
Newman and the Transition to Modern Liberalism

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Haec mutatio dexteræ Excelsi! all the stories which have gone about of my being a half Catholic, a liberal Catholic, under a cloud, not to be trusted, are now at an end.

—J. H. Newman's letter to R. W. Church, 11 March 1879

David DeLaura states in his seminal work on Arnold, Newman, and Pater, *Hebrew and Hellene in Victorian England*, that "Newman's role in the still unfinished 'Modernist' episode in the Roman Catholic Church . . . has . . . escaped close examination."¹ The observation is still valid and bears exploration. But it should be noted that the Modernist controversy, which is more or less confined to theology and its liturgical expressions, is only a part of the larger battle which John Henry Newman waged against liberalism in general. The rapid drift in the middle decades of the nineteenth century toward liberalism—toward the egalitarian ethos, secularism, and, ultimately, modern democracy—and the way in which that drift marked an unprecedented and frequently unconscious revolution in popular belief and praxis are socio-cultural phenomena well known to students of the Victorian era. In Newman's prose works we can find his clear (though frequently misunderstood) judgment on liberalism and the role it played in the Victorian transition to modernity.

Because Newman usually subordinates temporal concerns to intellectual and spiritual priorities, we do not find in his writings

¹ David J. DeLaura, *Hebrew and Hellene in Victorian England* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), xiv; hereinafter cited in the text as "HH."

much formal analysis of the social developments that were producing the fragmented, atomistic society about which Thomas Carlyle, Matthew Arnold, and John Ruskin, among others, wrote. Like Arnold, however, he had insights into the religious and educational developments of the age that foregrounded the anxieties of other Victorians who had more secular concerns. For Newman's life-long battle against liberalism is also an indirect commentary on what secularism, mechanization, selfish economics, and skepticism were doing to the individual and to society at large. For him the *Zeitgeist* was no less than the liberal principles conceived in the Enlightenment and made incarnate by the Industrial Revolution, principles he feared from his Anglican days as dangerous to society in general and to religion and education in particular. *The Idea of a University* and the *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* are, in part, chronicles of that fear.

Newman
miscategorized
as a theological
liberal.

Ironically, in the last two decades of his life and posthumously Newman has been increasingly associated with the theological liberalism he had often disavowed and with certain prominent liberals. It is true that he at times cultivated the friendship of men with whom he had irreconcilable differences. His friendship with Matthew Arnold, the moderate liberal, and with Lord John Acton, the prominent Catholic modernist, are two examples of this strange affinity. At the same time, Newman's public disagreement with Cardinal Manning, William George Ward, editor of the *Dublin Review*, and other ultramontanes over the tenor and direction—though not the substance—of English Catholicism is well known.² But his personal conviction and his appreciation for historical consistency put him at odds with both Arnold and Acton. Newman blamed the transformation of his beloved Oxford and the Church of England on the liberalism they espoused (he did not suspect that eventually it was to transform also the seemingly monolithic Church of Rome). It became clear to him that at the center of the Victorian transition was the powerful force of liberalism, which, as he observes in the "Note on Liberalism" at the end of the *Apologia*,³ had come to characterize the views of most educated Englishmen. The need to define liberalism, to point it out, and to write and preach against it gradually be-

² For an account of Newman's conflict with the Ultramontanes, see Joseph L. Altholz's *The Liberal Catholic Movement in England: The "Rambler" and Its Contributors, 1848-1864* and Wilfrid Ward's *The Life of John Henry Cardinal Newman*.

³ John H. Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, ed. David J. DeLaura (New York: W. Norton & Co., 1968), 218; hereinafter cited in the text as "APVS."

came a moral and intellectual imperative for Newman. At the same time his subtle and simple intellect, as Oscar Wilde once described it, grasped with characteristic incisiveness the importance of liberalism as a formative, evolutionary force for his time and for ours.

In the *Apologia* Newman tells us that “the strength of any party lies in its being true to its theory” and that “[c]onsistency is the life of a movement” (APVS, 149). These qualities—being true to a theory and consistency—characterized much more than Newman’s party. They also characterized his life and work, for he was indisputably consistent and faithful to a theory in his opposition to liberalism in the two fields where he labored most intensely: religion and education.

Strength in consistency.

When created Cardinal of the Roman Church in 1879, Newman took the significant occasion of his acceptance of the honor to define liberalism and restate his life-long battle against it. In the *biglietto* speech, towards the end of his life, we can hear echoes of the Anglican tracts of the 1830s:

To one great mischief I have from the first opposed myself. For thirty, forty, fifty years I have resisted to the best of my powers the spirit of Liberalism in religion. Never did Holy Church need champions against it more sorely than now, when, alas! it is an error over-spreading, as a snare, the whole earth . . . Liberalism in religion is the doctrine that there is no positive truth in religion, but that one creed is as good as another . . . It is inconsistent with any recognition of any religion as true. It teaches that all are to be tolerated, for all are matters of opinion. Revealed religion is not truth, but a sentiment and a taste; and it is the right of each individual to make it say just what strikes his fancy.⁴

Earlier, in the note on liberalism appended to the *Apologia*, he had defined it in epistemological terms:

Now by Liberalism I mean false liberty of thought, or the exercise upon matters, in which, from the constitution of the human mind, thought cannot be brought to any successful issue . . . the mistake of subjecting to human judgment those revealed doctrines which are in their nature beyond and independent of it. . . . (APVS, 218)

In a letter to R. W. Church, Oriel Fellow and later Dean of St. Paul’s, quoted earlier and dated 11 March 1879, Newman acknowledges the “cloud” he had been under and rejoices at the justice of his vindication.⁵ The cloud was the accusation of being tainted with

⁴ Wilfrid Ward, *The Life of John Henry Cardinal Newman*, 2 vols. (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1912), 2:460.

⁵ John H. Newman, *A Packet of Letters: Selection from the Correspondence of John*

liberal principles and it came from ultramontane quarters—mostly from William George Ward and others affiliated with the *Dublin Review*.

