

Newman and his Critics

A Chapter in the History of Ideas

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It was originally my intention to compose a general account of the influence of Newman on Catholic educational thought in this country and the United States. Although I had planned only a brief sketch, it soon became apparent that this subject was too complex and extensive for short treatment. However, in reviewing the literature in preparation for this large topic I became interested in another undertaking – a description of the strange neglect and misunderstanding of Newman's teachings which is so general among modern critics. Such a study seemed particularly appropriate as we approach the centenary of Newman's conversion. In view of the abiding interest and importance of Newman's work for English-speaking Catholics everywhere, and the affectionate esteem in which they hold him, I am sure that you will not feel that this paper is altogether unsuitable for the Canadian Catholic Historical Association.

The literature devoted to the Oxford Movement and to Newman's own life is voluminous and much of it superior in quality. Newman himself wrote nearly forty volumes, most of them of very great distinction. His friends within the Movement also left behind their record of what they felt to be the most interesting years of their lives, and of these Dean R. W. Church's "Oxford Movement" is numbered among the most attractive historical monographs of the last century. Newman achieved one of the classic autobiographies of any age in the "Apologia pro Vita Sua", and then was doubly fortunate in his official biographer, Wilfrid Ward, who published in 1912 a massive two-volume "life" in the best Victorian style without the usual quality of dullness which that description elsewhere implies. Ward also wrote several illuminating essays in his collected works of special value to the student. In more recent times shorter studies by Webb and by Christopher Dawson shed additional light on the place of Newman's thought in the nineteenth century. I have mentioned here only the chief and obvious sources for any account of Newman's development. Any conscientious reader who studies this material with care should come away with a sound knowledge of one of the most interesting and original religious thinkers in modern times.

It seems to me obvious therefore that anyone who misunderstands or

misinterprets Newman is either careless or perverse in his handling of the sources which are not only extensive but usually clear and easy to assimilate. No one, of course, is under the obligation of accepting Newman's arguments nor is anyone criticized in this essay for failing to do so, but in view of the ample and available material for the historian we may properly require any writer to exhibit a full understanding of Newman's opinions before he proceeds to comment upon them and we may reasonably censure those who do not make this elementary effort.

During his own life time, even before the appearance of many of the works which are listed above, there was a very general knowledge of Newman's position and much intelligent comment on his views. In the present century, however, with the honourable exceptions noted, there has been a steady deterioration in the quality and value of the writings devoted to the study of Newman. This was painfully evident in 1933 when a flurry of articles, pamphlets and books appeared in celebration of the Centenary of the Oxford Movement. The great majority of these were written from the Anglican point of view, with special attention to the influence of Newman and his followers upon the subsequent history of the English Church. Even when this was accomplished adequately and without controversial bitterness there was a general failure to grasp the wide range of Newman's thought or to select its chief features. In this connection it might be noted that Catholic writers generally decided to withhold their centenary reflections until 1945, and it is certainly to be hoped that wartime preoccupations will not unduly delay the appearance of their long awaited studies.

With these preliminary remarks we may proceed to a brief restatement of the outstanding episodes in Newman's career, keeping in view the more frequent misinterpretations. The most important event in Newman's life was his reception into the Catholic Church in October, 1845. It was the result of prolonged thought and anxious study. He has himself documented each step of the process in the "Apologia" and in the many letters which he wrote in the period 1839-45. To put the matter succinctly, he had gradually lost his confidence and faith in Anglican doctrine and had come to believe and accept Catholic teachings in their stead. Two misconceptions about his conversion are frequently expressed. The first of these is the notion that it came about as the direct result of a series of errors in tactics on the part of his opponents within the Anglican Church. It is suggested that he might never have become a Catholic if the Anglican Bishops had not condemned Tract 90 and if the academic politicians of Oxford had been more restrained and amiable in their opposition. This is distinctly the view of Dean Church, otherwise so acute, and there is something to be said for it, but not, I am convinced, very much. Surely it is evident that Newman was on the move, that he had accepted certain premises and was working out the consequences relentlessly. Possibly

the incidents referred to accelerated his progress just as others not emphasized by Dean Church might have retarded it, but Newman's decision was reached after profound reflections which were comparatively undisturbed by the course of events around him. Of this he was not himself fully conscious at the time but that such was the case clearly emerges from even a cursory perusal of the "Apologia".

