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Conducted by  
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**"I hear so much talk these days about 'progressive revelation' and how the doctrine of the Church should change in order to accommodate modern thinking.**

**What would be your answer to this?"**

I am not quite sure what 'progressive revelation' means because the apologists of this doctrine never really say. However, we do know that 'progressive' is defined as 'moving

forward; proceeding step by step,' and that 'revelation' means, 'the disclosing of knowledge to man by divine agency' so I suppose what is meant in the Christian sense is that God is uncovering various aspects of His Divine Will step by step down through the ages and that He will continue to do so until the end of time. The flaw in this teaching ought to be obvious to everyone because it means that no man in any age has ever known the complete Will of God, and no man until the end of time will ever know the complete Will of God unless that cataclysmic event coincides with the final bit of revelation from God.

It is also interesting to speculate how this additional revelation should come. Will God reveal it to individuals, to the Pope, the Archbishop of Canterbury, to any latter day Madhi, or will it be through any of the many groups of activists throughout the world. We have all seen the effects of the theory of so-called doctrinal development - the theory which promotes the idea that doctrine and theology can change and develop - and we are currently seeing this theory being put into practice in attempts to unify the differing strands of doctrine in the major religious groups. Documents like 'Faith in the City' indicate the more liberal, political, and pastoral aspects of the Anglican Church particularly, and in order to accommodate this shift in emphasis, doctrine and theology will have to change. We can see this in the inevitability of the ordination of women as priests; in the explaining away of God as a Person and the emergence of Him as some kind of 'force,' and in the denial of the Virgin Birth of Christ, and in His resurrection being explained as some kind of cosmic trick. We can expect other changes of doctrine and the theology in the future. Church leaders no longer lead, they bow to the so-called 'reforming' attitudes of peoples who have long since ceased to believe in the immutability of the counsel of God.

### IS REVELATION PROGRESSIVE

I think we all understand that progression is possible only until final fulfilment occurs. For example, certain diseases will progress in the body until they become terminal; when the disease has fulfilled itself, progression will cease and the person will die. Likewise, we see the progression of the revelation of God through the O.T. and into the new, culminating in the coming of Christ. As the writer of the Hebrew letter says, "In the past God spoke to our fathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son" (Heb. 1:1,2. NIV).

So in Christ we saw the embodiment of God Himself, "full of grace and truth". But that wasn't quite the end of the revelation; shortly before Jesus left His sorrowing Disciples He promised them that another "Comforter" should come (read John 14:15-26. In that discourse, note the words of Judas, 'Lord, why do you intend to show (reveal) yourself to us and not to the world' v. 22). Later, in the same Gospel record, Jesus answers the question posed by Judas (read John 16:1-15). You will notice that Jesus told the Disciples (later to be the Apostles) that the Holy Spirit would guide **them into all the truth, and would bring to their remembrance all that He (Jesus) had spoken to them.** So with the Apostolic Era we have the complete scenario of revelation from the Godhead (God, Christ, the Holy Spirit). It must be said, of course, that the Apostleship of Paul, who wrote most of the recorded N.T. letters, is well attested to in Scripture and cannot be mistaken.

So at the end of the Apostolic Era the revelation, which had progressed until then, was completed and ended. **All** the truth had been revealed. What man had to do was to interpret the revealed Will of God (the unchanging Will, we might add) in the light of every age in which he has lived since then. And therein has lain the problem and the tragedy of interpretation.

### WHAT DID GOD REVEAL

Before we answer this further question let us think why God needed to give any revelation at all. Man was lost in sin - for which the penalty was death and eternal separation

from God - and could do nothing to save himself, therefore, unless He wanted to lose His whole creation, HE had to act. A vicarious sacrifice was needed to remove the guilt and consequences of sin, and so God 'stepped down' from Heaven in the person of His Son and died on the Cross, the Guiltless for the guilty. It was also necessary for man to know that he still had the power of choice, to live or die. Further, God needed to re-state the type of life that man should live if, in fact, he chose life in Christ. It was essential from God's point of view that man should know and understand these things, hence revelation was necessary. The question we now have to address ourselves to is "what did God reveal"?

If we posed this question to a group of Christians we might get the answer, "well, He revealed enough to ensure our salvation." If pressed further, they might direct us to Acts 2:38 which reads, "repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Obedience to a textual directive, it is said, would produce salvation. But do textual directives comprise the whole of revelation? Surely God intended something in addition to this, important though the text is.

The plain and simple answer is that God revealed **Himself**; we have been shown His essential nature. Sometimes we shy away from Scripture because we say that there are some things that we are meant not to understand, consequently, we stop looking. But when we examine the Bible from Genesis to Revelation we see our Divine Creator laid bare before our wondering eyes. We see His creative power, integrity, long-suffering, steadfastness, love, compassion, wrath, endurance, majesty, righteousness; need we go on. And yet, there are those who say that He is so far above us that we can never really know Him; all we have to do is exactly what He tells us to do according to the text of the Bible. Well, all I can say is this; if Christianity means just appropriating to ourselves the text without appropriating the One who is revealed by the text, then small wonder that it is meeting with no great success. If a prospective employer had as many facts on an application form about a prospective employee as the Bible has about God, then he wouldn't consider it necessary to hold an interview in order to find any further information. The very heart and nature of the Godhead is uncovered to our understanding. Oh, why do we not read it, and revel in it? Furthermore, there is a wealth of information revealed to us so that we can live our lives in the benign and spiritually affluent ways of God. Leaping out to us from the written page we see our God and His Christ, and we are amazed at the scope of His Revelation. Why do we linger in the shadows?

### THE DOCTRINE OF CHANGE

People living in the 20th century cannot countenance that the 17th century could be classed as 'modern' when contrasted with, say, the 12th century. Does 'modern' man of any historical period think that the Christian doctrine should be changed and brought up-to-date in order to accommodate his modernity. Has God made a mistake in failing to appreciate that the 20th century would be different from its predecessors? This is what the apologies for a modern theology would seem to affirm. God failed to see that promiscuity would be rampant in the 20th century so His teaching about chastity and marital fidelity must have been wrong for us; what a puerile argument this is.

I read recently of one Anglican apologist who was commenting on the fact that the Anglican church in its training of the clergy had switched the emphasis from theology to pastoral expertise. He went on to say, "It is ironical, then, that our chief pastoral difficulties should be caused by a specific theological deficiency." Referring this statement to sexual promiscuity I take it to mean that the doctrine of Christian morality should be eased so that the pastoral care of those who live immoral lives would become easier to deal with. If this is the result of modern thinking then we can truly say that the Will of God has been really subordinated to the will of man. God has finally been relegated to non-league status and by

people who purport to lead others in His name. In all the welter of advice and information about means of containing the A.I.D.S. virus I have listened in vain for someone to champion the God-given doctrine of chastity and morality, but no, all we hear are means of making immorality safer. What was it Jesus said about the blind leading the blind?

Brethren, let us stand firm. The latter part of the 20th century has been characterised by falling standards in many areas. Let it never be said of us that we stood idly by while people trampled underfoot that glorious revelation that God gave and which cost Him so much.

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