However, the “cloud” may also refer to Roman suspicions concerning Newman’s orthodoxy attributable to his article “On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine.” The central thesis of this piece is not really at odds with the Catholic doctrine of the *sensum fidelis*, the sense of the faithful, which teaches that the vast body of the faithful cannot err in matters of faith through the protection of the Holy Ghost. Rather than proposing a democratic and liberal conception of the Church, the idea of the *sensum fidelis* germinal to this essay advances the patristic teaching that Newman had explored when writing in *The Arians of the Fourth Century* about the general apostasy of the world’s bishops to Arianism or semi-Arianism while the laity largely held to an orthodox Christology. In any case, in a letter to Cardinal Wiseman of January 19, 1860, Newman dismisses the essay as “at worst a slip of the pen in an anonymous un-theological paper” (Letters, 121).

Yet early in this century Catholic Modernists, heirs to nineteenth-century Catholic liberals and condemned by Pius X in the 1907 encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, claimed Newman as one of their own, as do some Newman scholars today. Edward F. Jost believes, for example, that after Newman became a Catholic he turned more liberal than he had been in his Anglican days at Oxford, particularly during the Tractarian movement. Jost cites as evidence his growing admiration for the spirit of French Catholic liberals like Lammennais, Montalembert, and Lacordaire and his animus against what were to Newman’s reserved temperament the extremist ultramontane forces both in England and on the Continent.⁶ Yet, in the “Note on Liberalism” Newman does not hesitate to distance himself from Lacordaire: “If I presume to contrast Lacordaire and myself, I should say, we had been both of us inconsistent;—he, a Catholic, in calling himself a Liberal; I, a Protestant, in being Anti-liberal” (APVS, 217). A stronger argument of sympathetic allegiance could be based on Newman’s association with Sir John Acton. Still, Terence Kenny makes an ultimately unconvincing case for

Henry Newman, ed. Joyce Sugg (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 207; hereinafter cited in the text as “Letters.”

⁶ Edward F. Jost, “Newman and Liberalism: The Later Phase,” *The Victorian Newsletter*, 24 (1963): 1-2.

Newman's liberalism.⁷ Both Jost and Kenny fail to consider two important facts. First, at one time the liberal and ultramontane forces were united against French Gallicanism and in favor of the papal privileges vis-à-vis monarchical power. Newman's anti-Erastian position—so vital to his defense of the Church as an Anglican—would be in line with the fight for the Church's and the laity's liberty carried on by Lammenais and his disciples in the pages of *L'Avenir*. Second, as a Catholic Newman took for granted, rather naively, the basic orthodoxy of those who labored in the Catholic camp against the anti-intellectual strain of British ecclesiastical authorities. It took the Old Catholic schism and the wider controversy over papal infallibility to awaken Newman to the fact that some who advocated the anti-dogmatic position also wore the Roman badge.

Newman had indeed a certain affection for Acton, as his correspondence with him shows, and he even served as editor of the liberal Catholic weekly *The Rambler* for a short time. It is also true that he was among the "Inopportunist"—those who, before the dogmatic definition of papal infallibility at the First Vatican Council, opposed the historical timing of the definition during the conciliar debates. All this would seem to cast a liberal aura on Newman. But a basic difference between Newman and Acton regarding infallibility cannot be ignored: whereas Acton believed the dogma evil and the death blow to the aspirations of Catholics who loved freedom and the scientific quest, Newman merely thought it ill-timed. The fact that the cardinal personally did not doubt the church teaching on infallibility is evident in his quick assent to it after the formal declaration. His assent to the dogma is also expressed in a very candid letter, dated October 20, 1870, to Mrs. Margaret Wilson, a convert who had difficulties with the teaching. In it Newman declares his own acceptance of infallibility and urges the troubled lady to understand the voice of the Church as the voice of God. His acceptance is facilitated by the development thesis, through which Newman explains Roman dogmatic definitions throughout the centuries by means of the organic model of gradual development by stages. Furthermore, there is no evidence that Newman ever contemplated following in the steps of Johann Döllinger, the renowned German historian and theologian (and mentor to Acton) with whom he had

Differed with Acton on papal infallibility.

⁷ Terence Kenny, *The Political Thought of John Henry Newman* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1974), 127-65.

some correspondence, toward the formation of the Old Catholic sect after the infallibility definition.

Newman's "inopportunism" was purely tactical. For one thing, he was keenly aware of the old accusations against his English correligionists regarding their alleged inability to be loyal to both the Crown and the Papacy. Very likely, he viewed the definition as potentially harmful to the nascent English Catholic Church. Moreover, Newman had a temperamental affinity with the old English Catholic nobility, who in their historic isolation wished to keep a low profile and were annoyed at the zeal of the new Oxford converts, frequently fervent advocates of the definition.

*Conscience
preeminent.*

The renewed accusations against Catholics which Newman had feared would come did come. One came from the Prime Minister himself. The reservations about the timing of the infallibility dogma lose significance in light of Newman's ardent defense of it in his response, cast in the form of a letter to the Duke of Norfolk, to Gladstone's *The Vatican Decrees in Their Bearing on Civil Allegiance*. Harold J. Laski has called this letter "perhaps the profoundest discussion on the nature of obedience and of sovereignty to be found in the English language."⁸ Basically Gladstone accuses Rome of usurping civil powers, of breaking with tradition on the question of papal infallibility, and of denying Catholics mental and moral freedom. Newman answers in his letter that he has no conflict in being both a good Catholic and a loyal Englishman; that history shows evidence that the Papal Church and the Church of Antiquity are one and the same; that the definition is just one example of "development of doctrine"; and that a properly formed conscience is the "aboriginal Vicar of Christ" and serves a different purpose from that served by the Pope as Vicar of Christ on earth. Hence Newman's famous remark, so reflective of his balanced understanding of ecclesiastical obedience, that were he to drink a toast to the Pope he would "drink to conscience first, and to the Pope afterwards."⁹

As for Newman's relationship with Acton, Gladstone's protégé, and his connections with the liberal journals *The Rambler* and *The Home and Foreign Review* between 1857 and 1864, it should suffice to note his quick dissociation from both and the cooling of his friend-

⁸ Harold J. Laski, *Studies in the Problem of Sovereignty* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1917), 202.

