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# The Beatification of Newman

David J. Phipps

The god of this age seems to be tolerance. It goes without saying that tolerance is good, but not if it leads to indifference. This applies particularly to matters of faith, and John Henry Newman, with his ‘dogmatic principle,’ would have been the first to say so. He will soon be beatified by the Pope (whatever that means), but that is none of our business. It is our business, however, when we are bombarded with pro-Newman propaganda not only by the media but also by those within the Church of England who wish us to follow him.

He already appears in the calendar in Common Worship as an example to Anglicans even though he left the Church of England in 1845 believing it to be in error. Apart from the furore caused by his attitude to the Reformers when he and Keble published Froude’s *Remains*, there are substantial theological reasons why we should reject his teaching.

The perception has been that, during his time as an Anglican, Newman did much to undermine the Church of England. For example, there is a letter from Monsignor Talbot to Ullathorne (Newman’s Roman Catholic Bishop of Birmingham), written in 1867, in which he says that ‘There can be no doubt that whilst an Anglican he induced a vast number of people to imbibe Catholic doctrines, and afterwards to submit to the Church’.<sup>1</sup> Punch came up with: ‘“Every road”, says the ancient proverb, “leads to Rome”; but of all roads none will take you there so quickly as the small Tracts that run through Oxford’. There is, indeed evidence that he was aware, whilst an Anglican, that his teaching was tending to pull the whole church towards Rome. In December 1841 he wrote a letter to Samuel Rickards, in which he says—

For two years and more I have been in a state of great uneasiness as to my position here, owing to the consciousness I felt that my opinions went far beyond what had been customary in the English Church. Not that I felt it any personal trouble, for I thought and think that such opinions were allowed in our Church fully; but that looking on my position here, I seemed to be a sort of schismaticist or demagogue supporting a party against the religious authorities of the place ... I cannot call the charge of the Bishop of Chester [J.B. Sumner], and (as I hear it) of the Archbishop of Dublin (Whately), any thing short of heresy ... The contest is not longer

one of what would be represented as a quasi-Romanism against Anglicanism, but of Catholicism against heresy.<sup>2</sup>

Newman had many good points, not least his courage and his logical consistency, but we need to be aware that he became a Roman Catholic because he had come to believe that the Church of England was not a part of the true church of Christ. There were several areas in which, whilst still an Anglican, he could not accept the doctrine of the Church of England, but three in particular are critically important: the nature of the church and its relationship to the Gospel, the relative authority of church and scripture, and the way of justification. In these things, Newman has the potential to do more harm in his death than he did in his life.

The very nature of Christianity is at issue. Newman discovered that he could not remain in the same church as the Protestant Reformers and had the integrity to leave. There are still those who, while holding Newman's views, remain within the Church of England. What lies at the heart of this dispute is something about which we all need to be informed—especially in these days of widespread doctrinal confusion, so we need to know what Newman taught during his Anglican period.

### The Nature of the Church

This is not the place to set out in detail the Reformers' position on the nature of the church. Suffice it to say that they described it in functional terms rather than entering into a precise discussion of its nature. Article XIX, therefore, sets out how the church is to be known in terms of what it does rather than what it is, except to say that it is a congregation of believers.

The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.

When they sought to go further, they defined the church in terms of election, as does *Nowell's Catechism*, where it is described as 'the congregation of those whom God by his secret election hath adopted to himself through Christ'.<sup>3</sup> It is the very nature of the church which lies at the heart of Newman's growing difficulties with Anglicanism, for it was this which determined its relationship

with Rome, its attitude to authority, and its understanding of the way of salvation. As Frank Turner writes: 'Ecclesiology, or concern over the identity, character, and constitution of the Christian Church in England, stood at the fountainhead of the Tractarian enterprise'.<sup>4</sup>

In his very early sermons Newman talks a great deal about the visible church. For example, he lays stress upon it by talking about the fact that 'We are at present members of the vine of God—we have been baptized into His Church, and are members of His visible communion'. But yet, at this period, his chief concern is the 'true and spiritual church, which is made up of God's true worshippers all over the earth'.<sup>5</sup>

His views changed. He told Keble in 1844, 'I was first taught the doctrine of ... 'the Church' by Whately (Oxford don, later Archbishop of Dublin) in 1825,'<sup>6</sup> and, in an autobiographical memoir of 1885, says that what he learned from Dr. Whately was 'the idea of the Christian Church, as a divine appointment, and as a substantive visible body, independent of the state, and endowed with rights, prerogatives, and powers of its own'.<sup>7</sup> Whately, however, would not have recognized what Newman made of his idea. Whately's idea of the church as a spiritual society meant primarily that Parliament should keep its hands off it; Newman transformed it into a visible embodiment of the gospel.

