to say, the true catholic Christian,” but not in the sense that the future of Christian doctrine was to be simply footnotes to the Lutheran Confessions:

Everything that is true and according to Scripture is his, when, where, and how it is said. And to him the *norma normata* of the sixteenth century is not congruent in the sense of the *norma normans*; the former does not exhaust the latter. And it is not the case that God himself would no longer be allowed to still give something to his church that one either did not have or did not observe in the decisive year 1580.<sup>55</sup>

Adherence to the Lutheran Confessions neither isolated one from the past, nor shut the door to the future. Lutherans were recipients of the entire tradition of the church—including the supernatural and miraculous—and Lutherans were positioned to receive God's continual guidance throughout the course of the church's future. To be Lutheran was not to exist solely within the sixteenth century.

54. Wilhelm Löhe, *Der evangelische Geistliche* (1852/1858), vol. 2, GW 3.2:149.

55. GW 3.2:149.

Yet, Loehle's openness to future development was not indeterminate. Development transpired as growth from the church's existing doctrine. Loehle's conception of development was not the open-ended progress of the emergent theology of the nineteenth century. Development was not the process of discarding the empty "husk" of historically contingent doctrine in order to allow the genuine "essence" of doctrine to grow in an accommodation to the spirit of the day.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, theological development was real; it was no simple repristination of the past. In other words, authentic development was an organic growth, derived and governed by the church's *norma normans* (*norming norm*) and, secondly, its *norma normata* (*normed norm*), i.e., its Symbols and theological heritage.<sup>57</sup> That the latter could neither supersede nor inhibit the faithful interpretation of the former, in no way compromised their relevance for the church of the future. As Loehle said to Kraußold, the reception of the Confessions as a historical text equally prevents one from the erroneous perceptions of both "superficial Protestantism" and "rigid orthodoxy."<sup>58</sup>

Loehle's comments about the relationship between the past, present, and the future as understood from the perspective of historical development suggest a central conviction of Loehle's that would realize itself in a number of controversies. Loehle's belief in doctrinal development offered an explanation that accounted for the historical emergence of doctrine within the church. However, it was also indicative of his belief that the church's doctrinal confession was not complete. There was further development yet to occur.

## Future Development

Determining the extent to which Loehle believed that development was an ongoing characteristic of the church is difficult, especially given the absence of any extended treatment on the subject. Did Loehle believe in a more open-ended development, or did he restrict it to certain doctrinal loci? At times, his language appears somewhat ambiguous, but one may account for his imprecision, in part, because Loehle did not restrict his discourse on development to doctrine. Loehle believed that within the life, practice, discipline, constitution, and external form of the church, development was needed and to be expected.<sup>59</sup>

56. The contrast of the interior "essence" (*Wesen*) or "kernel" (*Kern*) in distinction to the exterior "husk" or "shell" (*Schale*) was a common metaphor across the "long" nineteenth century, utilized as a means of distinguishing between the unconditioned principle and the historically contingent aspects of Christianity, relegating the latter to secondary, and consequently, inessential features of the Christianity. This idea is seen in far-ranging figures such as Johann Semler, Friedrich Schleiermacher, F. C. Baur, Ludwig Feuerbach, and Adolf von Harnack.

57. In other words, Scripture functions as the *norming norm*, and the Confessions and other ecclesiastical authorities function as *normed norms*.

58. Löhe, *Unsere kirchliche Lage*, GW 5.1:433.

59. For example, Loehle believed that the Lutheran Church, while possessing "priceless treasures" in its doctrine, possessed the "form of a servant" in its external appearance before the world. He maintained

Loehle believed that within the life, practice, discipline, constitution, and external form of the church, development was needed and to be expected.