⁹ Alvan S. Ryan, *Newman and Gladstone: The Vatican Decrees* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1962), xvii-xviii.

ship with Acton after the latter's attack on the infallibility doctrine. In an important letter to Acton of July 5, 1861, Newman finds fault with the *Rambler's* defiance of ecclesiastical authority and mentions "the loss of union among ourselves" (Letters, 126). Hugh MacDougall points out that Acton had come to regard Newman as an ultramontane—his idea of consummate evil—and, as such, an avowed enemy of liberty.¹⁰ Not unlike Luther or Calvin, Acton had slowly come to consider the claims of the papacy, if not the papacy itself, as evil. Acton exalted liberty, and principally liberty for rational inquiry, above all other goods; but Newman, ever convinced of the importance of objective truth, believed that both the common good and the welfare of individual souls are seriously threatened by the spread of religious error brought about by an irenicist compromise with rationalism and liberalism. He had identified these principles as early as 1835 in the tract "The Introduction of Rationalistic Principles into Revealed Religion." In the *Apologia* he concludes that the "stern encounter" of the age will be between "two real and living principles . . . one in the Church, the other out of it"—between "Catholic Truth and Rationalism" (APVS, 88). Even as an Anglican Newman was convinced that the good of souls is mainly dependent on sound doctrine and an enlightened attachment to ancient tradition. During his Anglican period, too, he formed the opinion that each person's spiritual well-being is infinitely more important in the economy of eternity than individual liberty. In *The Arians of the Fourth Century*, in words that sound uncomfortably harsh to modern ears, he says that "to spare him [the heretic] is a false and dangerous pity. It is to endanger the souls of thousands, and it is uncharitable towards himself."¹¹ Similarly, in an 1834 Anglican sermon, "Tolerance of Religious Error," he laments:

We are over tender in dealing with sinners. We are deficient in jealous custody of the revealed Truths which Christ has left us. We allow men to speak against the Church, its ordinances, or its teachings, without remonstrating with them. We do not separate from heretics, nay, we object to the word as if uncharitable; and when such texts are brought against us as St. John's command, not to

¹⁰ Hugh MacDougall, *The Acton-Newman Relations—The Dilemma of Christian Liberalism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1962), 140; hereinafter cited in the text as "Acton-Newman."

¹¹ John H. Newman, *The Arians of the Fourth Century* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1908), 253.

show hospitality towards them, we are not slow to answer that they do not apply to us.¹²

This is not to say that Newman had no respect for the sanctity of the individual conscience, which would have been contrary to Catholic teaching regarding invincible error and free will. The excerpt rather shows his animus against a relativistic disregard of objective truth in the name of charity or compassion. It is, in fact, a conviction that the very Anglican Samuel Johnson seems to have held, according to Boswell's *Life*.¹³

Newman's estrangement from Acton is further evidence of his refusal to concede the basic tenets of liberalism, which he saw as innately antithetical to Christianity in general and to Catholicism in particular. But a delicate balance between the rights of truth, as he understood it, and the rights of conscience was still possible for him. Hugh MacDougall brings attention to this in his analysis of the Acton-Newman relationship:

It would be difficult for the most liberal of Liberals to find any trace of intolerance in Newman's personal relations with non-Catholics. Never was a person more sensitive to the rights of conscience, and more averse from the use of any sort of undue compulsion in leading one to the Catholic Church. . . . (Acton-Newman, 152)

The distinction that Newman makes, then, is between the sinner and the public spreading of error. His difference with the liberals is essentially doctrinal. Where Newman and leading Modernists like Acton, Alfred Loisy and George Tyrrell really part company is in their radically opposing conceptions of man. His belief in original sin and its continuing effects precludes the blind optimism or faith in the cult of progress that underlies the liberals' Pelagian understanding of the human condition.

Permanence within change. The principal work on which Modernists base their claim to Newman's sympathy with their cause is *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*. Yet even a theological moderate like Christopher Hollis allows that, far from proposing any new dogmas or the elimination of dogmas, what Newman really justifies in his essay, begun shortly before his conversion, is the Catholic Church's authority to expound in an organic fashion doctrines which always were, if only in germinal form, part of Christian belief. What

¹² John H. Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 403.

¹³ James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (London: Jones & Co., 1829), 129.

Newman upholds in the *Essay* is not theological Darwinism—that the evolutionary process would result in a change in the Faith, in a new doctrinal species—but rather the idea that as the doctrines of the Faith develop and become clearer, they retain what Jean Guittou calls a “fundamental and abiding identity.”¹⁴ Yet, Modernists like Tyrrell, who wanted the Church continually to adapt her doctrine to the times, went so far as to argue that implicit in their condemnation by the Pope was a condemnation of Newman’s ideas.¹⁵ Hollis, however, makes an important distinction between Newmanian and Modernist development:

But there were of course in reality a number of differences between Newman’s theory of the development of doctrine and the Modernists’ assertion of novel doctrines. The Modernists contradicted previous doctrine . . . Newman when he preached a developing doctrine did not of course for a moment preach a novelty of doctrine. All Christian truth was to him implicit in the original teaching of Christ . . . Newman never claimed any right to teach the Church. He propounded a theory which professed to explain how the Church came to teach what it did teach . . . What was of primary importance was the teaching, and to Newman the notion that a man should repudiate the historical claims of the Gospel story and still call himself a Christian would have been simply unthinkable. (NMW, 199-200)

The Modernists’ position with respect to doctrine and the nature of the Church is far closer to Arnold’s religion of the *Zeitgeist* than to Newman’s orthodox faith.

