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Edited by Ian Ker and Terrence Merrigan

Excerpt

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I Life and writings

SHERIDAN GILLEY

NEWMAN THE ANGLICAN

Childhood and youth

John Henry Newman was born in London on 21 February 1801, the eldest of the six children, three sons and three daughters, of a banker, John Newman, an easygoing member of the Church of England without strong dogmatic convictions, and of his wife Jemima *née* Fourdrinier, whose ancestry was French Huguenot. Newman was baptized an Anglican in the London church of St Benet Fink on 9 April, though he was only to make his first communion as an undergraduate in Oxford in November 1817. His religious upbringing was a conventional, non-sacramental middle-class one. His childhood religious education was the then commonplace Anglican undoctrinal Bible-reading of his aunt Elizabeth Good Newman, and his paternal grandmother Elizabeth *née* Good, but he brought to it a profound sense of the superior reality of the supernatural, as in his wish that the Arabian Nights were true and in his imagining that he was an angel and the world was a deception played upon him by his fellow-angels.

This state of mind was interrupted by an adolescent reading of the Deist Tom Paine and the sceptic David Hume. His conversion to a more dogmatic form of Christianity, Calvinist Evangelicalism, occurred, according to his own account, at the age of fifteen in the autumn of 1816. It took place during the summer holidays while he was staying on at his boarding school as a result of the failure of his father's bank and under the influence of his Anglican Calvinist schoolmaster mentor, the Rev Walter Mayers. Newman was thereby caught up into the Evangelical Revival, the most vital religious movement of his youth. The basis of his conversion was his sense of the ultimate reality of 'two and two only absolute and luminously self-evident beings', himself and his Creator. These are the subjective and objective twin poles of his subsequent thought: the self, with its feelings and intellect and conscience, and the God in whom the self finds the means of escape from its own

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selfishness and subjectivity. He later summed up this private and personal religion in Cicero's aphorism, 'never less alone than when alone', and it was the permanent foundation of his growth into a stronger public institutional and intellectual understanding of the doctrine of the Church.

Newman later came to consider his experience to be quite unlike the standard form of Evangelical conversion, of conviction of sinfulness and the sensation of transforming release by the divine deliverance from it. Rather, he 'fell under the influence of a definite Creed'.¹ It was, moreover, accompanied by a stern moralism. Newman read the autobiography, *The Force of Truth*, by the Evangelical Anglican clergyman Thomas Scott of Aston Sandford, to whom 'humanly speaking' he said he almost owed his soul. Newman summarized Scott's teaching, deriving from Scott's conversion from Unitarianism to Trinitarian orthodoxy, in the phrases 'Holiness rather than peace' and 'Growth the only evidence of life'. Holiness is the principle of growth within the soul; and it is only by growth in holiness that the soul can know it is alive. This emphasis upon personal holiness preserved Newman from any hyper-Calvinist tendency to antinomianism, or an assurance of salvation which had freed him from the need to obey the moral law. It accompanied his private dedication to the celibate life.

Newman's conversion was also, however, the beginning of his serious intellectual life, giving him the 'impressions of dogma' which remained at the heart of his religion, and which at first included the doctrines of the Trinity, the Incarnation and Atonement, and of the Lutheran apprehension of Christ, or the doctrine of justification by faith alone. He also embraced the idea of his own 'final perseverance' through predestination to eternal life, in his strong sense of his own divine calling, but like other moderate Calvinists, he did not embrace the concurrent doctrine of reprobation, of God's preordained rejection of sinners, which he later pronounced 'detestable', thinking only of the mercy to himself. His belief that the pope was Antichrist, deriving from the Evangelical Joseph Milner's *Church History*, put him in the radical Evangelical camp, and gave him an odd tendency to millennial speculation. Long after he had outgrown it intellectually, the image of the papal Antichrist stained his imagination. He remained ever after more certain of his conversion than that he had hands and feet, but his belief in predestination was fading by the age of twenty-one. From that time, his faith would always seek to balance the light of reason with the life of experience: true religion must satisfy the demands of both head and heart.²

