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John Henry Newman

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### **An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine**

John Henry Newman (1801–90) remains one of the best-known and influential English churchmen of the nineteenth century. Ordained as a priest in the Anglican Church in 1825, he converted to Roman Catholicism, being ordained as a priest and later appointed cardinal. His works include *Grammar of Assent* (1870) and *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1865–6) as well as this *Essay* (1845), written in the midst of his own religious transformation. He discusses his theory of the development of Christian dogma: ‘from the nature of the human mind, time is necessary for the full comprehension and perfection of great ideas ... the longer time and deeper thought for their full elucidation’. By showing how fidelity to timeless truths coexisted in Christianity together with deeper and more developed understanding over time, Newman provides a helpful personal and theological apology for the teaching and practice of Catholicism against its detractors.

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Frontmatter

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Frontmatter

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Frontmatter

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Frontmatter

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AN ESSAY  
ON THE  
DEVELOPMENT  
OF  
CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE.

BY  
JOHN HENRY NEWMAN,  
AUTHOR OF LECTURES ON THE PROPHETICAL OFFICE OF THE CHURCH.

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OCULI MEI DEFECERUNT IN SALUTARE TUUM,  
ET IN ELOQUIUM JUSTITIÆ TUE.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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John Henry Newman

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## ADVERTISEMENT.

It is now above eleven years since the writer of the following pages, in one of the early Numbers of the Tracts for the Times, expressed himself thus:—

“Considering the high gifts, and the strong claims of the Church of Rome and its dependencies on our admiration, reverence, love, and gratitude, how could we withstand it, as we do; how could we refrain from being melted into tenderness, and rushing into communion with it, but for the words of Truth itself, which bid us prefer it to the whole world? ‘He that loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me.’ How could we learn to be severe, and execute judgment, but for the warning of Moses against even a divinely-gifted teacher who should preach new gods, and the anathema of St. Paul even against Angels and Apostles who should bring in a new doctrine?”<sup>1</sup>

He little thought, when he so wrote, that the time would ever come, when he should feel the obstacle, which he spoke of as lying in the way of communion with the Church of Rome, to be destitute of solid foundation.

The following Work is directed towards its removal.

Having in former Publications directed attention to the supposed difficulty, he considers himself

<sup>1</sup> Records of the Church, xxiv. p. 7.

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John Henry Newman

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

iv

## ADVERTISEMENT.

bound to avow his present belief that it is imaginary.

He has neither the ability to put out of hand a finished composition, nor the wish to make a powerful and moving representation, on the great subject of which he treats. His aim will be answered, if he succeeds in suggesting thoughts, which in God's good time may quietly bear fruit, in the minds of those to whom that subject is new; and which may carry forward inquirers, who have already put themselves on the course.

If at times his tone appears positive or peremptory, he hopes this will be imputed to the scientific character of the Work, which requires a distinct statement of principles, and of the arguments which recommend them.

He hopes too he shall be excused for his frequent quotations from himself; which are necessary in order to show how he stands at present in relation to various of his former Publications.

His more important changes of opinion will be seen of course by referring to his Lectures on the Prophetic Office of the Church, published in the beginning of 1837. In these Lectures there are various statements which he could wish unsaid; but he thinks it right to draw the reader's especial attention to the following passage, which he retracts with the others:—

“We must take and deal with things as they are, not as they pretend to be. If we are induced to believe the professions of Rome,



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John Henry Newman

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## ADVERTISEMENT.