With respect to doctrine, Loehle seems to have restricted development to a few theological loci; these are the same loci regularly associated with the so-called "open questions," in particular, eschatology and ecclesiology. The assessment of a topic as an open question was due to the absence of theological specificity and clarity within Scripture and the Confessions.<sup>60</sup> But this category was restricted to only a few subjects, it was not the tolerance of open-ended inquiry for all theological loci. Consequently, Loehle did not see his willingness to entertain open questions as a contradiction of his attitude toward the symbolic texts. As was already evident in his debate with Kraußold, Loehle did not believe that his countenance of open questions was incompatible with a *quia* subscription to the Lutheran Confessions, understood properly.<sup>61</sup> Regarding eschatology and the office of the ministry, Loehle held that the nature of these doctrines lacked final specificity, because the Lutheran Confessions had not adequately addressed them. Hence, he considered these doctrines to be "open" because the church had not spoken conclusively. Room existed for a variety of positions to be taken without the adjudication of error and heresy.

While Loehle's stance toward open questions is well known, reconsidering it in light of his understanding of doctrinal development allows a more nuanced position to emerge.<sup>62</sup> To be sure, these theological loci were "open." They even necessitated the raising of questions and debate since the witnesses of Scripture and the Confessions were unclear. Loehle saw the need for further theological clarification and illumination because open questions were still undergoing theological development. These doctrines had yet to receive their ultimate form. But were open questions indefinitely open? Question and debate were instrumental for achieving clarification, but were they permanent features?

that the church needed to develop its external beauty. See Löhe, "Warum bekenne ich mich?" GW 4:222.

60. This appears to indicate that Loehle underwent a change of mind regarding the completeness of Lutheran doctrine. In *Drei Bücher*, Loehle could opine that while the Lutheran Church was "incomplete in the consequences of doctrine," its doctrine was "complete," having already undergone a reformation of doctrine. While Loehle did not identify any locus of Lutheran doctrine as erroneous, he did maintain the need for future development; see Löhe, *Drei Bücher*, 165–170.

61. Kantzenbach calls Loehle's confessional posture an "open 'quia' subscription; see Kantzenbach, "Löhe als organischer Denker," 74.

62. See Martin J. Lohrmann, "A Monument to American Intolerance: The Iowa Synod's 'Open Questions' in their American Context," in *Wilhelm Löhe: Erbe und Vision*, ed. Dietrich Blaufuß (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2009), 294–306.



## Loehé's Millennialism

By the end of the 1850s, Loehé had embraced a chiliastic eschatology, wherein he believed in a literal interpretation of the thousand-year reign of Christ's kingdom on earth, preceded by the first resurrection (the resurrection of the faithful), followed by the second resurrection (the general resurrection of all the dead).<sup>63</sup> The influences and sources for some of Loehé's chiliastic thought have already been examined and well demonstrated.<sup>64</sup> Loehé assessed that the Lutheran doctrine of the last things was unresolved. It was an "open question."<sup>65</sup> The formulation of the church's doctrine of eschatology had not come to full articulation. The official doctrinal statements of the Lutheran Church were insufficient; there was no theological consensus within the Lutheran dogmatic tradition; and, more importantly, many of the exegetical interpretations that had become standard within the Lutheran tradition contradicted the clear and univocal testimony of Scripture. Held against the witness of God's word, Loehé judged that the Lutheran eschatological tradition represented an erroneous doctrinal formation. It was a doctrinal degeneration that had calcified, becoming an impediment to authentic theological development. The quintessential expression of this theological devolution was what he witnessed across the Atlantic among his Lutheran colleagues in the Missouri Synod in its staunch opposition to interrogating eschatology: "The Synod of Missouri does not admit any freedom, for them everything is complete (*fertig*), over which their authorities (*Gewährsmänner*) have spoken."<sup>66</sup> Loehé accused the theologians of the Missouri Synod of elevating their own theologians above the Confessions, and more importantly, Scripture. The illegitimate promotion of their own theologians allowed the Missouri Synod to declare that the doctrine of eschatology was complete, when neither the Confessions, let alone Scripture, justified such conclusion. Where "differences in knowledge" persisted, Loehé held that there must be freedom for cooperative, unprejudiced theological research.<sup>67</sup> But, through its unilateral imposition of its theological position and by its issuing of anathemas, the Missouri Synod had preemptively blocked further study and the clarification that comes through the study and investigation into the word of God.