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The Oxford in which Newman became resident as an undergraduate in 1817 was a bulwark of the Church of England, the principal training ground, with Cambridge, for its ministry, governed by the Heads of Houses and Fellows of the Colleges who were usually Anglican clergy (and as Fellows, had to be celibate). Newman's Evangelicalism made him an outsider to the heavy-drinking undergraduate culture of Trinity College, but his poor performance at his Finals in schools in 1820 was the result, he thought, of overwork and a crisis of seeking intellectual excellence over moral. In 1822, however, he triumphed in his election by examination to a Fellowship at the intellectually progressive Oriel College, where he came under the influence of Richard Whately, later Anglican Archbishop of Dublin, whom he helped to write a textbook on logic. Whately was accounted a radical thinker, teaching Newman not only to think, but to rely upon himself, yet, despite this liberal influence, Newman also learned about the doctrine of the Church in an Anglican tradition rooted in the writings of the sixteenth-century Richard Hooker and the Caroline divines of the reign of Charles I. Whately showed Newman the importance of the independence of the Church from the State in its own separate sphere, while another Fellow, Edward Hawkins, taught him the value of tradition beside the Bible, and the Rev William James imparted a version of the idea of the apostolic succession of the clergy, of their descent through long lines of bishops from the first apostles.

These three principles – tradition, the apostolic succession, and the Church's own independent authority – were to be fundamental to the Oxford Movement in the 1830s; but the major change in Newman's mind took place in the year between his ordination to the diaconate and the priesthood, between 1824 and 1825, over the issue of baptismal regeneration, the spiritual rebirth of the child at the font. This doctrine, taught by the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*, was a stumbling block to some Evangelicals, as it appeared to contradict their understanding of God's justification of the sinner at conversion, a free and undeserved pardon for sin which led to regeneration or the second birth into a new state of life. Such a true converted Christian was thereby distinguished from the merely 'nominal' unconverted one. Whether a vital Christian, a real Christian, was created by baptism or conversion, was an issue fraught with significance for the Anglican doctrine of the Church as well as for her pastoral theology.

The matter was still a grey area in the 1820s, and Evangelicals like Mayers could adopt the compromise of a conditional or partial or

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ecclesiastical change of state to the child at baptism, to be completed, in some cases at least, at conversion. Newman, however, like another young Evangelical, William Ewart Gladstone, chose to embrace the full Prayer Book doctrine. This was partly because of his sense that the sharp distinction between the regenerated convert and the unregenerate, the saved and the lost, was an unreal one, as Hawkins had told him. It did not describe the people at St Clement's in Oxford where Newman was a curate, raising the money to rebuild the church, and would therefore not work in a parish. But with this belief came a new sense of the importance of the sacrament, and of sacraments in general, and of the Church which by sprinkling with water and pronouncing a formula could make all the difference to the spiritual character of her children.

There were two possible developments arising from Newman's drift from Evangelicalism. The first was into some form of liberalism, by which he meant not so much unbelief as the principle of indifference towards doctrine, that one religion is as good as another. By his own account, he flirted briefly with liberal views in 1827, but this ended with his own breakdown as an examiner in schools in autumn 1827 and the death of his favourite and youngest sister, Mary, early in 1828. Or he could move forward into the High Church tradition. In 1828, he acquired and began to read systematically the writings of the Fathers of the early Christian centuries, finding his hero in St Athanasius, who had defended the Nicene faith, in St Jerome's phrase, *contra mundum*, against the world. Complementing the influence of the eighteenth-century Anglican Bishop Joseph Butler, he also imbibed the philosophy of the ancient theological school of Alexandria, its mystical interpretation of Scripture, its love of learning, its belief in a divine revelation to the gentiles in the pagan philosophers, as well as to the Jews, and its understanding of nature as a mysterious sacrament and symbol of the Godhead. Newman's patient labour of careful scholarship in this area inspired his first book, *The Arians of the Fourth Century* (1833), and continued through his remaining years as an Anglican, bearing its final fruit in his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*.

It was a High Anglican tradition to appeal to the Fathers as well as to the Bible, but no one wrote about them with quite the intensity of Newman. His new High Churchmanship inspired this quest for the proper fourth-century pattern of the Church, as he sought out the origins of the modern heresies in the early ones, in the darkening world of ecclesiastical politics around him. In 1828, he succeeded Hawkins as Vicar of the University Church of St Mary the Virgin, and from its pulpit preached the succession of wonderful, uncontroversial parochial

