

Newman's Doctrine – Development Or Deviation?

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A century after his death, the life of Cardinal Newman continues to arouse interest for a variety of reasons. Some are attracted by his intellectual stature and brilliant use of English. Others believe him to have been not only a genius but a saint. As T. R. Wright aptly states:

The cry 'Credo in Newmannum', which first echoed around the quadrangles of Oxford in the 1830s, is now to be heard from pulpits all over the world. The Newman industry is booming in universities and seminaries.¹

However, there is a problem at this point for the industry is acclaiming Newman as an enlightened liberal, far ahead of his time, but it is also hailing him as a great conservative simultaneously. The fact is that a number of myths have continued to gather around Newman so that he becomes all things to all men, but the reality of his life and teaching is considerably different.

The fact is that for a decade, Newman bestrode the narrow world of nineteenth century Oxford to the acclaim of a particular group of which he was the 'charismatic' leader, to the great dismay of many, both High Churchman and Evangelical alike. That both High and Low regarded Newman with much suspicion is today generally ignored for the very simple reason that it is more expedient to forget the facts of history when they do not fit the trends for the times. The late Michael Ramsey affords a clear example of this, when he writes in an essay on Newman the Anglican:

... Newman devoted a decade to a powerful religious revival within the Church of England, a revival which had immense subsequent influence and claims not to be an eccentricity in Anglican history but an authentic interpretation of Anglican tradition.²

No Archbishop of Canterbury would have written in such a vein during the nineteenth century, even if he had believed it, which is hardly likely. It is a measure of the immense influence which Newman has wielded upon the doctrine of the Church of England. The question at issue, which is an important one, is whether this doctrinal shift is a true theological development or a deviation from the foundations?

1. Early Life

Newman was born in 1801, the son of a middle-class banking family living in London. Newman's mother was descended from the Huguenots and brought the children up to know the Bible and Protestant doctrine. The family does not seem to have been influenced by the growing evangelicalism around them. Protestantism and evangelicalism were not synonymous.

Newman was sent early to Dr. Nicholas' school at Ealing, where he eventually came under the influence of the Revd. Walter Mayers, one of his teachers, and at the age of fifteen he professed conversion to Christ. With this experience, which deeply affected him, he read widely in the works of a number of evangelical writers such as Scott, Newton, Romaine, and Milner. Newman himself commented that they were, '... all of the school of Calvin'.

Ryle in *Knots Untied* suggests that there were five features common to Evangelicals at that period.⁴ The leading feature was the absolute supremacy of Holy Scripture in all matters of faith and practice. Arising from that doctrine, the sinfulness of human nature naturally follows, and logically the work of obedience and satisfaction of the Lord Jesus Christ is held to be absolutely necessary for man's redemption and to be received by faith alone. This faith is the gift of God by the power of the Holy Spirit in regeneration, and the work of sanctification by the Spirit demonstrates the reality of the profession.

These were the doctrines which Evangelicals held as they recognized them to be in the liturgy and Articles of the Church of England. Such were the doctrines which the young Newman professed to believe as he went up to Oxford in 1817. Newman entered Trinity College as a serious-minded youth with no interest in sport or games. He had adopted the strict practices of the nineteenth century evangelicals which he believed to be agreeable to God's Word.

Oxford in the early part of the nineteenth century had not shaken off the lethargy of the previous century. Trinity College, Newman soon discovered, was more addicted to serious drinking than sober study. But Newman applied himself diligently to his studies. With hindsight, it appears that he probably worked too hard, only obtaining an 'under-the-line' degree, the equivalent of a modern day pass. Surprisingly, Newman persevered and was elected a Fellow of Oriel after a competitive examination. Few thought that he had any chance of succeeding, but he did. Newman wrote in a rather peculiarly detached way about this:

As to Mr. Newman he ever felt the twelfth day of April 1822 to be the turning point of his life, and of all days the most memorable. It raised him from obscurity and need, to competency and reputation. He never wished anything better or higher than in the words of the epitaph, ' . . . to live and die a Fellow of Oriel.'⁵

2. Oxford Days

Newman, the shy young graduate, newly elected as a Fellow of Oriel was an evangelical innocent abroad in the Senior Common Room. The Fellows received him kindly as a person but they would not brook his evangelical views. There is no doubt that a subtle attack of flattery and rationalism was launched upon him, and that this turned his head. The evangelical tenets were discounted. The fact that Newman received this fresh teaching with little or no struggle indicates very clearly that there was more of the head than the heart in the professed conversion. This is not a harsh judgment for it tallies with Newman's own view. He commented that his conversion had little or no conviction of sin, no terror of judgment, and little evidence that he had been enabled to flee to Christ for refuge. While not denying the spiritual experience which had a major impact on his life, it is only fair to say that it was not a normal evangelical conversion in the time of revival. When Newman's faith was put to the test, it was revealed that his conversion was rather a stage of illumination than radical regeneration.