Against the backdrop of his call for development in the locus of eschatology and his evaluation of the Missouri Synod's doctrinal stultification, Loehé's conception of development becomes clearer. A number of descriptive and mechanistic characteristics that contribute to a better understanding of his conceptualization of doctrinal development become apparent. Of these features,

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three are worthy of mention: controversy, tradition, and Scripture.

### Controversy

Loehé believed that theological controversy was an immediate catalyst for theological development. Conflict over doctrine forced the church into heated debate from which the church would arrive at "the pure doctrine over the contentious point."<sup>68</sup> In fact, Loehé could even say that the history of dogma is nothing other than a history of theological conflict:

Is not the entire history of dogma nothing other than the history of an ongoing conflict of heavenly truth with lies; and is not the ecclesial formulation of each dogma only a sweet fruit of these often bitter conflicts, which in its individual stages and in its entire course can end with nothing other than the bright, clear light, with perfect transfiguration of our spirit and our knowledge through the Spirit of the Lord.<sup>69</sup>

The history of doctrine is a messy narrative of controversy and debate, but one that is ultimately positive: clarity and precision of theological knowledge are the "sweet fruits" of the history of controversy. But while Loehé saw theological strife at the center of doctrinal development, he did not reduce the history of theological development to a history of human conflict and progress. Loehé did not partition the mundane events of historical doctrinal formulation and tradition from the activity of God. Reminiscent of his Eastertide homilies, Loehé interpreted the history of doctrinal development as the graduated progress of the pneumatological transfiguration of the church. Doctrinal development was ultimately positive, not only by bringing about greater precision of knowledge, but through advancing the church's relationship with the triune God.

63. See Wilhelm Löhe, "Das Entgegenkommen zur Auferstehung der Toten. Predigt über Phil. 3, 7–11 (1857)," GW 6.1:695–706.

64. See Jacob Corzine, "Loehé as an Example of 19th-Century Lutheran Chiliasm," in *Wilhelm Löhe: Theologie und Geschichte/Theology and History*, 87–103; Gerhard Müller, "Wilhelm Löhes Theologie zwischen Erweckungsbewegung und Konfessionalismus," *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 15, no. 1 (2009): 28–32. See Kantzenach, "Löhe als organischer Denker," 79–81.

65. Löhe, "Brf. an Pastor Gruber," GW 6.1:834.

66. GW 6.1:834.

67. GW 6.1:834–835.

68. Löhe, "Zugabe," GW 5.1:457.

69. Löhe, *Unsere kirchliche Lage*, GW 5.1:393.

### Tradition

If controversy was the catalyst for research and investigation, resulting in doctrinal clarification, then it presupposes that development transpires within a doctrinal tradition. As shown in his 1861 *Kirchliche Briefe*, Loehe insisted that his eschatological thought did not undermine Article XVII of the Augsburg Confession.<sup>70</sup> Clearly, Loehe is aware that he moved beyond AC XVII, and believed that AC XVII was insufficient as a comprehensive expression of the church's doctrine of the last things, but Loehe did not state that it was an erroneous statement. To be sure, there were reasons that might have motivated him to downplay any disagreement with the Augsburg Confession, most obviously that any denunciation or open contradiction with the Augsburg Confession would have opened him to ridicule and attack, undermining his efforts at improving the character of the Lutheran confession within the state church of Bavaria. But there is evidence to suggest that Loehe's acceptance of AC XVII was sincere, even though he considered it deficient as a comprehensive expression of doctrine.