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sermons which beyond his ordinary congregation of tradesmen attracted the fascinated interest of generations of undergraduates for the height of their spiritual teaching and the simplicity and beauty of their prose. He also preached the university sermons in which he expounded the role of reason as subordinate to conscience and experience in forming the conception of God. Partly inspired by Bishop Butler, he attacked those who treated belief as a matter of deductive logic and evidence and proof, regardless of the moral and spiritual dispositions of the believer, and tried to distinguish the forms of argument helpful to religion from those hurtful to religion. The university sermons embodied Newman's response to much of the conventional divinity of his own day as well as to the scoffers of the eighteenth century. Newman's teaching that faith is personal in character, as heart speaks to heart, passed into the very personality of the Oxford Movement itself, as a band of brothers devoted to one another, and to an ideal intellectual and spiritual community in Oxford. It was this sense of a common cause that Newman depicted in all its intensity in his later spiritual autobiography the *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1864), and it entered into the classic account *The Oxford Movement* (1891) by Newman's great Anglican disciple, Dean Richard Church, which both have a readership today.

Controversy was inevitable, with such intensity of feeling, and in 1829, Newman abandoned his own former support for Catholic Emancipation to oppose the re-election of the Home Secretary Robert Peel as a member of parliament for the University of Oxford. Newman called Peel a 'rat' for changing his mind on the issue when it was his duty to represent the Anglican interest of Oxford, but Newman also found himself in conflict with his former mentors Whately and Hawkins, now Provost of Oriel. Newman assumed the leadership of a younger set of dons, including his bosom friend, Richard Hurrell Froude, and the older but quietly inspirational John Keble. Keble's volume of poems, *The Christian Year*, published in 1827, with a poem for every service of the *Book of Common Prayer*, made the dangerous new imaginative world of early nineteenth-century Romanticism pioneered by Sir Walter Scott and William Wordsworth safe for the Anglican tradition, in what Newman, with reference to the Caroline poets, described as the revival of the music of a school long dead in England.

The Oxford Movement

The election of a new Whig government in 1830, after four decades of almost unbroken Tory rule, raised fears of reform of the Church as of the other parts of the constitution which radicals called the 'Old

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Corruption'. There were popular attacks upon the bishops, most of whom opposed the Reform Bill of 1832, and the government decided as a first ecclesiastical measure to reform the over-privileged minority Protestant Church of Ireland, united to the Church of England in 1800. The Oxford Movement began in a paradox, in effect the defence of the aggressively Protestant Irish Church against a Roman Catholic crusade to reduce her power. Newman was stirred by the news of the government bill when on a holiday in Italy, but nearly died on revisiting Sicily. His recovery convinced him that God had preserved him for a purpose, reflected in his hymn, 'Lead, kindly light', and that he had a work to do in England. The poems written on his continental journey were published as the 'Lyra Apostolica' in the *British Magazine* and with those of other High Churchmen in the *Lyra Apostolica* in 1836.

After Newman's return to Oxford, John Keble preached his sermon on National Apostasy from the pulpit of St Mary's, and ever after Newman kept the date, the 14 July, as the beginning of 'the religious movement of 1833', or as it was to come to be known after 1839, the Oxford Movement. The Movement opened its campaign in September by publishing the *Tracts for the Times*, originally brief productions only a few pages long. Newman was to publish or edit or contribute to thirty of the ninety *Tracts*. In the first, he began in militant manner by calling for a reassertion of the authority of the office of the bishop as the local and present embodiment of apostolic authority in the Church, signifying her independent foundation by Christ. The *Tracts* taught that the Church was a supernatural society with her foundations in the heavens, Christ's body and bride, 'His very self below', bearing the divine message even to the end of the world.

Though this was partly a response to the claim by the State to reform the Church, there was another paradox here, that the Movement began among arch-conservative Tories traditionally attached to notions of sacral monarchy, and to the British constitution in which Church and State were one. Thus High Anglicans might protest at the Church's Babylonian captivity, and set out to make the Church a popular power, yet they would never agree on the desirability of disestablishment, which might have weakened the Church though giving it her freedom. There was, however, now a tension between the principle of the Church as established by the State, once all but a High Church article of faith, and the Church's Catholicity. To the new High Churchmen, or Apostolicals, like Newman, the Church was Catholic, or she was nothing.

The *Tracts* also rejected the ecclesiastical status of the Nonconformist Churches which, under Evangelical influence, had grown massively in

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membership in England and Wales during the preceding thirty years. On High Anglican theory, they lacked bishops and were therefore not Churches. With the accession of Edward Bouverie Pusey, the young and erudite Professor of Hebrew, to the Movement, the *Tracts* increasingly became learned treatises, with a strong stress upon re-establishing High Churchmanship from the writings of the theologians of the Anglican tradition as well as from the Fathers.