By the end of 1826, the church has become totally visible, and in the sermon which he counted as his first high church sermon, 'On the Catholic and Apostolic Church,' the idea of 'a congregation of faithful men' is not even considered:

By the Church in the Creeds is meant that visible Christian body and society, instituted by Christ and His apostles, professing the one faith of the gospel, governed by certain officers, and associated by certain laws.<sup>8</sup>

The same theme sounded out in the early Tracts:

Bear with me, while I express my fear, that we do not, as much as we ought, consider the force of that article of our Belief, "The One Catholic and Apostolic Church."... As people vaguely take it in the present day, it seems only an assertion that there is a number of sincere Christians scattered through the world ... Doubtless the only true and satisfactory meaning is that which our Divines have ever taken, that there is on earth

an existing Society, Apostolic as founded by the Apostles, Catholic because it spreads its branches in every place; i.e. the Church Visible with its Bishops, Priests, and Deacons.<sup>9</sup>

True doctrine and a right state of heart are not enough. More, in the shape of the visible, institutional church, is needed—

You argue, that true doctrine is the important matter for which we must contend, and a right state of the affections is the test of vital religion in the heart ... Believe me, I do not think lightly of these arguments. They are very subtle ones; powerfully influencing the imagination, and difficult to answer. Still I believe them to be mere fallacies ... It is an undeniable fact, as true as that souls will be saved, that a Visible Church must exist as a means towards that end.<sup>10</sup>

He even goes on to state explicitly that individuals do not belong to the church because they are Christians—it is the other way round. They are Christians because they belong to the church. The body is the first thing and each member in particular the second. The body is not made up of individual Christians, but each Christian has been made such in his turn by being taken into the body.<sup>11</sup>

It ought to be noted at this point that no responsible person would say that the visible church is only a human institution, or that it does not matter particularly. The question is which is primary—the community of true believers or the visible institution of which they are part. The spiritual dangers of Newman's emphasis are described eloquently by Bannerman. He is writing about Rome, but the principles are exactly the same—

The spiritual character of the gospel in all its relations to man is superseded by the relations to him of an outward Church; and on this foundation many of the worst and most characteristic errors of Popery are reared ... Instead of an inward faith uniting a man to his Saviour, Popery substitutes an outward union with a visible society.<sup>12</sup>

In later years, J. A. Froude was being fair when he said of Newman's circle that 'The Anglo-Catholics at Oxford maintained that Christ was present in the Church; the Evangelicals said that he was present in the individual believing soul'.<sup>13</sup> By 1830, Newman was already saying that the gospel belonged to the church.

The Gospel faith has not been left to the world at large, recorded indeed in the Bible, but there left, like other important truths, to be taken up by men or rejected ... Christ formed a body; He secured that body from dissolution by the bond of a Sacrament. He committed the privileges of His spiritual kingdom and the maintenance of His faith as a legacy to this baptized society.<sup>14</sup>

Along with this came the idea that grace comes, not directly from Christ, but through the church. Therefore, as Litton says of this system, 'spiritual life is derived to the individual, in the first instance, not from union with Christ, but from union with the visible church'.<sup>15</sup>

He did not promise to give us grace immediately from Himself, but through His Spirit, & that Spirit He lodged in His Church, i.e. the body of Xtians. He will give any man grace who asks for it—He has said 'seek & ye shall find'—but at the same time He has told us where to look—to the assembled congregation.<sup>16</sup>

If the church is one visible society through which man receives the blessings of God, it must matter that an individual is united to the one true church. This was a problem since 'That vast Catholic body, 'the Holy Church throughout all the world,' is broken into many fragments by the power of the Devil ... Some portions of it are altogether gone, and those that remain are separated from each other'.<sup>17</sup> This had the consequence that 'There is not a dissenter living, but, inasmuch and so far as he dissents, is in a sin'.<sup>18</sup>

Yet it is still 'to this one Body, regarded as one, that the special privileges of the Gospel are given,' so that blessings are corporate not individual:

It is not that this man receives the blessing, and that man, but one and all, the whole body, as one man, one new spiritual man, with one accord, seeks and gains it ... Elect souls are all elected in her, not in isolation.<sup>19</sup>

His answer to the problem of how the church could be one, but the Church of England exist without being united to the rest of the visible church lay, as it always had for high churchmen, in an appeal to the earliest church: both the Anglican and the Roman branches of the church were authentic because they were validly derived from the apostolic church. The claim of the Anglican Church to the Apostolic Succession rings out from the very beginning of the

very first Tract in 1833:

I fear that we have neglected the real ground on which our authority is built, OUR APOSTOLICAL DESCENT ... The LORD JESUS CHRIST gave His Spirit to His Apostles; they in turn laid their hands on those who should succeed them; and these again on others; and so the sacred gift has been handed down to our present Bishops, who have appointed us as their assistants, and in some sense representatives.

This gave the church a very clerical, sacramental aspect. In Turner's paraphrase of a paper written by Keble<sup>20</sup> in 1833:

The Tractarian argument was very simple. The sacraments were necessary for salvation; episcopally ordained clergy held the sacraments; only by receiving the sacraments from such clergy could a person be assured of salvation. Therefore, those clergy deserved respect, honour, gratitude, and obedience.<sup>21</sup>

To lose the succession would be to lose the church and the sacraments, which are real channels of grace. What, in Newman's eyes, saved the Church of England from schism was the historical accident that it had managed, unlike the Protestants on the Continent, to preserve the succession at the Reformation.