V

and make advances towards her as if a sister or a mother Church, which in theory she is, we shall find too late that we are in the arms of a pitiless and unnatural relative, who will but triumph in the arts which have inveigled us within her reach. No; dismissing the dreams which the romance of early Church history, and the high doctrines of Catholicism, will raise in the inexperienced mind, let us be sure that she is our enemy, and will do us a mischief when she can. In speaking and acting on this conviction, we need not depart from Christian charity towards her. We must deal with her as we would towards a friend who is visited by derangement; in great affliction, with all affectionate tender thoughts, with tearful regrets and a broken heart, but still with a steady eye and a firm hand. For in truth she is a Church beside herself; abounding in noble gifts and rightful titles, but unable to use them religiously; crafty, obstinate, wilful, malicious, cruel, unnatural, as madmen are. Or rather, she may be said to resemble a demoniac; possessed with principles, thoughts, and tendencies not his own; in outward form and in natural powers what God has made her, but ruled within by an inexorable spirit, who is sovereign in his management over her, and most subtle and most successful in the use of her gifts. Thus she is her real self only in name; and, till God vouchsafe to restore her, we must treat her as if she were that evil one which governs her. And, in saying this, I must not be supposed to deny that there is any real excellence in Romanism even as it is, or that any really excellent men are its adherents. Satan ever acts on a system; various, manifold, and intricate, with parts and instruments of different qualities, some almost purely evil, others so unexceptionable that, in themselves and detached from the end to which all is subservient, they are really 'Angels of Light,' and may be found so to be at the Last Day. In Romanism there are some things absolutely good, some things only just tainted and sullied, some things corrupted, and some things in themselves sinful; but the system itself so called must be viewed as a whole, and all parts of it as belonging to the whole, and in connexion with their practical working and the end which they subserve."<sup>1</sup>

He will add that there is one statement in these Lectures, about which he has never seen

<sup>1</sup> *Proph. Off.* pp. 103, 4.

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John Henry Newman

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

vi

## ADVERTISEMENT.

any reason at all for changing his opinion. It is this:—

“In England the Church co-operates with the State in exacting subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles as a test, and that not only of the Clergy, but also of the governing body in our Universities, *a test against Romanism.*” p. 287.

Such a statement is quite consistent with a wish, on which he has before now acted, to correct popular misapprehensions both of the Roman Catholic doctrines, and of the meaning of the Thirty-nine Articles.

Some years since a retractation of his appeared in the public prints, which he is desirous of formally acknowledging here, and of preserving. It is as follows:—

“It is true that I have at various times, in writing against the Roman system, used, not merely arguments, about which I am not here speaking, but what reads like declamation.

“1. For instance, in 1833, in the *Lyra Apostolica*, I called it a ‘lost Church.’

“2. Also, in 1833, I spoke of ‘the Papal Apostasy’ in a work upon the Arians.

“3. In the same year, in No. 15 of the series called the ‘Tracts for the Times,’ in which Tract the words are often mine, though I cannot claim it as a whole, I say—

‘True, Rome is heretical now—nay, grant she has thereby forfeited her orders; yet, at least, she was not heretical in the primitive ages. If she has apostatized, it was at the time of the Council of Trent. Then, indeed, it is to be feared the whole Roman Communion bound itself, by a perpetual bond and covenant, to the cause of Antichrist.’

“Of this and other Tracts a friend, with whom I was on very familiar terms, observed, in a letter some time afterwards, though not of this particular part of it—‘It is very encouraging about the Tracts—but I wish I could prevail on you, when the second edition

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John Henry Newman

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## ADVERTISEMENT.

vii

comes out, to cancel or materially alter several. The other day accidentally put in my way the Tract on the Apostolical Succession in the English Church; and it really does seem so very unfair, that I wonder you could, even in the extremity of *οικονομία* and *φενακισμός*, have consented to be a party to it.

“On the passage above quoted, I observe myself, in a pamphlet published in 1838—

‘I confess I wish this passage were not cast in so declamatory a form; but the substance of it expresses just what I mean.’

“4. Also, in 1833, I said—

‘Their communion is infected with heresy; we are bound to flee it as a pestilence. They have established a lie in the place of God’s truth, and, by their claim of immutability in doctrine, cannot undo the sin they have committed.’ Tract 20.