This was soon demonstrated by a number of actions. Newman cancelled his subscription to the Oxford Branch of the Bible Society, having first attempted to remove it from evangelical control. Shortly after taking full orders in 1825, he preached on baptismal regeneration, indicating that within a space of less than two years his views had theologically somersaulted. As assistant Curate in the parish of St. Clements, Newman complained that evangelical doctrines did not work but failed to acknowledge the fact that he had arrogantly changed the

whole style of worship there.⁶ It was clear that his evangelical faith had been intellectually undermined at Oriel. Newman was now open to various influences.

In 1827, Newman's friend John Keble published his *Christian Year*. This publication, which '... bathed in poetic glamour the Feasts and Fasts, the Rites and Ceremonies of the Church as an English High Churchman conceives that institution,'⁷ powerfully influenced Newman's thinking. In it Newman conceived the unreality of the material world. But to believe that the material world is not real is to move into unreality and to the region of the irrational. In 1828, Newman received preferment, becoming incumbent of St. Mary's, the university Church of Oxford. That same year he met Hurrell Froude, who was to have a more profound influence upon him.

The publication of Froude's literary remains by his friends in 1838-9, after his death, indicated that he was not a stable personality. Froude literally hated everything to do with the Reformation and openly admired everything medieval, including celibacy, Mariolatry and the Real Presence in the elements at Holy Communion. Newman was much taken with Froude, writing that Froude's opinions, '... arrested and influenced me even when they did not gain my assent.'⁸ This influence can be traced in Newman's famous Sunday afternoon sermons at St. Mary's.

From these sermons it can be seen that Newman had not simply resiled from evangelicalism, he had revolted from everything which it stood for.

In matters of worship, the Reformation had stood for Scriptural simplicity, but for Newman this was not enough. Newman declared that man needed a form of worship which gives scope to the feelings of wonder and awe. It is quite evident that Newman's new views, far from being an advance, were simply a return to the romantic notions of the Middle Ages which had been resurrected by writers such as Sir Walter Scott. It was Merry England of great cathedrals and abbeys, '... where brilliant decoration, coloured glass. . . and gleaming vestments served to impress the worshipper.'⁹ But again, it was not reality.

3. A Middle Way

By June 1832, Newman had finished writing his book, *The Arians of the Fourth Century*. Although it was written as historical theology, Newman's own preoccupation with contemporary ecclesiastical problems lies just below the surface. But Froude was by now exhibiting signs of consumption from which he would not recover. In an effort to stave off the disease, Newman and Froude travelled to Italy. Newman visited Rome with Froude and they met Wiseman at the English College. The two friends had been anxious to learn on what terms they might be admitted into the Papal Communion, while retaining their doctrines.¹⁰

This, by any standard, was a strange thing to do, even if, as Newman stated, the idea of being received into the Roman Catholic Church while outwardly remaining English clergymen did not enter their heads, as the Revd. William Palmer, a Tractarian leader for ten years and a close friend of Newman, had claimed.¹¹ Nonetheless, it was unwise, for this was an unauthorized visit, which was bound to create considerable suspicion, and it was remarkable that two intelligent Oxford graduates should be quite so naive about the consequences of the Council of Trent. Perhaps the kindest construction which can be put upon this is that both men were living, to some degree, in an unreal ecclesiastical world.

Newman travelled on to Sicily, where he was struck down with a severe illness from which he would have died save for the nursing care of his Italian servant. The illness left him profoundly depressed and during this depression Newman wrote the hymn, 'Lead kindly light'. The intriguing question is what does Newman mean by the light? It cannot be the Scripture because he had long since parted company with the supreme authority of Holy Writ. What was the work which he continued to talk about in the illness? It seems that Newman had undergone some traumatic experience, and that he was now facing a major turning point in his life.