Happily for us, we had the apostolical succession within our own country, and so could consecrate the bread and wine without [Rome]; but can any measure be more atrociously cruel than that of placing the Germans and others to the alternative of being hypocrites, or losing the Sacraments?<sup>22</sup>

In 1838, as Newman studied the Monophysite Controversy and the Council of Chalcedon, he was impressed by the beneficial influence of Pope Leo at the Council, and the way that Monophysitism dragged on for centuries. The thought crossed his mind that Anglicans might be in the same state as were the Monophysites—dragging out an existence isolated from the universal church.

He was in this state of flux when someone drew his attention to an article by Nicholas (later Cardinal) Wiseman in the *Dublin Review*. It was on Donatism, but made particular references to the parallels of that controversy with Anglicanism. Anglicans might claim that the corruption of the Roman Church justified their departure from it, but that had always been the plea of schismatics. Anglicans claimed that they were faithful to the Fathers, but the very

Fathers whom they championed condemned them. Wiseman claimed that—

By the Fathers, who combated the Donatists ... the very circumstance of one particular Church being out of the aggregation of other Churches, constituted these judges over the other, and left no room for questioning the justice of the condemnation.<sup>23</sup>

He then makes what was to be a devastating quotation from Augustine: ‘Wherefore, the entire world judges WITH SECURITY, that they are not good, who separate themselves from the entire world, in whatever part of the entire world’. When the implications of these words finally dawned upon Newman, his theory of the church simply fell to pieces. As he recorded twenty years later in the *Apologia*:

They decided ecclesiastical questions on a simpler rule than that of Antiquity; nay, St. Augustine was one of the prime oracles of Antiquity; here then Antiquity was deciding against itself. What light was hereby thrown upon every controversy in the Church! not that, for the moment, the multitude may not falter in their judgment ... but that the deliberate judgment, in which the whole Church at length rests and acquiesces, is an infallible prescription and a final sentence against such portions of it as protest and secede ... By those words of the ancient Father, the theory of the *Via Media* was absolutely pulverized.<sup>24</sup>

He tried to hold on to the idea that the apostolical succession all that was needed, but struggled. By 1840 he was writing—

One point is acknowledged, one must be conceded, and one will be maintained, by all Anglo-Catholics;—that the Church is One, is the point of doctrine; that we are estranged from the body of the Church, is the point of fact; and that we still have the means of grace among us, is our point of controversy.<sup>25</sup>

As we have seen, Newman’s ecclesiology began from two premises: that the church is an essentially visible, identifiable society, and that it is possible for such a society to exist without total structural unity. Under the impetus of Augustine’s dictum, he had seen this was an impossible position to hold. Therefore, assuming that it was his second premise which was wrong, he drew the only logically possible conclusion and became a Roman Catholic.



There is one very instructive letter, which he wrote to his brother Francis, in August 1845 when he had decided to go to Rome, but had not yet gone. It is very pertinent to those who are considering this step at the moment. He writes—

It is from no idea of the Roman system being the most bearable of the existing forms of religion that I contemplate accepting it. I have always resisted, and do heartily resist, the notion of choosing a religion according to my fancy. I have no desire at all to leave the English Church.

Then he goes on to demonstrate how his ecclesiology had developed:

My reason for going to Rome is this:— I think the English Church is in schism. I think the faith of the Roman Church the only true religion. I do not think there is salvation out of the Church of Rome.<sup>26</sup>

It seems that his real error lay not in believing that the visible church must be one communion, but in his belief that the church had to be a visible institution at all. This assumption was fundamentally incompatible with the Reformed nature of the Church of England which still (officially) bases its ecclesiology upon the election of God and the preaching of the Gospel, and it was this mistake which lay at the heart of his problems with Anglicanism.

### Authority

The starting point for our understanding of Newman on revelation is the insight that when God revealed Himself in Christ, He did not do so in propositional terms, because of the ‘incommunicable nature of God’ and the ‘mysteriousness of the doctrine’ of the Trinity.<sup>27</sup> This means that not all of what was known could be written down and that this revelation was much richer than was ever recorded. In the last of his University Sermons in 1843 he said:

Creeds and dogmas live in the one idea which they are designed to express, and which alone is substantive; and are necessary only because the human mind cannot reflect upon that idea, except piecemeal ... Thus the Catholic dogmas are, after all, but symbols of a Divine fact, which, far from being compassed by those very propositions, would not be exhausted, nor fathomed, by a thousand.<sup>28</sup>

Newman tells us in the *Apologia*<sup>29</sup> how, as an undergraduate, he heard