Loehe maintained that as the official confession of the church, ecclesiastical symbols carried authoritative weight that was not to be cast aside. Unity with the church's symbols was required.<sup>71</sup> Within the Lutheran Confessions, Loehe ranked the Augsburg Confession as the premier symbolical text that best expressed the catholicity of the Lutheran Church.<sup>72</sup> But no ecclesial standard answered every question. Even the Lutheran Confessions left open certain questions to be answered by a later time.<sup>73</sup> No symbol was finally ultimate. All ecclesial confessions must witness to the authority of Scripture; symbols always remain *norma normata*, determined by the *norma normans*. Moreover, since each symbol was the product of the church during a particular time and controversy, no symbol was able to authoritatively express all that was to be said about all theological loci. No symbol may be accorded the absolute and final say.<sup>74</sup> There was no tradition that completely expressed the revelation of Scripture; there was no period within the church where its theological knowledge was complete. Theological knowledge accumulates throughout history, but always in a "piecemeal" fashion. Each generation's theological knowledge was always "only an imperfect attempt to humanly set up and bring into a system the content of the divine words and the Symbols."<sup>75</sup> This appears to inform his frustration with Missouri. Despite his *quia* subscription to the Confessions, Loehe was cautious of imposing upon the confessional texts an improper authority. The Confessions were not the "Protestant paper pope."<sup>76</sup> If the Confessions could not be set up as the final authority for the church, Loehe would not tolerate

**F**or Loehe, the path toward completion was accomplished through Scripture; and this path was worked by God, who guides the church into all truth through ongoing study and explication of Scripture.

the imposition of particular dogmatic traditions. In his opinion, the Missouri Synod was guilty of searching "less in Scripture... than in the theologians," evaluating "the theological view of its authorities (*Gewährsmänner*) to be infallible."<sup>77</sup>

### Scripture

While symbols and tradition are the fruits of doctrinal development and instrumental for guiding further development, Scripture remains the ultimate source from which all doctrinal development emerges. But it is important to properly understand Loehe's position. The Bible is the *norma normans*, the ultimate standard against which all other norms in the church are judged. Scripture evaluates all traditions and teachings, discerning error and offering correction, but as the *norma normans*, Scripture's evaluative power is not only as a corrective to erroneous explication on behalf of the church, as in reforming error by returning to biblical precedent. To be sure this happens, but Scripture's norming authority also lies in its ability to supersede ecclesiastical doctrine and symbols, not only where they have erred, but where they are insufficient. The Reformation was not simply a corrective, but also a development. Loehe believed that the church was not stagnant, it always continues to grow, "Whoever desires to be must become. Whoever does not want to always remain in the process of becoming ceases to be. The church is comparable to a river, to whose nature it belongs to flow and to always move forward."<sup>78</sup> The church must proceed along "the way of completion and out of its incompleteness."<sup>79</sup> For Loehe, the path toward completion was accomplished through Scripture; and this path was worked by God, who guides the church into all truth through ongoing study and explication of Scripture.

Consider how in a letter to the Rev. Gruber, Loehe narrated his embrace of millennialism. He begins by stating that he was formerly of a similar disposition to the leaders of the Missouri Synod:

As I was younger and recognized that the way of the Lutheran Church was correct, I acted just like the brothers in Missouri. I accepted everything on account of a great and deserved trust. Even if everything was not inwardly

70. Loehe, *Kirchliche Briefe*, GW 5.2:851. See also Loehe, "Brf. an Pastor Gruber," GW 6.1:834. See Kantzenbach, "Loehe als organischer Denker," 80.

71. Loehe, *Unsere kirchliche Lage*, GW 5.1:388–391.

72. Loehe, *Kirchliche Briefe*, GW 5.2:852.

73. Loehe, *Unsere kirchliche Lage*, GW 5.1:389–390.

74. Wilhelm Loehe, "An meine Freunde in Neuendettelsau" (1860), GW 5.2:755–757

75. Loehe, *Kirchliche Briefe*, GW 5.2:856.

76. GW 5.2:858–859.

77. Loehe, "Brf. an Pastor Gruber," GW 6.1:834–836.

78. Loehe, "An meine Freunde," GW 5.2:751.

79. GW 5.2:754–755.

sufficient for me, I dared not trust my own eyes when I read the word of God. My authorities (*Gewährsmänner*) had to be right because I could not trust my own judgment. In the course of time, however, I could not resist the light of the divine word and the more I was convinced of the purity of the Lutheran doctrine in the chief articles, the more I recognized that God the Lord, in these days of ours, wanted to give the poor church greater light and a more beautiful clarity, than that of our fathers. To these points belonged eschatology, especially concerning the hope of Israel, the thousand-year [kingdom], and the second coming of the Lord. Generally, as in exegesis and history, so particularly in the knowledge of the prophets and of the prophetic vision of history, the modern day is blessed and more richly endowed than the sixteenth century and its successors. It appears to me not as derogatory, but rather as faithful when I accept the gift God extended and not despise it because my fathers did not possess it. I believe only to go their way when I follow the word itself and accept it rather than the arbitrary spiritualistic interpretation of former days.<sup>80</sup>