Newman arrived home in England to find that the Reform Bill of 1832 had been passed by the Whigs and the country was in a state of ferment over various issues. Keble, at Newman's invitation, preached the Assize Sermon on the National Apostasy. This was as Bishop Knox remarks a 'fulmination against the suppression of the Irish Bishoprics'.¹² The High Church party believed that this was an attack upon the spiritual rights of the Church by the World through a Whig Parliament. A Church Defence Association was formed in which Newman and his friends formed an extreme wing before they left to form their own party to promote the restoration of the English Church. This was the beginning of the Oxford Movement. It became clear that this restoration was not a return to the principles of the New Testament against the Erastianism of that period but a return to the position of the Early Church as it was ideally conceived to have existed in the fourth and fifth centuries. The *Via Media* had begun.

The new group now faced the same problem that had worried the Reformers in the sixteenth century. Their problem was one of continuity, lest they should be charged with being innovators rather than restorers of something which had been lost. Their answer to this problem was to see Archbishop Laud and the Caroline divines of the seventeenth century as the rather tenuous link between Anglicanism, the Henrician Catholics of the sixteenth century and the idealized Early Church. In this they were assisted by some ambiguous statements in the *Book of Common Prayer*. The fact that there were serious historical objections, as well as the plain customs of the English Church, seemed not to worry them at all. But there were indeed serious problems with this interpretation. The Caroline divines had not challenged the Elizabethan Settlement, which was without doubt Protestant in character, and the *Book of Common Prayer* had not been interpreted or used in the way which they were suggesting for three hundred years.

The manner by which this important rediscovery, in spite of the problems, was to be communicated to the nation was through the series of tracts, known as 'Tracts for the Times,' and Newman was the chief architect and writer in this venture. In these tracts a whole series of doctrinal teachings was set forth which, while they may have individually had some support within the English Church, had not been officially or legally recognized since the Reformation. In Tract 1, Apostolic Succession was set out as a part of Anglican heritage. Teachings followed on celibacy, asceticism, baptismal regeneration, the Real Presence and Priestly Absolution. In 1834 Newman wrote two tracts on the Middle Way, 'the *Via Media*'. Newman exchanged letters with a French priest who assisted him in formulating the concept that the Church of England lay midway between Rome and the Protestantism of the Reformation. This idea received its classic expression in the *Prophetic Office of the Church viewed relatively to Romanism and Popular Protestantism*, published in 1837. But Newman was to go further.

4. Justification, Roman And Protestant

In that same year, in his *Lectures on Justification* (published 1838), Newman attacked the Lutheran doctrine of Justification by Faith alone, charging that the evangelicals were in bondage to their feelings. His comment was that,

Luther weaned [the people] from seeking salvation in standing ordinances, by teaching that a personal knowledge of [salvation] was promised to every one who believed. For outward signs of grace he substituted inward; for reverence towards the Church contemplation of self.¹³

But to the majority who endeavoured to follow Newman's subtle reasoning, it appeared very unclear what he did mean. A contemporary, G. S. Faber, who was by no means unfriendly to him, though critical of Tractarianism, said of Newman that his doctrine of Justification included the following ideas:

(1) That we are justified by faith: that we are justified by obedience: that we are justified by baptism: we are justified conjointly by the two sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. (2) That our Justification precedes our Faith and that our Faith precedes our Justification. (3) That the word cannot bear two meanings, yet it clearly does have two meanings, the accounting righteous and the making righteous. (4) That there is but one act of Justification and yet there are ten thousand Justifications.¹⁴

Faber says that Newman's system was more than just a 'tissue of inconsistencies', which would reflect only upon the clarity of his apprehension, 'but unhappily it exhibits a strange and mischievous attempt to mix up together wholesome food and rank poisons, the sound doctrine of the Church of England and the pernicious doctrine of the Church of Rome'. But Newman was now creating opposition for himself far more widely than just among the strict evangelicals.

Matters were bound to come to a head, and it was a Tract which was the cause of a furore, not only in the Church of England but in the country at large. The series had begun in September 1833 and the final Tract was issued in February 1841. Tract 90 endeavoured to prove that subscription to the 39 Articles was consistent with Roman doctrine. A storm erupted in the Church and country which drove Newman eventually from the public ministry of the Church of England. He retired to the monastic retreat at Littlemore to reflect upon and write his *Development of Christian Doctrine*.