Hawkins (later Provost of Oriel and Newman's arch-enemy) preach his sermon of 1818 on Tradition. There Hawkins taught that 'the Church should teach, and the Scriptures prove, the doctrines of Christianity'.<sup>30</sup> This view is in itself unexceptional. Hawkins is very careful to differentiate between his position, and 'the errors of the Romanists'. Tradition, because it has 'often been corrupt ... and therefore fallible' is allowed 'no independent authority whatsoever'.<sup>31</sup>

The value of tradition, for Hawkins, is didactic not interpretative. In the title of the sermon he used the words 'Unauthoritative Tradition,' and said that 'The value of unauthoritative tradition, [is] not so much in the confirmation or interpretation of Christian doctrines, but is intended to be the ordinary introduction to them'.<sup>32</sup> It is a plain fact that most of us do not initially learn our faith straight from the Bible, but from other Christians—inside church or out. Even Salmon, in his robust defence of protestant principles of authority, agrees with this—

Christ foresaw our need of human instruction, and provided for it, not only by the ordinary dispensations of His providence, but by the institution of His Church, whose special duty it is to preserve His truth and proclaim it to the world.<sup>33</sup>

Hawkins' thought is reproduced almost verbatim in Newman's first book, *Arians of the Fourth Century*—

Surely the Sacred Volume was never intended, and is not adapted, to teach us our creed; however certain it is that we can prove our creed from it, when it has once been taught us. ... From the very first, that rule has been, as a matter of fact, that the Church should teach the truth, and then should appeal to Scripture in vindication of its own teaching.<sup>34</sup>

He also makes the supposition that, alongside Scripture, there must have existed in the church from the very beginning more teaching from the Apostles than was ever recorded in Scripture: 'it is plain that there must have been such tradition, granting that the Apostles conversed, and their friends had memories, like other men.'<sup>35</sup>

This tradition, guarded within the bosom of the church, and protected from public view, in Newman's opinion, supplements Scripture:

Apostolical tradition is brought forward, not to supersede Scripture, but

in conjunction with Scripture, to refute the self-authorized arbitrary doctrines of the heretics. We must cautiously distinguish, with [Irenaeus] between a tradition supplanting or perverting the inspired records, and a corroborating, illustrating, and altogether subordinate tradition. It is of the latter that he speaks, classing the traditionary and the written doctrine together, as substantially one and the same.<sup>36</sup>

This certainly began to undermine the traditional Anglican understanding of authority which lay, in the words of the Article, in the ‘sufficiency of the holy Scriptures’. As we have seen from Hawkins, this was not just the position of the Evangelicals. Turner, in his otherwise excellent book, which is full of valuable insights, claims that Newman discussed Arianism because it ‘closely [paralleled] the rise of modern evangelical religion from the time of Wesley onward’.<sup>37</sup> In this view, he is in a minority.

Sheridan Gilley describes the book as ‘an exercise in theological apologetic against the rationalist and liberal enemies of the Church’.<sup>38</sup> In this he is fairly representative of scholarly opinion. Stephen Thomas compares the *Arians* with Joseph Milner’s *History of the Church*. The latter is an unashamedly evangelical work which measures the life of the church at all times by the extent to which it preached of justification by faith. Thomas says that ‘The target of both Newman’s *Arians* and Milner’s *History* is identical—that modern spirit of intellectual autonomy, which separates the cultivated and refined believer from revealed truth and sets him off on the road to infidelity’.<sup>39</sup>

Newman’s real target was the Liberal Churchmen even though it incidentally included the Evangelicals. Ian Ker describes *Arians* as ‘primarily a historical work’ but one in which ‘its author’s own theological preoccupations are never far from the surface. Like contemporary religious liberalism, Arianism, unlike earlier heresies, was originally [quoting *Arians*, p. 28] ‘a sceptical rather than a dogmatic teaching’.<sup>40</sup> Or, in the words of Rowan Williams, who is no friend of Evangelicalism, Newman was attacking not Evangelicalism, but ‘the type of theology dictated by human wisdom, human desire, the reluctance to be humble before revelation’.<sup>41</sup>

This has political overtones, especially when Newman attacks the cowardice of the orthodox bishops—

The orthodox majority of Bishops and divines, on the other hand, timorously or indolently, kept in the background; and allowed themselves to be represented at Sardica by men, whose tenets they knew to be unchristian, and professed to abominate.<sup>42</sup>

Williams goes on to say that because of their 'ignorance or spiritual laziness' the fourth century bishops failed to see the dangers of Arianism and 'confusedly, even if not with deliberate apostate intent, sought a middle way between truth and falsehood'. In reaction against the traditional relationship between church and state, in which the state was overstepping its proper bounds, Newman is moving 'towards a theory of the state as intrinsically secular ... with which the Church is in constant struggle and negotiation', and 'orthodoxy has become more of a quality of spiritual life than a public system by which a community may govern itself'.<sup>43</sup>

Contemporary evidence supports the view that Newman was defending the church against liberalism rather than evangelicalism even though his praise of the reticence of the Alexandrian church to open up its teaching to outsiders could be seen as opposing the habit of the Evangelicals to use the atonement in their evangelistic preaching. In the *Apologia* (which is not always to be trusted) he says that—

While I was engaged in writing my work upon the Arians, great events were happening at home and abroad, which brought out into form and passionate expression the various beliefs which had so gradually been winning their way into my mind. Shortly before, there had been a Revolution in France ... Again, the great Reform Agitation was going on around me as I wrote. The Whigs had come into power ... The vital question was how were we to keep the Church from being liberalized?<sup>44</sup>

Fortunately, Newman's hindsight is supported by a letter he wrote to his friend J.W. Bowden whilst engaged with the *Arians*.