One of the most salient characteristics of liberal thought is its emphasis on the subjective, tentative nature of truth, on the impossibility of discovering objectively and positively religious and moral truth. Newman saw that such subjectivism would reduce religion to a matter of private taste or sentiment, thus dissolving the historical and doctrinal foundation on which he believed Christianity was built. He countered the danger by proclaiming the historic role of authority in discerning truth and by concretely defining it: “Conscience is an authority; the Bible is an authority; such [is] the Church; such [is] Antiquity” (APVS, 219). This is the unmistakable meaning of Discourse X, “Faith and Private Judgment,” in *Discourses Addressed to Mixed Congregations*:

*Authority
protects truth.*

¹⁴ Jean Guittou, *The Church and the Laity* (New York: Alba House, 1965), 161.

¹⁵ Christopher Hollis, *Newman and the Modern World* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1968), 191; hereinafter cited in the text as “NMW.”

Men were told to submit their reason to a living authority. Moreover, whatever an Apostle said, his converts were bound to believe; when they entered the Church, they entered it in order to learn. The Church was their teacher; they did not come to argue, to examine, to pick and choose.¹⁶

Theological modernism insists that the church and revelation have to be adapted to modern man's intellectual demands. For Newman the opposite was true. Charles Frederick Harrold remarks that "[f]ar from holding, like Coleridge, Carlyle, Strauss or Renan that Christian revelation must be reformed in the light of modern thought, he held that modern thought needed reform in the light of the Christian revelation."¹⁷ In fact, Newman laments the conciliatory attitude towards the world of many English Catholics, as the following sorrowful reproach in *Discourses Addressed to Mixed Congregations* shows:

Men say, "These persons are better than their Church; we have not a word to say for their Church; but Catholics are not what they were, they are very much like other men now . . . let them change quietly, no one changes in public—be satisfied that they are changed. They are as fond of the world as we are; . . . they do not like strictness a whit better; they hate spiritual thralldom, and they are half ashamed of the Pope and his Councils. They hardly believe any miracles now, and are annoyed when their own brethren confess that there are such. . . . The Catholic doctrines are now mere badges of party . . . they are kept in their church by a point of honour, and a reluctance at seeming to abandon a fallen cause." (*Discourses*, 555-56)

Newman, as if foreseeing the spread of religious indifferentism in our own century, gives a caveat more in line with the high doctrine of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* than with the irenicist positions of some contemporary churchmen:

The Church declares by the mouth of the Apostle, "Whoso will be a friend of the world, becomes an enemy of God"; and the world retorts, and calls the Church apostate . . . Antichrist. She is the image and the mother of the predestinate, and, if you would be found among her children when you die, you must have part in her reproach while you live. (*Discourses*, 556)

The apparent intransigence of these words is mollified when they

¹⁶ John H. Newman, *Discourses Addressed to Mixed Congregations: English Prose of the Victorian Era*, ed. Charles F. Harrold and William D. Templeman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1938), 558; hereinafter cited in the text as "Discourses."

¹⁷ Charles Frederick Harrold, *John Henry Newman* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1966), 165; hereinafter cited in the text as "JHN."

are taken in their proper scriptural context about the world's hatred of Christ and his followers (John 15:18).

"The dogmatical principle," or the affirmation "that there is one truth, that religious error is in itself of an immoral nature,"¹⁸ became for Newman the essential weapon to fight the dangerous irenicism inherent in liberalism. The note on liberalism at the end of the *Apologia* outlines eighteen liberal propositions and is a kind of Newmanian "Syllabus of Errors," an English version of Pius IX's famous condemnation of eighty erroneous propositions in the "Syllabus" attached to the 1864 encyclical *Quanta Cura*. It also speaks of his old enmity toward liberalism and its proponents: "The men who had driven me from Oxford were distinctly the Liberals, it was they who had opened the attack upon Tract 90" (APVS, 221).¹⁹ Newman had identified his ideological enemies while he was still an Anglican; the *biglietto* speech towards the end of his life shows that he had not modified his stance.

Consistency was the mark of Newman's intellectual and spiritual development. His progression towards Roman Catholicism and, therefore, towards religious dogmatism, is admirably organic. The *Apologia* traces this trajectory. Before 1845 he had tried to justify his church affiliation through the doctrine of the *via media*, the idea that Anglicanism represented a healthy balance between the corruptions of Rome and the denials of Protestantism. But he came to a startling epiphany: while studying the Monophysite heresy in the summer of 1839 he realized that it also represented a "middle way" between Roman orthodoxy regarding the nature of Christ and the more radical Eutychian belief in a single nature in Christ: "I saw my face in that mirror, and I was a Monophysite. The Church of the *Via Media* was in the position of the Oriental communion, Rome was, where she is now; and the Protestants were the Eutychians" (APVS, 96). Thus, the *Via Media*, besides being untenable, "a paper religion" (APVS, 64), was no guarantee of truth; its reasonableness was not synonymous with orthodoxy.

It is, therefore, difficult to view Newman as the theological mod-

Via Media
relies on
private
judgment.

¹⁸ John H. Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1949), 357; hereinafter cited in the text as "EDCD."

¹⁹ Tract 90 brought upon Newman the wrath of Oxford liberals and caused Newman's bishop to order the tracts to cease. This eventually led to Newman's retreat to Littlemore. In Tract 90 he had tried to reconcile the thirty-nine articles of the *Book of Common Prayer* with Catholic doctrine and discipline.

erate that Christopher Hollis makes him out to be—a man of the middle way against Ultramontanes and Modernists alike. Newman's position was not necessarily in between these two; it was simply different. Newman came to the realization that "middle-of-the-roadness" is no guarantee of sound doctrine; that realization, in turn, set him on the road to Rome. He saw that the *Via Media* theory relied on private judgment when deciding what the primitive church taught.²⁰ But private judgment invariably leads to differences of interpretation. In the absence of an authoritative church, this presents both an intellectual and a moral difficulty. Newman could no longer settle for subjective judgments in divine matters.

Truth not in
continuous
flux.