It seems clear that Newman had been moving away from Protestant Anglicanism altogether for some time. The sheer logic of his mind perceived that the position of a middle way was really untenable. Either Rome was right or the Reformers were. The problem was how to deal with the large number of accretions which had been made to the faith of the Early Church and for which there was no warrant either in Holy Scripture or in the faith and practice of the Early Church. Ian Ker, in his recent study, writes:

By the end of 1844 Newman was practically certain that the Church of England, far from being a branch of the Catholic Church, was in fact in schism and that the Roman Catholic Church was identical with the Catholic Church of the Fathers. There was only one obstacle to acting on his belief, as he explains in the APOLOGIA: ' . . . I came to the conclusion. . . of writing an essay on Doctrinal Development. . . ' ¹⁵

Before Newman had finished the writing of this book, he requested to be received into the Roman Church and was duly received on 9th October 1845.

5. In Rome

Newman completed and published the *Essay of the Development of Christian Doctrine* before the end of the year. From it we can analyse how and why he went to Rome. The basis of Newman's thought is in fact a-theological or, to put it in another way, a rationalized theology, not dissimilar to the subtleties of the Mediaeval Schoolmen. The one factor which is axiomatic in his theology is that there is no systematic development of Christian doctrine. Ker again says most aptly that:

It would hardly be possible for Newman to have a systematic theory of development since he does not regard the actual doctrinal developments which have taken place as being in any way systematic.¹⁶

Newman himself says:

The development of an idea [like Christianity] is not like an investigation worked out on paper, in which each successive advance is a pure evolution from a foregoing, but it is carried on through and by means of communities of men and their leaders and guides; and it employs their minds as instruments. . .¹⁷

Behind this idea, there lies, in fact, the vivid imagination of Newman, affected like many others in that era by the Romantic Movement, who, although he had determined to work out the difficulty of Rome and the Early Church in a logical way, reverts to creating a mental picture of the Early Church which he then conceives as being closest to the Roman Church of the nineteenth century. This is sheer romanticism. We quote Ker again as he says,

the appeal is far more to the imagination than the intellect. . .the point for Newman is clinched by the IMAGINATIVE REALISATION that Modern (19th Century) Catholicism is the nearest. . . to what is called the ethos of the Early Church. . .¹⁸

Newman explains what he means by an illustration in which he likened the contemporary Dominican preachers, Jesuit missionaries or Carmelite friars to the Apostles and Prophets. This is not simply apologetic writing with a special emphasis on the imagination, as Ker suggests, but a case of very special pleading. But underlying this whole argument is the distinction that Newman draws between implicit and explicit reason. This is crucial to the whole idea of the development of doctrine.

In a paper written in 1868 Newman stated clearly:

the apostles had the fulness of revealed knowledge, a fulness which they could as little realise to themselves, as the human mind, as such, can have all its thoughts present before it at once. . . in an apostle's mind great part of his knowledge is latent or implicit. . . I wish to hold that there is nothing which the Church has defined or shall define but what an apostle, if asked would have been fully able to answer and would have answered, as the Church has answered, the one answering by inspiration, the other from its gift of infallibility.¹⁹

In an example to demonstrate his precise meaning, Newman suggested that if St. Paul should have been asked about the Roman doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, (made an article of faith in 1854, although the Council of Trent had left the matter as an open question), the Apostle would not have immediately understood the term but he would have understood the idea and would have affirmed it. And in like manner:

[The deposit of faith] is in such sense committed to the Church or to the Pope, that when the Pope sits in St. Peter's chair or when a council is collected round him, it is capable of being presented to their minds with that fulness and exactness. . . with which it habitually, NOT OCCASIONALLY, resided in the mind of the apostles.²⁰

With such a view of infallibility it is surprising that Newman himself was strongly opposed to the promulgation of the doctrine of papal infallibility in 1870. He wrote to a friend that, 'As to the Immaculate Conception, by contrast there was nothing sudden or secret in the proposal. . . This has taken us all by surprise.' And again to Bishop Ullathorne he wrote,

What have we done to be treated as the Faithful were never treated before? Why should an aggressive and insolent faction [the Jesuits] be allowed to make the hearts of the just to mourn?²¹

Surely, if he were consistent, Newman must answer that question in the same way as the Immaculate Conception. If the apostle Paul were asked about papal infallibility he might not understand the term, but he would understand the idea and affirm it. This is the precise weakness of the development of doctrine theory. There is no genuinely objective standard by which such matters can be judged, once the Scriptures are laid aside.