“5. In 1834, I said, in a magazine—

‘The spirit of old Rome has risen again in its former place, and has evidenced its identity by its works. It has possessed the Church there planted, as an evil spirit might seize the demoniacs of primitive times, and makes her speak words which are not her own. In the corrupt Papal system we have the very cruelty, the craft, and the ambition of the Republic; its cruelty in its unsparing sacrifice of the happiness and virtue of individuals to a phantom of public expediency, in its forced celibacy within, and its persecutions without; its craft in its falsehoods, its deceitful deeds and lying wonders; and its grasping ambition in the very structure of its polity, in its assumption of universal dominion: old Rome is still alive; no where have its eagles lighted, but it still claims the sovereignty under another pretence. The Roman Church I will not blame, but pity—she is, as I have said, spell-bound, as if by an evil spirit; she is in thralldom.’

“I say, in the same paper—

‘In the book of Revelations, the sorceress upon the seven hills is not the Church of Rome, as is often taken for granted, but Rome itself, that bad spirit which, in its former shape, was the animating principle of the fourth monarchy. In St. Paul’s prophecy, it is not the Temple or Church of God, but the man of sin in the Temple, the old man or evil principle of the flesh which exalteth itself against God. Certainly it is a mystery of iniquity, and one which may well excite our dismay and horror, that in the very heart of the Church, in her highest dignity, in the seat of St. Peter, the evil principle has throned itself, and rules. It seems as if that spirit had gained subtlety by years; Popish Rome has succeeded to Rome Pagan: and would that we had no reason to expect still more crafty developments of Antichrist amid the wreck of institutions and establishments which will attend the fall of the Papacy!.....I deny that the distinction is unmeaning. Is it nothing to be able to look on our mother, to whom we owe the blessing of Christianity, with affection instead of hatred, with pity indeed, nay and fear, but not with horror? Is it nothing to rescue her from the hard names

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John Henry Newman

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

viii

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which interpreters of prophecy have put on her, as an idolatress and an enemy of God, when she is deceived rather than a deceiver?’

“I also say—

‘She virtually substitutes an external ritual for moral obedience; penance for penitence, confession for sorrow, profession for faith, the lips for the heart: such at least is her system as understood by the many.’

“Also I say, in the same paper—

‘Rome has robbed us of high principles which she has retained herself, though in a corrupt state. When we left her, she suffered us not to go in the beauty of holiness; we left our garments and fled.’

“Against these and other passages of this paper the same friend, before it was published, made the following protest:—‘I only except from this general approbation your second and most superfluous hit at the poor Romanists. You have first set them down as demoniacally possessed by the evil genius of Pagan Rome, but notwithstanding are able to find something to admire in their spirit, particularly because they apply ornament to its proper purposes: and then you talk of their churches: and all that is very well, and one hopes one has heard the end of name-calling, when all at once you relapse into your Protestantism, and deal in what I take leave to call slang.’

“Then, after a remark which is not to the purpose of these extracts, he adds—‘I do not believe that any Roman Catholic of education would tell you that he identified penitence and penance. In fact I know that they often preach against this very error as well as you could do.’

“6. In 1834 I also used, of certain doctrines of the Church of Rome, the epithets ‘unscriptural,’ ‘profane,’ ‘impious,’ ‘bold,’ ‘unwarranted,’ ‘blasphemous,’ ‘gross,’ ‘monstrous,’ ‘cruel,’ ‘administering deceitful comfort,’ and ‘unauthorised,’ in Tract 38. I do not mean to say that I had not a definite meaning in every one of these epithets, or that I did not weigh them before I used them.

“With reference to this passage the same monitor had said—‘I must enter another protest against your cursing and swearing at the end of the first *Via Media* as you do. (Tract 38.) What good can it do? I call it uncharitable to an excess. How mistaken we may ourselves be on many points that are only gradually opening to us!’

“I withdrew the whole passage several years ago.

“7. I said in 1837 of the Church of Rome—

‘In truth she is a Church beside herself,’ &c. [as above.]