I have mentioned the Modernists' basis for claiming Newman as one of their own: the *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*. The very title sounds congenial to contemporary Modernist process theology, which holds that truth is in a continuous flux and must, therefore, be continually adapted to modern developments in science, philosophy and psychology. But this position is radically at odds with Newman's "dogmatical principle." It rather has closer affinities with Matthew Arnold's vision of a dogma-free, purely ethical Christianity. In fact, Arnold used (or, rather, abused) Newman's idea of development to rid Christianity of beliefs and practices he considered irrational and superstitious. What Arnold really aimed for was the elimination of the metaphysical trappings of Christian theology, precisely what the Modernists have always wanted. Arnold's extended essay *St. Paul and Protestantism* treats this kind of development at length. DeLaura has noted the basic difference between Newman's and Arnold's conceptions of development:

Where by "development" Newman meant (among other metaphors) something like the unfolding of the implications of an original germinative thought, Arnold (despite his use of the word "addition") tends to mean something closer to the *alteration, deletion, and eventual extirpation* of Christian theology. (HH, 89)

What Newman essentially means by development is harmonious, organic growth. Arnold means deracination and the purging of accretions and, in the final analysis, of the supernatural element in Christianity. Moreover, at the heart of their differences are their beliefs concerning Jesus: Arnold's neo-Arian conception of Jesus as

²⁰ Philip Flanagan, Introduction, *Newman Against the Liberals: Twenty-five Classic Sermons*, ed. Michael Davies (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington House Publishers, 1978), 22; hereinafter cited in the text as "Classic Sermons."

simply a great moral model and Newman's abiding conviction of Jesus' divinity. Newman must have identified in Arnold, for whom he nevertheless felt affection and literary admiration, one of the Arians of the fourth century whom he had studied so closely.

The development essay cleared away many obstacles between Newman and the Catholic Church. Through it he came to a Catholic understanding of revelation and the role of language within the historical framework of doctrinal development, of the perennial relationship between the human as receptor and the divine as giver of religious truth. As he says in the essay itself, dogma is "supernatural truth irrevocably committed to human language, imperfect because it is human, but definitive and necessary because given from above" (EDCD, 325). Obviously, this definition entails an irreconcilable difference with the Modernist notion of an on-going revelation tailored to the demands of the spirit of the age.

Philip Flanagan has pointed out that Newman understood development "not just as a means of explaining the apparent corruptions in Roman doctrine, but as itself an argument in favor of the Roman Church because it admitted such development" (Classic Sermons, 26). Thus, it became necessary in the *Essay* to arrive at a definition of development. So Newman outlined the seven requirements for a true development, of which continuity of principle through the various phases of the developing idea is paramount. He cites the establishment of the canon of the New Testament, the adoption of the practice of infant baptism, the inclusion of the "homousion" clause in the Nicene Creed, and the definition of the nature and prerogatives of the Petrine office, among others, as examples of development in action. Central to the thesis is the idea that in any development growth is organic—each new phase containing and developing the previous one (Classic Sermons, 278). That organicist conception of revealed truth allowed Newman to retain his love for primitive Christianity and embrace Catholicism. In fact, it became clear for him that a living Faith presumes development or growth, characteristic of all living things; it could not be reduced to a dead formula.

What Newman did not foresee, however, was the way in which the idea of development was to be used by the proponents of Modernism (the religious expression of philosophical liberalism) to justify not only disciplinary and liturgical changes but even doctrinal ones. His confidence that at least the enemies of Christian doctrine

*Development
is organic.*

Newman
failed to
foresee
Catholic
liberalism.

were to be found charging against the edifice of the Catholic Church from outside²¹ has proven short-sighted in view of the Modernists' ascendancy in the post-Vatican II church.²² Yet, he had a keen sense of a general apostasy, evident as early as Tract 83 (aptly named "The Times of Anti-Christ"). The guilt for the anticipated massive falling away from the faith he lays at the feet of liberalism, or the anti-dogmatic principle, for denying the absolute nature of truth. Newman should have seen, however, its "Catholic" manifestations in "the destructive criticism of Loisy, the contempt for scholastic authority of Tyrrell, the defiance hurled at the Papacy in the manifesto *Programma dei Modernisti* of the Italian Modernists" (JHN, 360) as well as in the thought of influential English Catholics like his friend Acton and the Baron Friedrich von Hügel.

Newman should have foreseen, mainly because he had recognized that the majority of educated men were now imbued with the principles of liberalism, that it would only be a matter of time before educated men in the Catholic Church would begin to feel the urge to adapt to the world and court the acceptance of their secular colleagues. This is precisely what happened: Newman had failed to consider the possibility of a widespread modernist program of action that culminated in this century in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council. Perhaps Newman could not foresee the transformation of the church's monarchical government into the present collegial structure, and thus counted on the traditional corrective measures of Rome. Since his death, however, observers both outside and inside the Catholic Church have been surprised at the emergence of radical theologies, proposed by men like Hans Küng and Teilhard de Chardin, which openly question not only specifically Catholic doctrines such as the nature of the church or papal infallibility²³ but also generally held Christian tenets like original sin and the resurrection. Teilhard de Chardin's view of original sin is a case in point:

²¹ See the fifth lecture Newman gave in Dublin, "A Form of Infidelity of the Day," part of the series "University Subjects," for evidence of this surprising naïveté.

²² See the Reverend Ralph Wiltgen's penetrating study of the Second Vatican Council from a peritus' perspective in *The Rhine Flows into the Tiber* (Rockford, Ill.: TAN Books, 1985) and Deietrich von Hildebrand's philosophical-historical study in *The Trojan Horse in the City of God* (Manchester, N.H.: Sophia Institute, 1993) for further material on the question of Modernism within the contemporary Catholic Church.