6. By What Standard?

Newman's doctrine and conduct must be evaluated by the standards which he voluntarily assumed at his ordination and which he professed to believe and to practise before God and the Church. Those standards were clearly set out and were even more clearly understood in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Newman, from a Protestant home, having professed conversion as a teenager, adopting the moderate Calvinistic views of many of the Evangelical leaders, entered into Holy Orders. He was required to give his assent to the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion as part of the formularies of the Church of England. Harford writes aptly on the subject of clerical subscription:

A careful study of the Articles and Prayer Book reveals the fact that Anglican theology moves along certain definite and distinctive lines . . . These lines of doctrine distinguish it from Romanism on the one hand and from the extreme forms of Protestantism on the other. It is not compatible with adherence to the opposing principles which are distinctive of Rome, or of . . . Anabaptism.²²

Newman had therefore committed himself to a distinctive position, not as a layman but as a leader in the Church. He had assented not only to the plain meaning of the words in his ordination vows but also to their historical meaning and background as well as their spirit. It was from these that he gradually drew back until he finally repudiated this theological position for another. Our criticism of Newman is not when he becomes a Roman Catholic but of the manner in which he conducted himself within the ranks of the clergy of the Church of England and particularly with the aims, methods and spirit of *Tracts for the Times*.

When Newman converted to Rome, the criticism was changed to debate. While Newman remained within the Church of England he was acting in a manner contrary to his own understanding of the English Church's historical position. And this fact is recognized by Rome. Clifford Longley makes the point in a leading Article in *The Times*. He wrote this on the quest for unity:

. . . Anglican belief today as defined in ARCIC 1's statement endorsed by the 1988 Lambeth Conference would pass all the tests applied by Leo XIII, but. . . the Papal judgement was based on an alleged defect in Anglican doctrine and practice in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.²³

If this were not the case, then there would have been no need for Newman to have acted in the way that he did. Gresham Machen gives a particularly apt illustration of this principle from the Conservative and Liberal struggles of America in the early years of this century:

The matter may be made plain by an illustration from secular life. Suppose in a political campaign in America there be formed a Democratic Club for the purpose of furthering the cause of the Democratic Party. Suppose there are certain other citizens who are opposed to the tenets of the Democratic Club, and in opposition desire to support the Republican Party. What is the honest way for them to accomplish this purpose? Plainly, it is the formation of a Republican Club. . . But suppose . . . the advocates of Republican principles should conceive the idea of making a declaration of conformity to Democratic principles [but] turning its resources into anti-Democratic propaganda. That plan might be ingenious, but would it be honest?²⁴

The fact is, the more that one reads of Newman's early pronouncements, the more one realizes that he was totally disaffected, not only with the formularies of the Church of England but with its spirit as well. What hindered him from leaving the Church much earlier were the friends who he knew would not leave with him, and his affection for his mother and her principles. It was shortly after her death that Newman was received into Rome. Perhaps one of the more subtle ties was Newman's deep affection for Oxford.

But what was the foundation of the Church of England? And by what means can it be established? The first test is to look at the doctrinal formularies. The Articles, Prayer Book and Ordinal are all claimed to be agreeable to the Word of God. The second test is to examine those formularies in the light of God's Word in order to see if they will stand that test. Now that is obviously a long and detailed process. However, we can safely shorten that approach by examining the key areas in the teachings of the chief architect of the reformed Church of England.

For without any doubt, the most influential character in the Church of England's reformation was Thomas Cranmer, who had the most profound influence upon its Protestant position. Whether we consider the Articles, Prayer Book or Ordinal, in each case we discover the careful, conservative, biblical hand of the Archbishop. Of the three factors which influenced Cranmer's approach to reforming the English Church the first was revelation, the Bible as God's Word written and the two other factors were reason and tradition, both in a subsidiary capacity.