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John Henry Newman

Frontmatter

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ix

“8. In 1837, I also said in a review—

‘The Second and Third Gregories appealed to the people against the Emperor for a most unjustifiable object, and in, apparently, a most unjustifiable way. They became rebels to establish image-worship. However, even in this transaction, we trace the original principle of Church power, though miserably defaced and perverted, whose form

Had yet not lost  
All her original brightness, nor appeared  
Less than Archangel ruined and the excess  
Of glory obscured.’

Upon the same basis, as is notorious, was built the Ecclesiastical Monarchy. It was not the breath of princes, or the smiles of a court, which fostered the stern and lofty spirit of Hildebrand and Innocent. It was the neglect of self, the renunciation of wordly pomp and ease, the appeal to the people.’

“I must observe, however, upon this passage, that no reference is made in it (the idea is shocking) to the subject of Milton’s lines, who ill answers to the idea of purity and virtue defaced, of which they speak. An application is made of them to a subject which I considered, when I so wrote, to befit them better, viz. the Roman Church as viewed in a certain exercise of her power in the person of the two Popes.

“Perhaps I have made other statements in a similar tone, and that, again, when the statements themselves were unexceptionable and true. If you ask me how an individual could venture, not simply to hold, but to publish such views of a communion so ancient, so wide-spreading, so fruitful in Saints, I answer that I said to myself, ‘I am not speaking my own words, I am but following almost a *consensus* of the divines of my Church. They have ever used the strongest language against Rome, even the most able and learned of them. I wish to throw myself into their system. While I say what they say, I am safe. Such views, too, are necessary for our position.’ Yet I have reason to fear still, that such language is to be ascribed, in no small measure, to an impetuous temper, a hope of approving myself to persons I respect, and a wish to repel the charge of Romanism.

“An admission of this kind involves no retractation of what I have written in defence of Anglican doctrine. And as I make it for personal reasons, I make it without consulting others. I am as fully convinced as ever, indeed I doubt not Roman Catholics

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John Henry Newman

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x

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themselves would confess, that the Anglican doctrine is the strongest, nay the only possible antagonist of their system. If Rome is to be withstood, it can be done in no other way."

Of course he now withdraws the arguments alluded to, as far as they reflect upon the Church of Rome, as well as the language in which they were conveyed.

LITTLEMORE,

*Oct. 6, 1845.*

## POSTSCRIPT.

Since the above was written, the Author has joined the Catholic Church. It was his intention and wish to have carried his Volume through the Press before deciding finally on this step. But when he had got some way in the printing, he recognised in himself a conviction of the truth of the conclusion to which the discussion leads, so clear as to supersede further deliberation. Shortly afterwards circumstances gave him the opportunity of acting upon it, and he felt that he had no warrant for refusing to do so.

His first act on his conversion was to offer his Work for revision to the proper authorities; but the offer was declined on the ground that it was written and partly printed before he was a Catho-

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John Henry Newman

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

ADVERTISEMENT.

xi

lic, and that it would come before the reader in a more persuasive form, if he read it as the author wrote it.

It is scarcely necessary to add that he now submits every part of the book to the judgment of the Church, with whose doctrine, on the subjects of which it treats, he wishes all his thoughts to be coincident.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02146-3 - An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine

John Henry Newman

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## CONTENTS.

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1

## CHAPTER I.

## ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF IDEAS.

SEC. I.—On the Process of Development in Ideas . . . . .	30
II.—On the Kinds of Development in Ideas . . . . .	43
III.—On the Corruption of an Idea . . . . .	57
§ 1.—Distinctive Tests between Development and Corruption . . . . .	<i>ib.</i>
§ 2.—First Test of a True Development.—Preser- vation of Type or Idea . . . . .	64
§ 3.—Second Test.—Continuity of Principles . . . . .	66
§ 4.—Further Remarks on the Second Test . . . . .	70
§ 5.—Third Test.—Power of Assimilation . . . . .	73
§ 6.—Fourth Test.—Early Anticipation . . . . .	77
§ 7.—Fifth Test.—Logical Sequence . . . . .	80
§ 8.—Sixth Test.—Preservative Additions . . . . .	86
§ 9.—Seventh Test.—Chronic Continuance . . . . .	90

## CHAPTER II.

ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIAN IDEAS, ANTECEDENTLY  
CONSIDERED.