The Church has for a time lost its influence as a body ... Two years back the State deserted it [Roman Catholic Emancipation in 1829] ... The Upper Classes ... are liberals, and in saying this, I conceive I am saying almost as bad of them as can be said of any man ... I would rather have the Church severed from its temporalities and scattered to the four winds than such a desecration of holy things. I dread above all things the

pollution of such men as Lord Brougham affecting to lay a friendly hand upon it ... You ask me what I am doing—Why—I am going to be an author, but anonymously. I am thinking of writing one or two works on Theological subjects for a library which is coming out.<sup>45</sup>

It can be seen too in his biglietto<sup>46</sup> speech in 1879. There he said that—

I rejoice to say, 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 ... Liberalism in religion is the doctrine that there is no positive truth in religion, but that one creed is as good as another, and this is the teaching which is gaining substance and force daily. ... It teaches that all are to be tolerated, for all are matters of opinion.<sup>47</sup>

Therefore, going back to the *Arians*, we now have a second authority alongside that of Scripture. It might be secondary and subsidiary, but, nevertheless, it exists, and this means that the devout Christian has to submit to the teaching of the church—

Christ has so willed it, that we should get at the Truth, not by ingenious speculations, reasonings, or investigations of our own, but by teaching. The Holy Church has been set up from the beginning as a solemn religious fact, so to call it ... Those who in the first place receive her words, have the minds of children, who do not reason, but obey their mother.<sup>48</sup>

What is more, this tradition can add to doctrine. Scripture is still ‘the document of ultimate appeal in matters of faith,’ but yet ‘we do not consider it our sole informant in divine truths’.<sup>49</sup> For example: ‘a person who denies the Apostolical Succession of the Ministry, because it is not clearly taught in Scripture, ought ... if consistent, to deny the divinity of the HOLY GHOST, which is nowhere literally stated in Scripture’.<sup>50</sup>

He writes that the essence of much error has been to try to elicit for oneself a creed from ‘the apparently casual writings of the Apostles’ which are without ‘a systematic structure, or a didactic form, or a completeness in their subject matter’.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, he came to believe it ‘very improbable indeed, that [Scripture] should contain the whole of the Revealed Word of God’.<sup>52</sup>

The problem is that ‘the Bible is not so written as to force its meaning upon

the reader,' and 'does not carry with it its own interpretation'. Refusing the authority of the church makes doctrinal certainty impossible. The idea that 'the Bible without note or comment [is] the sole authoritative judge in controversies of faith, is a self-destructive principle, and practically involves the conclusion, that dispute is altogether hopeless and useless, and even absurd ... [and] that that is truth to each which each thinks to be truth'.<sup>53</sup>

This attitude could not be illustrated better than by a letter he wrote to his brother, Francis, in November 1835, when Francis, who had left the Church of England for the Brethren, had now left them for the Unitarians because he now denied the personality of the Holy Spirit. So, fully ten years before he converted to Rome, Newman wrote—

On what ground of reason or Scripture do you say everyone may gain the true doctrines of the gospel for himself from the Bible? where is illumination promised an individual for this purpose? Where is it any where hinted that the aid of teachers is to be superseded? where universal testimony of the Church is not a principle of belief as sure and satisfactory as the word of Scripture? ... Till you give it up, till you see that the unanimous witness of the whole Church (as being a witness to an historical fact, *viz.* that the Apostles taught), where attainable, is as much the voice of God (I do not say as sacredly and immediately so, but as really) as Scripture itself, there is no hope for a clearheaded man like you. You will unravel the web of selfsufficient [*sic*] inquiry ... Why should you object, as you take Scripture to be from God and to be an external bond upon you, to take the universal teaching of the Church also? What antecedent probability is there against it? ... Observe I am not urging the testimony of the Church, as if the opinion of a number of persons of the meaning of Scripture, but as an independent source of truth, *viz.* an historical testimony to a fact *viz.* the Apostles having taught such and such doctrines.<sup>54</sup>

In his Anglican phase, he held that the task of the church was simply to hold on to what it had received. In this respect the Church of England was superior to Rome which added to the truth. He writes—