The publication of a separate library of the Fathers began in 1838, and of the Anglo-Catholic divines in 1841. Newman's own patristic essays, another effort to change the whole spiritual and intellectual atmosphere or 'ethos' of Anglicanism, originally appeared in the *British Magazine*. They were republished as *The Church of the Fathers* in 1840.

There was good Anglican precedent for claiming a special ecclesial excellence for the Church of England, as superior to the other Protestant Churches, but the High Church tradition had usually acknowledged the benefit of the sixteenth-century Reformation, considering the Church of England to be Reformed as well as Catholic. Yet the Church of England had the special virtue of preserving the traditional Catholic threefold apostolic order of bishop, priest and deacon, as had the Roman and Orthodox Churches, while being free from their corruptions. On this basis, on the 'branch theory', Rome and Orthodoxy were 'branches', with the Church of England, of the original undivided primitive Church. Or on a different perspective, Rome, while corrupt, had a proper ministry which continental and dissenting Protestants lacked, and Canterbury held to a middle way between Rome and Geneva, or between Popery and a more radical Protestantism or Puritanism.

In *Tracts 38* and *41*, *The Via Media*, Newman suggested that the Church of England had become more Protestant than she once had been. In his *Lectures on the Prophetic Office of the Church* of 1837, a work which grew out of his controversy with the Abbé Nicolas Jager, and which was delivered in the Adam de Brome chapel of St Mary's Church, Newman redefined the *via media* or 'Anglicanism' as lying midway between popular Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. Yet even here he declared that unlike Rome and Protestantism, which had reality, forming the character of nations, 'Anglicanism' was only a 'paper theory', in the writings of a distinguished body of High Anglican theologians, not yet realized in concrete terms in the real experience of a living Church. Moreover, Newman distinguished, within the Church's teaching, the 'episcopal tradition' which he identified with the Catholic creeds, and which resembled the Anglican idea of the fundamentals of the faith, passed from bishop to bishop, from the 'prophetic tradition'

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within the broad current of the Church's theological reflection in its widest sense, including its worship in the *lex orandi*. This idea, of the subtle and complex relationship of the *lex credendi*, of what is believed, to the *lex orandi*, or how the Church prays, has had a profound effect on theology since, and it reaffirmed the importance for Newman of the Prayer Book. In stressing, however, the vitality and vigour of the 'prophetic tradition', Newman widened the possibility for change and growth in the Church's teaching way beyond the primitive creeds, while identifying the faith with the whole range and scope of it in a manner nearer to Roman Catholicism. Significantly, Newman renamed 'Anglicanism' 'Anglo-Catholicism' in his second edition of the *Lectures* in 1838.

Newman had some basis in the Anglican tradition for his *Lectures on the Doctrine of Justification* of 1838, his principal attempt to apply his understanding of the *via media* to a particular dogma, in which he took to pieces the Reformation principle on which the Church was said to stand or fall. Newman united the Protestant position, that justification is being declared just, that is given a full and free pardon regardless of one's sins, in a new relationship with God, with the Roman Catholic understanding that justification is being made just, that is restored, regenerated, renewed, in holiness and righteousness, God effecting what He declares. To the Protestant who argued that the formal cause of justification is the imputation of Christ's death to the sinner, and to the Roman Catholic who made the formal cause the infusion of Christ's merits through his death upon the cross, Newman preferred the language of the 'impartment' of Christ's merits through God's indwelling Trinitarian presence in the soul.

Newman made the instrumental cause of justification both baptism, as Catholics do, and faith, as do Protestants. The work of salvation is begun in baptism, sustained by faith, hope and love, good works and sacraments, and transforms the believer in holiness and righteousness in the image of Christ, from glory into glory. Newman thought that the Protestant formula, justification by faith alone, had some merit, in pointing to Christ as our sole justifier. Its defect in English popular Protestantism is that it produces the neglect of hope, love, good works, sacraments, holiness and righteousness, with a reliance not on Christ but on one's subjective feelings about Him, so that Christians are justified not by their faith but by their feelings. On the other hand, Newman argued polemically that the Roman Catholic position made righteousness a human possession to be trafficked with, as between equals, but his

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conclusion that justification includes regeneration was obviously closer to the Catholic position than to the Protestant one, as a process rather than an act, even while his emphasis upon the divine indwelling widened the subject with the teaching on deification by Athanasius and the Greek theological tradition.