²³ Refer to Hans Küng's *Infallible? An Unresolved Enquiry* (New York: Continuum Publishing Co., 1994) and to Richard McBrien's monumental *Catholicism* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994) for examples of post-Vatican II dissident

It is no exaggeration to say that, in the form in which it is still commonly presented today, original sin is at the moment one of the chief obstacles that stand in the way of an intensive and extensive progress of Christian thought. An embarrassment or a stumbling-block to the well-meaning but undecided, and at the same time a refuge for the narrow-minded, the *story* of the Fall, as we can see for ourselves, is nullifying the attempt to introduce, as is so essential, a fully human and humanizing Christian *Weltanschauung*.²⁴

The classical modernist eagerness to join “progress”—in the more extreme cases by embracing shaky theories as in the case of Teilhard de Chardin’s promotion of the Piltdown Man fraud—and be a part of the *Zeitgeist* is evident here. Victorian liberals like Arnold would have approved de Chardin’s sentiments, but Newman would have had difficulty understanding how a Catholic scholar and a priest could adopt the Higher Critics’ theory of scriptural myth and symbol and remain in good standing in the Church.

Newman’s aversion to liberal principles is not limited to the theological sphere, as is often suggested. It informs also his educational ideal. This is hardly surprising given his conception of the educator’s role as both instructional and pastoral, an idea seminal to Newman’s philosophy of education. That philosophy is organic and essentially medieval, perhaps the only distinctly medieval aspect of Newman’s thought. In *The Apologia*, for example, Newman laments Oxford’s abandonment of its medieval ideal of education as both intellectual and spiritual formation. His efforts at Oriel College to recover that organic ideal proved, in the long run, unsuccessful. Newman’s causes were indeed often lost ones.

Education should support intellectual and spiritual formation.

Arthur Dwight Culler observes that Matthew Arnold’s evaluation of Oxford as the home of “lost causes and impossible loyalties” was equally applicable to Newman:

All Newman’s loyalties were impossible, if only because they ran counter, directly and advisedly counter, to the spirit of the age. This was true in religion and it was true in education. The age was agog with educational projects, but they were all directed toward a knowledge which was secular and utilitarian.²⁵

This was precisely the crux of the matter in Newman’s controversies with Hawkins, Provost of Oriel, over the more pastoral role

²⁴ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Christianity and Evolution*, trans. Rene Hague (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch, Inc., 1971), 188.

²⁵ A. Dwight Culler, *The Imperial Intellect* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), 98.

of college tutors envisioned by Newman; in his losing the Regius Professorship of Divinity to the latitudinarian Hampden; and in his whole involvement with the projected Catholic University of Dublin. No wonder, then, that in the *Apologia* Newman concludes that it was the liberals who drove him out of Oxford. Because his educational theory was informed by a theocentric outlook, the idea of secular, utilitarian education repelled him; it also caused him as an Anglican to oppose the proposal to admit dissenters to Oxford and as a Catholic to oppose the projected secular Queen's Colleges for the Irish Catholics.

*Sectarian
education
desirable.*

The Idea of a University is Newman's other apologia—his defense of denominational education. The issue of religious exclusiveness in education is precisely the substance of the first five discourses of *The Idea*; and the author's position regarding the indispensability of theology is clear. The idea of *The Idea* was to avert, in Catholic circles at least, the liberal drift of the times towards universities without theology, such as the recently established University of London. This was the essence of his Dublin mission. In an important essay on the dangers Newman saw in secular education, P. A. Dale says that R. H. Hutton, Newman's early biographer, is wrong in believing that Newman came to Dublin to enlighten an obscurantist clergy. Rather, Dale rightly affirms, he came to do the very opposite: to convince influential Catholics, both lay and clerical, who were ready to accept the non-denominational Queen's Colleges that Archbishop Cullen and Pius IX were correct in insisting that "for Christians a strictly sectarian university is both a logical necessity and an educational desideratum."²⁶

The cause for his opposition to the Queen's Colleges was, at least in principle, the same as it had been for the university battles of his Anglican period—fear of the intellectual and moral dangers of a secular education. Newman, appealing to reason, argues in *The Idea* that the exclusion of the Supreme Reality and Author of all science and knowledge is illogical and invites other disciplines to encroach on subjects that rightly belong to theological discourse. He thus devotes three of the nine discourses of *The Idea*, beginning with "Theology as a Branch of Knowledge," to the question of the place of the-

²⁶ P. A. Dale, "Newman's 'The Idea of a University': The Dangers of a University Education," *Victorian Studies* 16 (1972): 9-10; hereinafter cited in the text as "Dangers."

ology in the university. Dale has underscored the appeal to logic in Newman's argument:

By immediately descending upon the illogicity of omitting theology, [Newman] caught the liberal case against religious exclusiveness at its weakest point . . . [H]ere he could answer the liberals on their own grounds of reasonableness and toleration, and with very little effort, turn their position into an unreasonable and illiberal exclusion of a bonafide branch of knowledge from the university. (Dangers, 17)

*Secular
education
intolerant.*

As with the development essay, *The Idea* has been the source of certain misunderstandings about Newman's position regarding liberalism. Those who give a political interpretation, in the modern sense, to the word "liberal" in *The Idea* ascribe to it a narrower and newer meaning than Newman did. He understood "liberal" in its ancient meaning—the condition of being free, not a slave—as the fourth section of Discourse V, "Knowledge Its Own End," makes clear. There we find an important distinction between the two kinds of knowledge: servile (bodily and mechanical) and liberal (proper to exercises of the mind, of reason, of reflection and, as such, proper to the free citizen). Consonant with his long-standing concern with the total education of the individual, at the end of Discourse V Newman warns that knowledge is not synonymous with virtue (as Macaulay maintains in his essay on Bacon). He points out that a liberal education, one that does not have a utilitarian or practical end, may give good sense or impart knowledge, but not necessarily make a better man. Hence, the distinction in Discourse VI, "Knowledge Viewed in Relation to Learning," between wisdom as a state of the intellect and knowledge as ideas expressed by the intellect. A liberal education will ideally produce the gentleman, who is also the good citizen. He is memorably described at the end of Discourse VIII, "Knowledge Viewed in Relation to Religion." It should be noted, however, that by "gentleman" Newman did not mean necessarily those born to a privileged social class, but rather the person of "philosophic habit," he of a calm, clear and comprehending vision that comes from liberal studies. That kind of education is most useful to society, without being utilitarian, because it fosters those conservative ideals of social harmony and civility.