We ... consider the Church as a witness, a keeper and witness of Catholic Tradition, and in this sense invested with authority ... She bears witness to a fact, that such and such a doctrine, or such a sense of Scripture, has ever

been received and came from the Apostles; the proof of which lies in evidence of a plain and public nature, first in her own unanimity throughout her various branches, next in the writings of the Ancient Fathers; ... but she does not undertake of herself to determine the sense of Scripture, she has no immediate power over it, she but alleges and submits to that doctrine which is ancient and Catholic.<sup>55</sup>

This is the difference between Canterbury and Rome—

[The Roman Catholics] understand by the Faith, whatever the Church at any time declares to be faith; we what it actually so declared from the beginning ... The creed of Rome is ever subject to increase; ours is fixed once for all.<sup>56</sup>

Since the church is the teacher, it is not necessary for individual Christians to check doctrines, but to verify the credentials of the teacher. In 1841 he wrote—

While, then, the conversions recorded in Scripture are brought about in a very marked way through a *teacher*, and *not* by means of private judgment, so again, if an appeal *is* made to private judgment, this is done in order to settle who the teacher is, and what are his notes or tokens, rather than to substantiate this or that religious opinion or practice ... The practical question before us is, *who* is the teacher now, from whose mouth we are to seek the law, and *what are his notes?*<sup>57</sup>

So, ‘the simple question then for Private Judgment to exercise itself upon is, what and where is the Church?’<sup>58</sup> The importance of this question for Newman in his quest for truth culminating in his *Essay on Development* cannot be overestimated: if we find out where the church is, then we have found the truth. Salmon makes the telling point that Newman and his friends were setting up a false antithesis here. The lack of an infallible teacher does not necessarily mean the lack of any teacher—

This is the alternative they want to bring us to—either an infallible Church, whose teaching is to be subject to no criticism and no correction, or else no Church teaching at all, each individual taking the Bible, and getting from it, by his own arbitrary interpretation, any system of doctrine he can ... They have no difficulty in showing that the latter method inevitably leads to a variety of discordant error; and they conclude we are forced to fall back on the other. But in what subject in the world is it

dreamed that we have got to choose between having infallible teachers, or else having no teacher at all?<sup>59</sup>

Newman, personally, clearly needed an authoritative voice to obey. He said that ‘The mind requires an external guide ... The human mind wishes to be rid of doubt in religion; and a teacher who claims infallibility is readily believed on his simple word’.<sup>60</sup> So, now, ‘If Christianity is both social and dogmatic, and intended for all ages, it must, humanly speaking, have an infallible expounder,’<sup>61</sup> and since he thought the Bible inadequate for the purpose, he had to look elsewhere.

In proportion, then, as we find, in matter of fact, that the inspired volume is not calculated to subserve that purpose, we are forced to revert to that living and present guide, which, at the era of her rejection, had been so long recognized as the dispenser of Scripture ... and the arbiter of all true doctrine and holy practice to her children.<sup>62</sup>

This landed Newman on the horns of a dilemma. Rome had apparently preserved a continuity from the earliest times, which he believed essential, but yet it taught a system of doctrine which appeared to depart from the doctrine of the Apostles. For example, where in the teachings of the earliest church did one find all the modern Roman teaching about Mary? He said himself in 1844 that he had been kept from conversion by ‘a repulsive principle ... arising from *particular doctrines* of the Church of Rome’.<sup>63</sup>

It was to resolve this tension, and to justify Roman developments in doctrine, that he wrote the *Essay on Development* in 1845, but once the nettle was grasped, and he faced up to his need to find authority in the church rather than the Bible, his difficulties were solved. That living and present guide was, of course, the only church which claimed both continuity with the apostolic church, and the present, direct supervision of the Holy Spirit over its doctrine—the Church of Rome. It is important to understand that Newman was not converted to the contents of Roman Catholic doctrine, but to the Church of Rome itself. Nowhere did he ever put the essential position of the Roman Catholic Church so clearly as he did four years after his conversion—

No one can be a Catholic without a simple faith, that what the Church declares in God’s name, is God’s word, and therefore true. A man must simply believe that the Church is the oracle of God.<sup>64</sup>



### Justification

From a theological point of view the doctrines we have mentioned are hugely important. From a practical point of view, the doctrine of justification is even more so. As Luther wrote: ‘If the doctrine of justification is lost, the whole of Christian doctrine is lost’.<sup>65</sup> Anyone who denies that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law (Rom. 3:28) can hardly be called a Christian, yet Newman had problems with the doctrine of justification because he fell into the old trap, of mixing up justification and sanctification, which he describes as ‘substantially ... the same thing’,<sup>66</sup> because ‘Justification ... declares the soul righteous, and in that declaration, on the one hand conveys pardon for its past sins, and on the other *makes* it actually righteous’.<sup>67</sup>

He saw the overriding problem of sin not in its guilt before a holy God, but rather in the corruption of man’s nature. This can be seen in the very first of his published sermons, “Holiness necessary for Future Blessedness,” from August 1826 where he says that in order to be justified, a man must not only be counted righteous, but also made righteous—