Loehes understood himself to be the faithful heir of the church's tradition, who through the ongoing study of the word of God, concluded that the church's hitherto theological reflection on eschatology was underdeveloped; it was an insufficient expression of the revelation of God's word.<sup>81</sup> He held Scripture above the church's symbols, doctrine, and theological tradition, because Scripture was the word of God and, therefore, the source from which God continues to lead the church into the fullness of all truth.

Perhaps one of the most interesting features of Loehes thought on development is that he saw himself not primarily as a scholar or theorist of development, but as an instrument of the church's development of doctrine. Development arises from doctrinal controversy through a return to Scripture, the source from which God grants the church greater knowledge of truth. Loehes never penned an essay or treatise on doctrinal development, but he did not shy away from theological contention in support of the furthering of doctrines that he felt were inadequately understood and professed within the Lutheran Church. Loehes readily challenged longstanding tradition, when he assessed that the church had neglected to form its doctrine in correspondence with God's word, even going as far as to say that the Lutheran Confessions, while not wrong, were inadequate in their interpretation of Scripture. Moreover, as a participant calling the church to return

80. Löhe, "Brf. an Pastor Gruber," GW 6.1:833.

81. Loehes claim that his chiliastic theology was derived from Scripture has long been considered suspect. Scholars have hypothesized a variety of sources that inspired his eschatology from German romanticism and idealism to the Irvingites to his commitment to organicism. For a detailed investigation into his eschatological sources, see Corzine, "Loehes as an Example."

**Loehes believed that his colleagues' theological maturation had begun with Scripture but culminated with the Lutheran Confessions. In contrast, his theological formation began with the dogmatists, then moved to the Symbols, and from the Symbols Loehes proceeded to Scripture.**

to Scripture rather than "resting upon the laurels of the Fathers," it seems that Loehes saw himself as instrumental to a positive development of the church's doctrine, building upon tradition through recourse to the source from which ecclesiastical tradition emerged and is nourished.<sup>82</sup> Loehes differentiated himself from his colleagues in that his theological development followed a path different from theirs. Loehes believed that his colleagues' theological maturation had begun with Scripture but culminated with the Lutheran Confessions. In contrast, his theological formation began with the dogmatists, then moved to the Symbols, and from the Symbols Loehes proceeded to Scripture. While many of the results that he and his colleagues came to might be the same, the effect of the paths taken accounts for an important distinction. The strongest theological influence on his confessional colleagues was the Lutheran Confessions, while for him it was Scripture. For this reason, Loehes saw his path of theological development as suitable in leading the church to greater "truth, veracity, equity and justice" because "Scripture is more brilliant and clearer than the human word."<sup>83</sup> So it was that Loehes, guided by Scripture and not by any "paper pope" believed himself to be better suited to help lead the Lutheran Church into a more faithful articulation of biblical doctrine, a more comprehensive exposition of the "imbedded, [but] not yet interpreted" truth of God's word.

### Other Examples of Development

In light of the absence of a formal exposition on doctrinal development, the examination of Loehes' millennialism concretely illustrates how he understood the process of development. However, one might object that this study does not evidence Loehes' belief in doctrinal development. Perhaps, given his chiliasm, Loehes' thoughts were employed only for the purpose of justifying his divergent eschatology? To be sure, Loehes' theory of development was used to defend his particular eschatological positions but given that some features of his understanding of development predate his eschatology, it is doubtful that he embraced development only

82. Löhe, *Kirchliche Briefe*, GW 5.2:858.

83. GW 5.2:859.



as a post hoc justification. Moreover, Loehe did not restrict development to the study of the last things. In fact, Loehe employed a similar understanding of development with respect to another "open question," the office of the holy ministry.