SEC. I.—On the Probability of Developments in Christianity . . . . .	94
II.—On the Probability of a Developing Authority in Christianity . . . . .	114



Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02146-3 - An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine

John Henry Newman

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xiv

CONTENTS.

## CHAPTER III.

ON THE NATURE OF THE ARGUMENT IN BEHALF OF THE EXISTING  
DEVELOPMENTS OF CHRISTIANITY.

	PAGE
SEC. I.—Presumptive Character of the Proof . . .	131
II.—Character of the Evidence . . .	139
III.—Method of Conducting the Inquiry . . .	146
IV.—Instances in Illustration . . .	158
V.—Parallel Instances . . .	179

## CHAPTER IV.

ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE ARGUMENT IN BEHALF OF THE EXISTING  
DEVELOPMENTS OF CHRISTIANITY.

SEC. I.—Application of the First Test of Fidelity in Develop- ment.—The Church of the First Centuries . . .	204
II.—Application continued.—The Church of the Fourth Century . . .	242

## CHAPTER V.

ILLUSTRATIONS CONTINUED.

Application of the First Test continued.—The Church of the Fifth and Sixth Centuries . . .	270
SEC. I.—The Arians of the Gothic race . . .	271
II.—The Nestorians . . .	281
III.—The Monophysites . . .	293

## CHAPTER VI.

ILLUSTRATIONS CONTINUED.

SEC. I.—Application of the Second Test of Fidelity in Deve- lopment . . .	318
§ 1.—Scripture and its Mystical Sense . . .	319
§ 2.—The Supremacy of Faith . . .	327
II.—Application of the Second and Third Tests.—The Dogmatic and Sacramental Principles, and the For- mation of a Theology by means of them . . .	337

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02146-3 - An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine

John Henry Newman

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## CONTENTS.

XV

## CHAPTER VII.

## ILLUSTRATIONS CONTINUED.

	PAGE
Application of the Fourth Test of Fidelity in Development . . . . .	369
§ 1.—Resurrection and Relics . . . . .	<i>ib.</i>
§ 2.— <i>Cultus</i> of Saints and Angels . . . . .	376
§ 3.—Merit of Virginity . . . . .	381
§ 4.—Office of St. Mary . . . . .	384
§ 5.—Specimens of Theological Science . . . . .	388

## CHAPTER VIII.

## ILLUSTRATIONS CONCLUDED.

SEC. I.—Application of the Fifth Test of Fidelity in Development . . . . .	397
§ 1.—Developments growing out of the Question of our Lord's Divinity . . . . .	<i>ib.</i>
§ 2.—Developments following upon the Doctrine of Baptism . . . . .	410
II.—Application of the Sixth Test of Fidelity in Development . . . . .	428
III.—Application of the Seventh Test of Fidelity in Development . . . . .	445

## CORRIGENDA.

- Page 4, 8 lines from bottom, *for* And *read* Now.  
 „ 70, line 20, *for* a *read* in.  
 „ 85, note, *for* Lequen *read* Lequien.  
 „ 164, line 17, *for* Mono-physites *read* Monophysite.  
 „ 185, line 16, *for* Sulpitius *read* Sulpicius.  
 „ 208, line 12, *for* distinguished *read* distinguishable.  
 „ 217, line 10, *insert* properly *before* called.  
 „ 230, note 4, *for* Instit. *read* Epit. Instit. 55.

Note to be added at p. 408.

St. Basil, St. Chrysostom, and St. Cyril of Alexandria sometimes speak, it is true, in a different tone; but this is irrelevant to the argument, as will be seen by pp. 388, 389.