It is told us again and again, that to make sinful creatures holy was the great end which our Lord had in view in taking upon Him our nature, and thus none but the holy will be accepted for His sake at the last day ... The whole history of redemption, the covenant of mercy in all its parts and provisions, attests the necessity of holiness in order to salvation.<sup>68</sup>

This is biblical, to some extent, for justification has to be followed by sanctification if it is real, but his scheme turns the order on its head. He very definitely rooted justification in the sanctifying gift of the Holy Spirit—‘The presence of the Holy Ghost shed abroad on our hearts, the Author both of faith and renewal, this is really that which makes us righteous, and ... our righteousness is the possession of that presence’.<sup>69</sup>

Furthermore, he is emphatic that the Spirit is given always and only in baptism. Writing to Keble he says that ‘no other *appointed means but baptism* is revealed in Scripture for regeneration.’<sup>70</sup> And in a sermon of 1838 says: ‘If a man is not born again in Baptism, it does not appear how he is to be born again’.<sup>71</sup>

For Newman, baptism really does give a man new life in every sense of the word, and gives him powers which he did not have before: ‘Baptism really does

change a man's moral state as well as his state in God's sight ... it gives him the means of being a better man than he otherwise would be'.<sup>72</sup>

Not only does he teach that baptism regenerates; he also teaches that justification comes with baptism, because the ground of justification is not simply the atonement made by Christ, but His presence and righteousness within the Christian. He can say that 'Baptism is expressly said to effect the first justification,'<sup>73</sup> and say that 'the Presence of Christ is our true righteousness, first conveyed into us in Baptism'.<sup>74</sup>

But what part does faith play in justification? Faith is seen as subservient to baptism. Faith continues what baptism has already given: 'Faith justifies, *because* Baptism has justified'.<sup>75</sup> He even goes so far as to question whether justification by faith can be found at all in Scripture: 'But it may be said, that Scripture says that faith will apply to us the merits Christ, and thus become the instrument of washing away sins. I do not know where Scripture so says'.<sup>76</sup>

Turner says that 'For Newman, the fundamental problem with the Lutheran doctrine was that of explaining exactly what constituted *faith*. Protestants who emphasized justification by faith alone, he contended, could not really explain what they meant by faith'.<sup>77</sup> It is clear from his *Lectures on Justification* that he did not understand what they meant by faith. The position he constantly attacks as the Protestant one is actually closer to Sandemanianism—

Because the Brazen Serpent in the wilderness healed by being looked at, they consider that Christ's Sacrifice saves by the mind's contemplating it. This is what they call casting themselves upon Christ,—coming before Him simply and without self-trust, and being saved by faith.<sup>78</sup>

His doctrine, however, is not salvation by baptism. In baptism a man has his sins forgiven and is given the presence and the power of Christ to help him live a better life, but he will be judged on the basis of what he does with these opportunities. Christianity, for Newman, can never be a matter of outward forms, it has to be inward—

He is not a Christian who is one outwardly, who merely comes to Church, and professes a desire to be saved by Christ ... He is the true Christian, who, while he is a Christian outwardly, is one inwardly also; who lives to God; whose secret life is hid with Christ in God; whose heart is religious.<sup>79</sup>

This is superficially attractive, but, as is so often the case, Newman takes the argument too far. He goes on to insist that we are justified by works—but they have to be works done in faith and by the power of the Spirit: ‘The way of salvation is by works, as under the Law, but it is by “works which spring out of faith”, and which come of “the inspiration of the Spirit”.’<sup>80</sup> As far as he is concerned, works and faith cannot be set in opposition to each other. That which is inspired by faith must be brought to completion by good works—

There can be no doubt at all that salvation is by faith ... but still it may be by works also; for ... obedience is the *road* to heaven, and faith the *gate* ... Those particular works, which commence in faith, these are the only right and sure road to heaven?<sup>81</sup>

Good works and ecclesiastical ordinances have a place in justification along with faith—

It does not follow that works done in faith do not justify, because works done without faith do not justify; that works done in the Holy Ghost, and ordinances which are His instruments, do not justify, because carnal works and dead rites do not justify.<sup>82</sup>

This is not a mere doctrine of human merit. It is far more complicated than that. Man is not saved by his good works, but by good works produced in him by the Holy Spirit. He can speak explicitly of ‘the nothingness of man and the all-sufficiency of Christ’ and insist that ‘in our natural state, and by our own strength, we are not and cannot be justified by obedience’.<sup>83</sup> The fact that it is God who makes a man able to please Him is what, in Newman’s eyes, absolves this teaching from the charge of Pelagianism; the good works are not man’s works but God’s—

[That] in our natural state, and by our own strength, we are not and cannot be justified by obedience, is admitted on all hands ... and to deny it is the heresy of Pelagius. But it is a distinct question altogether, whether *with* the presence of God the Holy Ghost we can obey unto justification.<sup>84</sup>