Like his understanding of eschatology, Loehe did not openly disagree with the Lutheran Symbols' theology of the office of the ministry; rather, he found its theological exposition incomplete. It was one of the doctrinal propositions in need of "a more well-rounded and purer formulation."<sup>84</sup> Specifically, the Confessions required clarification because they did not speak in an unequivocal manner. The Symbols' ambiguous position on the ministry had permitted the development of two distinct theological "directions" within the Lutheran Church. Such ambiguity and the coexistence of alternative conceptions of the ministry, evidenced the need for further theological development. In fact, Loehe believed that such development was already underway as a result of the theological controversy between Johannes Grabau and the Missouri Synod. In Loehe's estimation, the respective positions in the North American debate illustrated the different theological directions that had emerged out of the ambiguous doctrinal witness of the Lutheran Confessions. Although this debate transpired across the Atlantic, Loehe believed that these competing theological directions also characterized Lutherans in Germany. These were unresolved questions that the Lutheran Church had endured for three centuries.

Loehe admonished both sides of the North American debate to seek peace and cease their contentious fighting. While they need not merge and form a single synod, fellowship between their respective synods could exist in the face of their divergent positions if they could agree to refrain from vicious arguments. His counsel for peace, however, was neither a call to ignore the issue, nor to simply arrive at a harmonious indifference. Caustic rhetoric was to be set aside, but "beginning with love and peace, amid prayer and supplication" both sides were to "begin an examination of the contentious issue from the standpoint of a simple love of truth and the longing for complete unity."<sup>85</sup> Loehe heralded this debate as necessary and timely because the question of the ministry had yet to receive the attention that such a topic merited. In the absence of territorial churches, the freedom of the American context finally allowed this unsettled issue to come to the table:

Every question has its time when it can no longer be pushed back but asserts itself until it is accepted and settled with dignity. Such struggles of development (*Entwicklungskämpfen*) were again and again a blessing. In the end, out of heated controversies—often through the unrighteousness of the parties—came the peaceful fruit of righteousness, the pure doctrine regarding the contentious point.<sup>86</sup>

The three-century long ambiguity in the Lutheran theology of the office of the ministry and its corresponding two directions that

"had slumbered for a long time in the womb of the church" had realized itself in transatlantic debates.<sup>87</sup> This debate was necessary for debates are incubators for the development of doctrine.

The final example to consider points to Loehe's broader conceptualization of development extending beyond the confines of doctrine to the entire life of the church. Loehe became convinced that the Lutheran Church suffered from an inadequate understanding of the Lord's Supper. The Reformation had succeeded in effecting a necessary correction regarding the matter of the bodily presence of Christ. The medieval doctrine of transubstantiation was a unilateral extension of the early Christian belief in the transformation of the body and blood of Christ in the Supper, but at the loss of the early Christian belief in the reality of the presence of bread and wine. The Lutheran Reformation succeeded in recovering the lost teaching of Scripture and the early church and correcting the overextension of medieval doctrine, without forfeiting the teaching of the bodily presence in the Supper as in the Reformed Church. Unfortunately, in his polemical reaction to the Reformed dismissal of the sacramental presence of Christ in the Supper, Luther had objected to a sacramental interpretation of John 6. While sympathetic to Luther's defense of the sacrament, Loehe held that Luther had gone too far in denying any sacramental interpretation of the Johannine text. Luther's reading succeeded in creating a deficient articulation of the doctrine of the Lord's Supper by underemphasizing the fruits of the Lord's Supper and its centrality in the life of the church. Further development was needed to properly elevate the fruits of the sacrament.<sup>88</sup>

As with eschatology and the office of the ministry, Loehe stated that he did not find the Lutheran doctrine of the Lord's Supper to be in error. Loehe did not advocate for a radical alteration or transformation of the church's received doctrine. Luther and the early Lutheran reformers had successfully championed the doctrine of the Lord's Supper over and against medieval Catholicism's transubstantiation and the rejection of Christ's bodily presence by the Reformed. This was simultaneously a genuine development against earlier error and the avoidance of erring in the opposing extreme. Yet, this doctrinal articulation was not complete. This corresponds with Loehe's belief that the fullness of theological truth could not be adequately recognized and stated at a single moment in church history, as he stated in his homily on John 6:51–71:

All truth does not come at once, but is gradual; it goes like the Sun. From the night the dawn arises, and out of the dawn the sun rises high and rises till noon. Only then does it send its magnificent *white* light, which illumines everything because it descends from the highest point.<sup>89</sup>

Development need not only occur in light of pronounced error

84. Löhe, *Unsere kirchliche Lage*, GW 5.1:389–390.

85. Löhe, "Zugabe," GW 5.1:489.

86. GW 5.1:457.

87. GW 5.1:490.

88. Wilhelm Löhe, "Predigt am 5. Oktober. Johannes 6, 51 bis 71," in *Abendmahlspredigten (1866)*, ed. Martin Wittenberg (Neuendettelsau: Freimund-Verlag, 1991), 109–119; see also "Predigt am 12. Oktober. Johannes 6, 54 bis 71," 120–127.

89. Löhe, "Predigt am 5. Oktober," 118; emphasis original.

but also as a gradual growth into the fullness of truth. The Lutheran Church had not failed at confessing the body and blood of Christ in the sacrament; rather, it had inadequately developed a sacramental centrality that permeated the entire life of the church.

For Loehe, the desired change appears to correspond to his own personal evolution, in what Deinzer identifies as “not a change, but a healthy development from a Lutheranism more measured by dogmatics and the Confessions to a more ‘sacramental Lutheranism.’” As Loehe explained,

I am still the same good Lutheran as before, but in a more interior way. In the past, Lutheranism was so much for me a confession of the Symbols from A to Z. Now the whole of Lutheranism is contained for me in the sacrament of the altar, in which demonstrably all the chief doctrines of Christianity, especially the Reformation, have their center and focus. The main thing for me now is not so much the Lutheran doctrine of the Lord's Supper but sacramental life and the experience of the blessing of the sacrament made possible by abundant enjoyment alone. My progress is described in the words “sacramental Lutheranism.”<sup>90</sup>

Did Loehe believe that he exemplified the development that was necessary for the Lutheran Church to undergo? Possibly. But what can be said is that Loehe was no disinterested party; he did not play the role of passive observer or simple narrator of theological disputes. Whether it was eschatology, the office of the ministry, or the sacrament of the altar, Loehe was active in conversations and debates regarding these doctrines. Intentional or not, Loehe positioned himself as a catalyst for the theological development that he believed was needed in the church. “Light after light will be given from the word [of God] to those who would like to learn it according to the needs of their day.”<sup>91</sup> Loehe did not believe himself to be the light that was needed in his day, but he saw himself as a messenger of the light.

## Conclusion

In works on the history of doctrinal development, Loehe's name will never stand alongside of Baur, or even his confessional colleagues Thomasius or Kliefoth. Loehe never gave voice to his understanding of development, and it is questionable whether he even conceptualized a comprehensive vision of development or the history of dogma. Nevertheless, while his theory of development is incomplete and, as a theory, hardly merits attention in comparison to the more elaborated and technical theories of his contemporaries, its study proves worthwhile for at least two reasons. In the

90. As quoted in Johannes Deinzer, *Wilhelm Löhes Leben. Aus seinem schriftlichen Nachlaß zusammengestellt*, vol. 2 (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1880), 523. See also, Gerhard Müller, “Wilhelm Löhes Theologie zwischen Erweckungsbewegung und Konfessionalismus,” *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 15, no. 1 (1973), 33.

91. Löhe, *Kirchliche Briefe*, GW 5.2:861.

**L**oehe understood development to be a natural and necessary feature of a living reality. In one word, development was organic. As a living reality, an organic entity, it is natural and expected that development occur within the church.

first place, Loehe's thinking further evidences how widespread the concept of doctrinal development was during this period of the nineteenth century, even among the confessionally awakened Lutherans. Unlike some of their contemporaries who traveled to the United States, they appeared less hostile to the possibility of doctrinal development. The significance of Loehe's openness, shows that the acceptance of doctrinal development was not only a feature among academics. Loehe was not a professor offering a competing framework to challenge the critical projects of Baur, Strauss, or other professors. Loehe's embrace of development was, at least in part, related to his pastoral concerns. The development of doctrine corresponded to his larger theological framework, first, encompassing the relationship between the Trinity and the church, and second, serving his desire for recovery and improvement within the church.