*Knowledge
not synony-
mous with
virtue.*

The bulk of Newman's anti-utilitarian thesis is found in Discourse VII, "Knowledge Viewed in Relation to Professional Skill," where he also describes a danger perhaps more serious than the materialism of a secular, utilitarian education: the philosophical mind

substituting purely secular knowledge for religion. He does not hesitate to give the caveat:

When [philosophy] is strong enough to have a will of its own, and is lifted up with an idea of its own importance, and attempts to form a theory, and to lay down a principle, and to carry out a system of ethics, and undertakes the moral education of the man, then it does but abet evils to which at first it seemed instinctively opposed.²⁷

The passage also reflects Newman's concern with the dangers of intellectual pride, perhaps first evident to him in the Oxford Noetics of Oriel College, and the use of secular knowledge for ethical and moral formation. In this Newman is again at odds with Arnold, who proposes in *A Bible Reading for Schools* the secular use of Scripture to teach poetry, philosophy and eloquence but not religion. In fact, in a letter to Arnold (May 24, 1872) Newman expresses mild disapproval of Arnold's idea. For him, as he affirms in *The Idea*, there could be no compromise of Catholic and secular principles: "Catholicism is one whole, and admits no compromise or modification" (*Idea*, 161-62). Arnold, on the other hand, believed the secularization of the sacred both possible and integral to his conception of a redeeming culture, of the best that has been thought and said. Thus, he at times resorted to an uneasy adaptation of Newman's positions, such as the association of poetry with morality (see "The Study of Poetry").

*Society
benefits from
intellectual-
spiritual elite.*

The complex Newman-Arnold relationship offers both sharp contrasts and surprising coincidences with respect to their theories of knowledge, culture, and education. It is true, as P. A. Dale maintains, that whereas "Arnold would make his culture 'prevail' among the masses," in Newman's *Idea* "there is absolutely no suggestion of 'delivering' society through culture." A comparison of *The Idea* and *Culture and Anarchy* would bear this out. Yet, an important affinity between these Victorian sages, stemming from their essentially aristocratic conceptions of society, does exist. I am referring to their belief in the social utility of the cognoscenti, an intellectual and spiritual elite not all that foreign to Carlyle's notions of the hero and heroism. The elitist idea is evident in *The Idea's* unstated premise that a university education is not for everyone, but principally for those belonging to an educated class, those expected to assume positions of social leadership. It also surfaces in Newman's earlier ser-

²⁷ John H. Newman, *The Idea of a University*, ed. Charles F. Harrold (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1947), 32; hereinafter cited in the text as "Idea."

mons "The Visible Church for the Sake of the Elect," "Faith and the World," and "The Individuality of the Soul." His anti-egalitarianism, one must concede, finds certain support in Scripture, as in the text about the many and the few and in various scriptural references to election.

In Arnold's case, the nearly superhuman figures of the poems, like the Scholar Gypsy and Empedocles, are almost archetypes embodying his theory of the exceptional, thinking few who attain knowledge and truth (see "The Bishop and the Philosopher"). These undemocratic perspectives are in effect Newman's and Arnold's variants of the Carlylean ideal. With typical ambivalence, Arnold momentarily ceases to be the great popularizer of culture; Newman's spiritual elitism, properly understood as a theory of talents developed through spiritual and intellectual rigor, is, on the other hand, perfectly consonant with his hierarchical view of the universe and with his visceral disinclination towards democracy.²⁸

Whether or not one shares Newman's views about the rise of modern liberalism in society and the church, his general assessment of the future of Western civilization and the religious faith that generated and shaped it should not be underestimated. He recognized the genesis of modern agnosticism in religion's diminishing public influence. Furthermore, because the modern crisis of faith in the West appeared to Newman intimately linked to an intellectual cri-

²⁸ In his recent definitive biography of Newman, Ian Ker offers an insightful discussion (*John Henry Newman: A Biography* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988], 82-88) of his subject's attitudes towards the masses, the role of the exceptional individual, the inefficacy of committee efforts, and the problematic relationship of ecclesiastics and modern democracy. Newman's qualified apprehensions about the advent of democracy can be found, for example, in his 1855 work "Who's to Blame?" It is important to point out, however, that others have tended to find Newman a man very much of his times. For example, H. L. Weatherby holds in "Newman and Victorian Liberalism: A Study in the Failure of Influence" that, despite his stiff religious conservatism, Newman shared with his liberal contemporaries a philosophical frame of mind emanating from the anti-Christian assumptions of English and German Romanticism, essentially Platonic and idealist and, as such, not congenial with the Aristotelian realism of Christian metaphysics and epistemology. In *Figures of Autobiography* Avrom Fleishman has noted the Platonic strain in Newman's thought, particularly in the opening confession of the *Apologia*, which he finds romantically solipsistic and even narcissistic: "I thought life might be a dream . . . and all this world a deception . . . the doctrine of final perseverance . . . had some influence on my opinions . . . in confirming me in my mistrust of the reality of material phenomena, and making me rest in the thoughts of two and two only absolute and luminously self-evident beings, myself and my Creator . . ." (14, 16)

sis, that of our diminished capacity to conceive of what is not empirically demonstrable, he felt with keen urgency the need to educate and form the total individual. This is why both the religious and educational works are marked by Newman's larger vision of man as a spiritual being facing a new encroaching materialism and the mass apostasy predicted in the Book of Revelations which, to Newman, was already evident in the signs of the times.