Faith justifies, good works justify, and baptism also justifies because it brings the indwelling presence of Christ, which is the foundation of all righteousness. The sacraments are ‘the only *justifying* rites, or instruments of communicating the Atonement, which *is* the one thing necessary to us’.<sup>85</sup> Baptism is primary because the Holy Spirit, who is the foundation of all righteousness, comes in

baptism. Therefore, 'Faith ... is justifying because of Baptism,'<sup>86</sup> and 'Sacraments are the immediate, Faith is the secondary, subordinate, or representative instrument of justification'.<sup>87</sup>

I should explain myself thus:- I do not consider that lively faith is the primary seed of inherent righteousness, but that the indwelling Spirit is. Faith may exist in the unregenerate, but it is dead. The indwelling Spirit enters through Baptism, and henceforth faith is both lively and the instrument of justification. Baptism is the original instrument and issues in the entrance of the Spirit in which, not as by a second process, consists our justification'.<sup>88</sup>

This position gives him huge trouble in trying to evade the force of Article 11, which states that—

We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore, that we are justified by faith only is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort.

Righteousness is, for him, centred on the presence of Christ within, making the Christian holy: 'The righteousness in which God accepts us is inherent, wrought in us by the grace flowing from Christ's Atonement,' so he explicitly rejects a forensic view because 'it is external, reputed, nominal, being Christ's own sacred and most perfect obedience on earth, viewed by a merciful God as if it were ours'.<sup>89</sup> He thinks that the biblical position, rediscovered by the Reformers, that Christ died to pay the price for the sins of His people, and that His righteousness is counted to them for righteousness 'meagre and artificial' compared with his doctrine (shared by Rome) of righteousness implanted by the sacraments—

And so if our Church has at any time forgotten the Living Presence conveyed in the Sacraments, an opening has been at once made for the meagre and artificial doctrine of a nominal righteousness. So many passages are there which speak of the Atonement as still living in Christians, that if we will not enforce them literally, we must be content to hear them explained away into a mere imputation of it in God's dealings with us, or into a contemplation of it by our faith.<sup>90</sup>

If the righteousness of Christ is not imputed to Christians but only infused to

some degree or other, it means that the joy of the Gospel is removed completely. We never become perfect, and while our sin might be to some degree passed over, it remains in the sight of God. The perfect forgiveness achieved in baptism is never repeated—

In Baptism there is a plenary remission of all that is passed that none such occurs again in this life ... We are admitted as a transgressing child might be ... according as we pray, repent, and are absolved, to a lower state of our Father's favour ... without more however than the suspension of our sins over our heads.<sup>91</sup>

Turner follows a number of other commentators in admiring the *Lectures on Justification* saying that they are 'the greatest of Newman's theological works composed while he remained in the English Church', and are his 'most powerful, eloquent, and moving theological work'.<sup>92</sup> Newman's position is superficially attractive because, while it links justification with the demand for sanctification, it by no means demands that a man justifies himself, for it is the Holy Spirit who produces the fruit which lead to justification. He said that he was trying to hold together the best of both the Roman Catholic and the Protestant doctrines of justification, but in doing so, he was, according to Buchanan,<sup>93</sup> merely reproducing the teaching of Osiander in the sixteenth century.

One of the earliest, and possibly the classic, Evangelical response to Newman was that of G.S. Faber. He frankly admitted that while he could understand Newman's separate propositions, he could by no means reconcile them with each other. He went on to say—

The *least* evil of Mr. Newman's System is, that it is a tissue of contradictions and inconsistencies. Were it *nothing* more, it would reflect only upon his own clearness of apprehension: but unhappily, it exhibits a strange and mischievous attempt to mix up together, wholesome food and rank poison, the sound doctrine of the Church of England and the pernicious dogmas of the Church of Rome.<sup>94</sup>

Cunningham went further and described Newman's doctrine as 'beyond all reasonable doubt, identical, in its fundamental principles and general tendencies, with that of the Council of Trent and the Church of Rome'<sup>95</sup> because it replaces the idea of imputed righteousness with that of imparted righteousness as a basis for judgment.

Concerning Osiander, Calvin says that ‘not contented with that righteousness, which was procured for us by the obedience and sacrificial death of Christ, he maintains that we are substantially righteous in God by an infused essence as well as quality’. Therefore, says Calvin, this doctrine has disastrous consequences: ‘if we would not knowingly and willingly allow ourselves to be robbed of that righteousness which alone gives us full assurance of our salvation, we must strenuously resist.’<sup>96</sup>

Newman’s position does indeed, as Calvin predicted, lead to a state of what can only be called profound pessimism. In a series of poems from November 1832, he writes that ‘Even holiest deeds, Shroud not the soul from God, nor soothe its needs.’<sup>97</sup> In the poem ‘Bondage,’ it is even worse:

Oh prophet, tell me not of peace,  
Or Christ’s all-loving deeds;  
Death only can from sin release,  
And death to judgment brings?<sup>98</sup>

This is not the joy of the Lord! It might be religion, but it is far from Christian, and this is the man celebrated in the Anglican lectionary and beatified by Rome. Let us beware!

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