The Oxford Movement's repudiation of the Reformation became still clearer with the posthumous appearance of the first two volumes of Hurrell Froude's *Remains*, also in 1838. *Tract 85*, Newman's 'Lectures on the Scripture Proof of the Doctrine of the Church', showed a radical awareness of the difficulties in the Protestant appeal to Scripture worthy of a German Higher Critic. There was, however, also controversy with the new Anglican liberals, and with the cloudy theology of the Oxford professor Renn Dickson Hampden. Newman had questioned whether another sometime Oriel liberal, Thomas Arnold, the celebrated reforming headmaster of Rugby School, was formally a Christian; in 1836, Arnold attacked him as one of the 'Oxford Malignants'. By 1837, Newman's attempt to define a new Anglican ecclesiology was inflaming the hostility of Protestants of every stripe and was worrying old-fashioned High Churchmen, whose conservatism was as remote as it could be in its moderate tone and temper from Newman's own innovative and quicksilver mind.

Newman's activities, however, were as much spiritual as intellectual: with editions and translations of the Breviary hymns; with *Tract 75*, on the Roman Breviary, and the revival of daily services and of auricular confession. His construction of a church in the hamlet of Littlemore gave him another field of responsibility, assisted by his mother and sisters. His belief in the Anglican *via media* was first shaken in the summer of 1839 by an apparent parallel between Anglicanism and moderate Monophysitism as a mediating position. It was even more shaken in 1839 on reading an essay on the Donatists of North Africa in the *Dublin Review* by Nicholas Wiseman, the principal intellectual figure in the Roman Catholic revival in England. Wiseman quoted St Augustine's phrase, 'Securus judicat orbis terrarum' ('the whole (Catholic) world judges surely'), to distinguish the local Donatist schismatics from the African Catholics in full communion with the world-wide Church. Newman recovered from the shock, which came to him with an incantatory power, distressing him with the thought that the Church of England, for all her claim to be apostolic, was in difficulty in claiming to be Catholic. He had applied the doctrine of apostolicity as one of union with his bishop, the sympathetic Richard Bagot – he regarded

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his bishop as his pope – but Augustine’s universalism had emerged to resolve the problem of heretical bishops, through the need for a living authority superior to the bishop himself.

Newman assumed a heavy journalistic responsibility from 1838 to 1840 as an editor, as well as a frequent contributor, to the *British Critic*, and in 1841 he wrote a series of letters to *The Times* attacking his old adversary Sir Robert Peel’s speech opening a reading room at Tamworth, which recommended religious neutrality. Newman’s letters, subsequently published as ‘The Tamworth Reading Room’, contain a brilliant dissection of the powerlessness both of Peel’s non-denominational Christianity and of a faith claiming to be based on reason and culture. The letters include some of Newman’s most powerful writing on the role of reason in religion, so that he quoted certain passages from them nearly thirty years later in the formal and systematic conclusion to the argument of the *University Sermons, An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*.

In 1841, however, Newman unwittingly unravelled his enterprise of catholicizing Anglicanism. The Church of England, according to a famous aphorism, had a Catholic Prayer Book, but its sixteenth-century formulation of faith, the Thirty-nine Articles, was Protestant. The Articles were important as the guarantee of the Anglican monopoly in Oxford, where undergraduates had to subscribe to them at matriculation and the clergy on ordination and on becoming Fellows. They therefore had to be shown to be compatible with Newman’s developing Catholicism. The authors had been Protestants, but Newman chose ‘to take our reformed confessions in the most Catholic sense they will admit; we have no duties towards their framers’. By Catholic, he did not mean primarily Roman Catholic, but according to the faith of the primitive Church, and he specifically rejected such popish doctrines as prayer before images and the papal supremacy. But damagingly, he spoke of the Church as ‘teaching with the stammering lips of ambiguous formularies’ in the Articles, which had been deliberately phrased obscurely to include the Catholic-minded in the Tudor era, and could therefore be understood in a Catholic sense as well as a Protestant one.

Newman then set out, like a lawyer, to take them in their literal or legal sense. Thus the Articles recommend the official Tudor sermon collections, the *Books of Homilies*, which shed a Catholic light upon the Articles if these last are interpreted by them. He sailed closest to the wind of seeming sophistry in arguing, over Article XXII, which condemns ‘the Romish doctrine’ of purgatory as ‘a fond thing vainly invented’, that this did not condemn the official Roman Catholic