At the same time Cranmer was a great exponent of patristic literature. In his studies Cranmer sought to show that much of the doctrine of the Reformation had been held and proclaimed by the Early Church at least germinally. In Cranmer's work *A Confutation of Unwritten Verities*, there are many quotations from the Fathers to prove that they constantly acknowledged the priority of Scripture, and so the Fathers were witnesses to the Scripture and not a separate authority in themselves. Cranmer says:

All contentions which the old fathers had with heretics was for the Scriptures . . . but for things which are not contained in the Scriptures, they never accused any man of heresy.²⁵

The fact is that, once Cranmer had become grounded and established in the Scriptures as God's Word, a number of consequences flowed from it. The first in point of time was the inter-relationship of Church and State. Cranmer's spiritual pilgrimage led on to Justification by faith alone, Scriptural worship based on that principle, the two dominical sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion, and his great liturgical work of the service of Holy Communion in the second Edwardian Prayer Book of 1552, which is the basis of the present B.C.P. service.

To quote Bishop Wordsworth freely, 'The Church of England had become Protestant in order that the Church might be truly Catholic'. And this foundation was confirmed in all the religious settlements, from 1559 to 1688. This was the standard to which all the classical evangelicals adhered strictly, interpreting both Prayer Book and Ordinal in the light of the Articles. That is the right and proper method. It is doctrine which is normative and liturgy must take its meaning from the doctrine, and not doctrine from the liturgy. This is the standard by which Newman's conduct and influence must be evaluated.

7. The Standing Or Falling Church

From 1662 until the middle of the following century it is true that evangelicalism, but not Protestantism, had almost been extinguished within the English Church. The reason for this is quite simply that the majority of the Puritans were ejected at the Restoration of the monarchy. Vital religion was at a very low ebb until the conversion of George Whitefield and the Wesleys, with a number of other (parochial) clergy in different parts of the country. This began a movement which became known in England and Wales as the Evangelical Revival, which gradually restored the evangelicalism of the Reformers and Puritans to the National Church. Bishop Knox writes:

The history of the Evangelicals up to 1850 falls into two distinct periods. In the first . . . they were simply a few scattered clergy . . . [but] the second stage . . . was an age of marked and rapid progress . . . for which no parallel can be found in our Church History.²⁶

For the evangelical in this classical period, while there may have been discussion and debate on inspiration, infallibility and inerrancy, there was no doubt as to the fact that the Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament were the Word of God. Arising from that deep inner conviction, there was the consciousness of the ruin of man by nature, and conviction of sin before a Holy God. But with that conviction, there was also the good news that God had in Christ made a full atonement for sin and that a righteousness had been provided by Christ Jesus which by faith could be made their own. So they were not only pardoned, but counted righteous, not only forgiven but adopted as sons, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. This formed the basis for a holy walk, motivated by gratitude to the electing grace of God in a full assurance of faith. In a word, their life and worship, based on the Word, was that they were justified by faith alone. This was the gospel they proclaimed to rich and poor alike. Martin Luther, three centuries earlier, had called this gospel the test of a standing or falling Church.

This was the gospel which Paul called 'the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes', and which the apostle proclaimed from Jerusalem to Rome. This was the gospel which, if anything in the way of human works was added to it, brought the apostle's anathema. And this was the gospel which Newman not only turned away from but attacked. For the confrontation was between Newman and the classical evangelicals, even though

many of the old High Church party were offended by him. We quote from Ian Ker, citing Newman's own words. He writes:

The Bible is not so written as to force its meaning upon the reader, nor does it carry with it its own interpretation . . . those who think Christians must draw their faith from Scripture hold an unreal doctrine . . . The New Testament is an incomplete document . . .²⁷

And again Ker quotes Newman in relation to Justification, demonstrating that although Newman professes to hold both the ideas of accounting and making righteous, in effect it is making righteous which forms the basis of his doctrine:

The presence of the Holy Ghost shed abroad in our hearts, the Author both of faith and of renewal, this is really that which makes us righteous and our righteousness is the possession of that presence.²⁸

Like Rome, Newman had confused Justification and Sanctification. For the distinction maintained by all the great divines of the Church of England, such as Hooker, Andrewes and Beveridge, is that through the work of Christ there is an external and imputed righteousness but through the work of the indwelling Spirit there is an internal and inwrought righteousness.