*Knowledge
can serve
the faith.*

Newman realized how knowledge itself could become a tool to advance the materialistic ethos. His fear of "the Baconian idea of 'knowledge as power' and . . . the Utilitarian ambition that education might become an instrument for material aggrandizement"²⁹ must not be mistaken, however, for intellectual timidity or fear that increased knowledge might result in diminished faith. From his years at Oxford Newman was ruled by the conviction that knowledge, transmitted without an animus to religion, both cultivates the gentleman and forms the confirmed Christian. This expansive conception of knowledge is found not only in *The Idea* and *The Tamworth Reading Room* but in the *Apologia* as well. In the last chapter, "Position of My Mind since 1845," for example, we find a passage that considers in dialectical terms the relationship between private judgment and authority as the source of creative energy. It shows Newman's appreciation of the intellectual process in the university and in the church, and is notable because it brings up the question of authority in a discussion of the cognitive and creative processes. It merits extensive quotation:

The energy of the human intellect "does from opposition grow"; it thrives and is joyous, with a tough elastic strength, under the terrible blows of the divinely fashioned weapon It is the custom with Protestant writers to consider that, whereas there are two great principles of action in the history of religion, Authority and Private Judgment, they have all the Private Judgment to themselves, and we have the full inheritance and the superincumbent oppression of Authority. But this is not so; it is the vast Catholic body itself, and it only, which affords an arena for both combatants in that awful, never-dying duel. It is necessary for the very life of religion, viewed in its large operations and its history, that the warfare should be incessantly carried on. Every exercise of Infallibility is brought out into act by an intense and varied operation of the Reason, both as its ally and as its opponent, and provokes again, when it has done its work, a re-action of Reason against it; and, as in civil polity the State

²⁹ Russell Kirk, "The Conservative Mind of Newman," *Sewanee Review* 60 (1952): 661.

exists and endures by means of the rivalry and collision, the encroachments and defeats of its constituent parts, so in like manner Catholic Christendom is no simple exhibition of religious absolutism, but presents a continuous picture of Authority and Private Judgment alternately advancing and retreating as the ebb and flow of the tide;—it is a vast assemblage of human beings with wilful intellects and wild passions, brought together into one by the beauty and the Majesty of a Superhuman Power (APVS, 193-94)

Newman's system plainly proposes that secular knowledge respect the domain of theology and, furthermore, be informed by it. For him a symbiotic relationship between the two is not only possible but natural. Ultimately, however, his most elemental distinction is between knowledge—and this includes theology—and faith; their healthy, balanced relationship his main concern. The discussion of Benthamite principles in the sixth section of *The Tamworth Reading Room* focuses on both the distinction and the relationship:

I am not a politician; I am proposing no measures but exposing a fallacy The ascendancy of Faith may be impracticable, but the reign of Knowledge is incomprehensible. The problem for statesmen of this age is how to educate the masses, and literature and science cannot give the solution.³⁰

What, then, is Newman's solution to the problem of educating the leaders and the masses in modern society? Certainly not Matthew Arnold's secular culture or other Victorian aesthetic or materialistic panaceas. The solution lies in nurturing in Christians what Newman calls in *The Grammar of Assent* the "Illative Sense," or the mind that reasons, infers, exercises the faculty of judgment (what Aristotle called *phronesis*), and further purifies its reasonings by testing them against authority to guard against individual error. For Newman authority is, as anyone who has read the *Apologia* knows, antiquity, traditional wisdom, the Bible, the Church, and a properly informed conscience. Nothing could be more dissonant with the classical liberal enshrinement of reason as supreme authority and source of knowledge and virtue, then, than the harmonious working of the Illative Sense and authority prescribed by Newman as the proper formula for discerning truth and moral certitude. He understood that secular knowledge by itself could not be the principle or instrument of ethical improvement; hence, his insistence on a cor-

Education should promote judgment tested by authority.

³⁰ John H. Newman, *The Tamworth Reading Room: Essays and Sketches*, ed. Charles F. Harrold, 3 vols. (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1948) 2:203; hereinafter cited in the text as "Tamworth."

rect understanding of knowledge in relation to faith. At the end of *The Tamworth Reading Room* there is a splendid synthesis of that relationship:

I consider, then, that intrinsically excellent and noble as are scientific pursuits, and worthy of a place in a liberal education, and fruitful in temporal benefits to the community, still they are not, and cannot be, the instrument of an ethical training; that physics do not supply a basis, but only materials for religious sentiment; that knowledge does but occupy, does not form the mind; that apprehension of the unseen is the only known principle capable of subduing moral evil, educating the multitude, and organizing society; and that, whereas man is born for action, action flows not from inferences, but from impressions,—not from reasonings, but from Faith. (Tamworth, 213)

*Pessimism
tempered by
faith in
Providence.*

Impressions from the brave, new world that he inhabited and the faith that he felt was threatened by that world propelled Newman to action. A unifying element gave that life of action its admirable coherence: Newman's life-long battle against liberalism, against the anti-dogmatic principle. His arms and inspiration were one and the same: his faith in immutable truths and traditional authority. Faith and authority, as he understood them, shaped his mind and informed his conclusions. Original sin, for example, precluded for him the comfort that many of his liberal contemporaries found in the Victorian cult of progress. He retained the old Augustinian distinction (so despised by Teilhard de Chardin) between the natural and the supernatural orders. He accepted that the ancient struggle between the City of God and the City of Man was perennial and, consequently, that there was little room for optimism about human perfectibility. However, despite this unromantic view of the human condition Newman did not yield to despairing pessimism, as many moderns have. Nor did he advocate a Quietist retreat from the world. Instead, he kept an abiding faith in the Church, in her mission, in man as a spiritual being destined to return to God, and, above all, in God's benevolent Providence. His faith taught him, as it had Augustine centuries before, that in this world we have no lasting city. It gave his prose that special luminosity and force for which it is well recognized even by those who do not share his spiritual vision. It also, of course, inspired his work in the university and in the Church, which was essentially the same mission: the formation of the Christian in an increasingly secular world. For Newman that world, particularly in the industrial West, is liberal—in its egali-

tarian ethos, in its relativistic morality, in its religious and intellectual skepticism. It is, in short, the realization of the ideals of the Enlightenment and of the French Revolution. With Edmund Burke, William Cobbett, and Robert Southey, among others before him, Newman doubted—against many Victorians and moderns—that those ideals lead to true human happiness, in this world or in the next.