Loehe's conception of development was positive. Development was not an indication of irreconcilable contradictions between the past and present, nor did the presence of development evidence a departure from the past in evolution from the simple message of Christ to a convoluted and overworked dogma. Loehe understood development to be a natural and necessary feature of a living reality. In one word, development was organic.<sup>92</sup> As a living reality, an organic entity, it is natural and expected that development occur within the church.

Here it is important to note two other differences from his contemporaries. First, Loehe's development was far-removed from the idealistic extremes that posited a development of God and the divine life. While the thoughts of Hegel and Schelling loom large against the backdrop of development, and the work of Baur was an inspiring—if antagonistic—model, Loehe circumvented any connection between development and God's identity unlike his contemporary Hofmann.<sup>93</sup> While God was instrumental in guiding the church through the process of development, God was removed from development itself. Second, although Loehe employed the terms “development” and “continuation,” he was cautious in his employment of the concept of development. Loehe balanced

92. Kantzenbach, “Löhe als organischer Denker,” 71–75.

93. See James Ambrose Lee II, *Confessional Lutheranism and German Theological Wissenschaft: Adolf Harleß, August Vilmar, and Johannes Christian Konrad von Hofmann* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2022), 234–254.

and restricted development by the fact that he believed the fullness of revelation had already been given. Development occurs within the church's understanding and explication of revelation. Loehe dismissed any notion of the development of revelation. Additionally, he established development as the organic growth of the truth that the church already possessed, rather than locating truth on a distant horizon only attainable through a dialectic movement. Moreover, progress itself is circumscribed, limited to a few open questions. Development was not conceived of as an indefinite process that all Christian doctrine must continually undergo.

Furthermore, the study of Loehe's understanding of development is important because it affords some beneficial context to the topic of open questions. The coordination of open questions with development shows that Loehe did not understand open questions to be open in the sense that any theological articulation was ultimately legitimate. More importantly, it suggests that Loehe might have understood "open question" to be a temporary designation, at least with respect to certain questions. These questions were open only till the point that the church arrived at further clarity through a development of doctrine. Consider his remarks in *Unsere kirchliche Lage*. After stating that the locus of the ministry had undergone insufficient deliberation during the Reformation and that even the Symbols suffer from a deficiency in this locus, Loehe stated:

I believe in a possible development of the Lutheran Church also in this point, and I see its future precisely in this, at least in part. But what right has a person . . . to put open questions, which are propositions capable of further development—and in this way also of purification—in a series with those articles that already have been truly in the fire of contestation and have emerged from the struggle of the church with complete and definite clarity? In these articles there must be unity among the faithful followers of a confession.<sup>94</sup>

Far from according this locus with theological ambivalence, what Loehe seems to desire was that the open question of the office of the ministry would undergo a rigorous theological examination similar to those loci whose doctrinal orthodoxy had already been proven across the history of the church through controversy. At least in a few instances, "open question" seems to have been a temporary designation assigned to those doctrines that Loehe believed were underdeveloped. Development would bring about a more nuanced and precise theological articulation, ostensibly more concordant with the revelation of Scripture. Moreover, it is presumed that the process of development would eventually terminate with the revocation of the status "open question." In other words, the end result of theological development, tested through the purifying fires of controversy and debate, is that an open question becomes closed, no longer tolerating equivocal and heterogeneous positions. Like the propositions that had undergone

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Loehe balanced and restricted development by the fact that he believed the fullness of revelation had already been given. Development occurs within the church's understanding and explication of revelation.

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development and purification during the Reformation, unity in confession would be required. This observation may not hold true with every open question, but it evidences that in some circumstances, Loehe envisioned doctrinal development as the instrument by which an open question would become closed.

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94. Loehe, *Unsere kirchliche Lage*, GW 5.1:390.