But what did contemporary writers think of Newman's theology? Bishop M'Ilvaine, writing in 1841 in a work entitled *Oxford Divinity Compared*, answers Newman's charge that:

the righteousness of Christ imputed to us for Justification as held by *THE LARGE PORTION OF THE ENGLISH CLERGY*. . . is an unreal righteousness and a real corruption, bringing us into bondage to shadows . . . and away with this modern, this private, this arbitrary, this tyrannical system . . .²⁹

M'Ilvaine called Newman's doctrine of justification the, ' . . . most melancholy exhibitions of morbid mind and want of spiritual discernment.'³⁰ M'Ilvaine comments that he earnestly hopes that his name may be counted worthy to be included amongst the large portion of English Clergy condemned by Newman's attack!

Newman by his own admission had been ordained into a Church which, although far from perfect, had in a large measure proclaimed the Biblical doctrine of Justification by Faith based on the Word of God. Not only had he attacked this doctrine, Newman had been the leader of a movement which had restored doctrines and practices which were inimical to these truths. The Church, which had been standing, had now begun to fall.

8. A Deviant Development

Is there a key which unlocks the central door to Newman's rationalised theology? For Newman spread himself widely in his various writings. The answer lies in his view of Scripture. Just as Cranmer began his pilgrimage by realizing that the Bible is God's Word written, so Newman as a teenager adopted a creed which is based four-squarely on that presupposition. While he remained with others of like mind, reading the great writers, all was well. But it would not be going too far to say that, when his faith was subtly challenged, Newman, instead of bearing the reproach of Christ, supinely surrendered the sword of the Spirit, thereby leaving himself open to all manner of teachings.

The one factor which is axiomatic in Newman's theology is that there is no systematic development of doctrine. Now that could be conceded, should we assume that there is no standard by which doctrinal development can be measured? But if we believe that there has been divine revelation given, then the situation changes. Newman is right when he states that the full implications of doctrines are not spelt out in the New Testament. A classic case is that of the doctrine of the Trinity. But he is wrong when he says that the materials are not furnished in the Scriptures for this glorious doctrine to be believed and affirmed. It is believed and affirmed, not on the basis of either antiquity or the infallibility of the Church but on the sure and certain warrant of Holy Scripture.

And this doctrine is based simply on the fact that Christianity began with the witness that Jesus is the Son of God, and the deity of Christ is at the heart of its message. But as Christians believed that there was but One Living and True God, then an explanation must be given of the relationship of the Son to the Father. Likewise there must also be an explanation of the person of the Holy Spirit. Thus the necessity to formulate the doctrine of the Trinity arose. And from that there also arose the need to describe the relationship of the divine and human natures of Christ. With these and other related doctrines there are associated the names of the Fathers and later classical divines: Tertullian and the Trinity; Athanasius and the Person of Christ; Augustine and the doctrine of Man; Anselm and the doctrine of the Atonement; Luther and Justification by faith; Calvin and Scripture. And in every case the need to formulate these doctrines arose from hostile forces that attacked externally and from false teachers who sought to undermine the faith from within. Finlayson writes:

It is very remarkable . . . that the necessity arose in exactly the order in which we could reasonably expect it. This has resulted in a reasonable development of doctrine along lines that have continued to command the intellectual allegiance of students of the faith in every age.³¹

We maintain, then, in opposition to Newman, that doctrine is systematic and that, far from the Scriptures being insufficient, all that is necessary is given by the breathing out of God (*theopneustos*), and Christ is in or behind all the Scriptures, and, as we accept Him, the Holy Spirit is given to bear witness through the Word and its doctrines to the Christ of the Scriptures. To fall short of Christ Jesus, whatever the doctrines we hold, is to fall away from the Scriptures. That is not to say that all doctrine is laid out there in systematic form. It is not. But the materials are all there to be worked upon, prayerfully seeking the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit, as the Fathers and the great divines did.

If the foundation of any theology is not laid in the Christ of the Scriptures the theology must be a deviation from the truth of the Word of God. This was so in Newman's case. It led him to deny the great Reformation doctrines of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. In that deviation Newman created a fantasy of the perfection of the fourth and fifth century Church which was based on unreality and a misreading of the actual situation. This led him to substitute the Church for Christ, and when the Early Church failed, the Church of Rome took its place. We quote a contemporary critique of his life and ministry written by an Irish Churchman. In it he said:

Newman's gospel when you examine it, was not salvation by Christ, but salvation by the Church. It was salvation by baptismal regeneration, salvation by sacramental grace, salvation by a priesthood with delegated powers of absolution; salvation in short through rites and ceremonies peculiar to a certain Church.³²

Dr. Hort, at one time under Newman's influence, commenting on Newman's *A Grammar of Assent* (published 1870), said of him, quoting F. D. Maurice:

In matters of belief what Maurice said of him is profoundly true, that he was governed by an infinite scepticism counter-acted by an infinite devoutness. But for his indestructible sense of God's reality and presence, he must have early become a thorough-going unbeliever; and then not content with a sober and reasonable faith, he delighted to use his subtlety in finding reasons for or excuses for any belief which he wished to accept.³³

Such is the stuff of which philosophy is made. For Newman, with his rejection of Scripture, theology cannot develop logically; it evolves, if necessarily illogically, and reason is suspended only to re-emerge as subtle rationalism. Oriel had undone his early faith, and the kindly light that he had prayed for was not the sure light of God's Word but a will o' the wisp which had brought him, not to a true development but to a deviation from the truth. This was the tragedy of Newman's life. But the fact is that if Newman were right then all the Reformers were wrong. If the Reformers were right, then Newman is tragically mistaken. The answer to that dilemma lies squarely in the attitude to the Scriptures.³⁴

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Endnotes:

- 1) T. R. Wright, Introduction to Symposium, *J. H. Newman: A Man For Our Time?* Grevatt and Grevatt, 1983, p. 1.
- 2) A. M. Ramsey, Essay on *Newman The Anglican*, *ut sup.*
- 3) John MacNeilage, 'A Study of Cardinal Newman', *The Gospel Magazine* c. 1940.
- 4) J. C. Ryle, *Knots Untied*, James Clarke, 1964, p. 3 ff.
- 5) Joyce Sugg, *John Henry Newman*, Catholic Truth Society, 1986, p. 8.
- 6) Brian Martin, *John Henry Newman, His Life and Work* Geoffrey Chapman Mowbray 1990.
- 7) John MacNeilage, *op. cit.*, p. 277.
- 8) *Ibid.*
- 9) V. H. H. Green, *Renaissance and Reformation*, Arnold 1974, p. 17.
- 10) Walter Walsh, *Secret History of the Oxford Movement*, Swann Sonnenschein 1898, p. 264.
- 11) *Ibid.*
- 12) Bishop E. A. Knox, *The Tractarian Movement*, Putnam 1933, p. 110 ff.
- 13) *Ibid.*, p. 204.
- 14) *Ibid.* p. 205.

- 15) Ian Ker, *Newman The Theologian*, Collins 1990, p. 33.
- 16) *Loc. cit.*
- 17) *Loc. cit.*
- 18) *Ibid.*, p. 34.
- 19) *Ibid.*, p. 39.
- 20) *Loc. cit.*
- 21) Ian Ker, *John Henry Newman*, Oxford University Press 1988, p. 652.
- 22) D. Harford, Article on subscription in *Prayer Book Dictionary*, Pitman 1912, p. 52.
- 23) Clifford Longley, from Article in *The Times*, The Quest for Unity 1989.
- 24) Gresham Machen, quoted by G. N. M. Collins in *Heritage of Our Fathers*, Knox Press 1974, p. 86.
- 25) P. E. Hughes, citing Cranmer in *Theology of The English Reformers*, Hodder and Stoughton 1965, p. 31.
- 26) E. A. Knox, *op cit.*, p. 54.
- 27) Ian Ker, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
- 28) Ian Ker, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
- 29) Bishop M'Ilvaine, *Oxford Divinity Compared*, Seeley and Burnside 1840, p. 320 ff.
- 30) *Loc cit.*
- 31) Finlayson, *The Story of Theology*, Tyndale Press 1963, p. 9.
- 32) MacNeilage, *op. cit.*, p. 280.
- 33) E. A. Knox, *op. cit.*, p. 150.
- 34) The substance of this Essay was first delivered to the United Protestant Council Meeting at Westminster Chapel in November 1990 and has been edited for publication.