The second popular error concerning his conversion is the belief that he was captivated by romantic notions about the Middle Ages, and the vast and powerful Church of that day. It is suggested that he saw the Catholic Church through a sentimental haze and a poetic shimmer of pageants, cathedrals and colourful crusades, and that he followed this mirage until he found himself in the Rome of the nineteenth century. Some of his critics hint darkly that there was then a rude awakening which Newman was too proud to acknowledge and that he came in time to regret his false step bitterly. With this latter insinuation we need not concern ourselves. The circulation of this rumour alternately amused and annoyed Newman himself who finally took note of it in terms, which dispose conclusively of the ridiculous suggestion.

The main point seems now to be solidly established in literary and historical handbooks.¹ It fits in so well with the desire of the critics to classify and tabulate: Is not the early nineteenth century the age of the Romantic Movement? Does not Newman himself admit an interest in the novels of Sir Walter Scott? All this clearly betokens enchantment with the Medieval scene and suits the scheme of things so neatly that our literary critics have usually connected the Oxford Movement with the widespread literary and artistic trend of the day. No one can, of course, exclude entirely the possibility that Newman and his associates, especially Hurrell Froude, were influenced to some degree by such considerations but there is no strong evidence that they were and the probabilities are entirely against it.

It is true that Newman took much pleasure in reading the novels of Scott – but so did many others who remained quite unshaken in their Presbyterian or Anglican beliefs. This whole theory has arisen for the simple reason that in their own minds many critics have vaguely identified Catholicism with the Middle Ages, and they rashly assume that Newman also linked them together. If he became a Catholic, they reasoned, it must have been through admiration for Medievalism, a conveniently broad term. This view will not stand examination. There may be Converts who have been moved largely by esthetic motives in joining the Catholic Church, although I beg leave to doubt that their numbers are many or their conversion of long duration, but Newman is certainly not one of them.

¹ E.g. J. H. Randall, Jr.: *The Making of the Modern Mind*, rev. ed. (1940) p. 438; 533.

The most casual study of his writings reveals that his historical studies were concentrated on the Primitive, not the Medieval Church. If the critics balk at reading through his volumes of sermons and of essays on theology and history they might at least read the titles and the chapter headings before printing their confident assertions. Certainly the Arians and Athanasius were not of the Middle Ages, nor were the Apostolic Fathers or the Patristic writers with whom he was so largely engaged in the crisis of his life. Here again the evidence of the "Apologia" is conclusive. He had his first serious doubt of Anglicanism when he was mastering the history of the Monophysites. As he says, his stronghold was Antiquity, and here in the middle of the fifth century he found the Church rejecting as heretical views which seemed to him identical with his own.²

This is only one of the many significant passages of the "Apologia" in which the evidence of the Early Church is under review. In this field, as he claimed, Newman was a specialist. He was at home with the Christian Fathers but he knew little or nothing of the theologians or philosophers of the Middle Ages. The last book he wrote as an Anglican was "An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine". It is exclusively occupied with the endeavour to ascertain whether the fullness of Catholic doctrine today is the normal and natural growth of the apostolic teachings exhibited in the works of the Fathers and the decisions of the Early Church. Since it had no place in his argument he quite passed over the Medieval Church in which, in fact, he had no great interest in 1845. Newman accepted Catholicism when he had satisfied himself that in all essentials it was identical with the Primitive Church.

I have emphasized this point because it is important to the argument of this paper to understand that Newman did not become a Catholic until he had followed a long and arduous train of thought. It is interesting to note that his approach to the problem was essentially historical.

The way is now clear to deal with Newman's career within the Catholic Church. I believe that the final period of his life has also been much misinterpreted and misunderstood by both Catholic and Protestant writers. Non-Catholic writers have in some instances freely confessed their embarrassment in describing Newman's life within the Church. If they praise his books without reserve, even from the purely literary point of view, they fear that they may be thought by implication to extend this approval to Catholicism itself. Consequently to avoid such misunderstanding they introduce many criticisms into their account of his life and thought. Among the more anxious defenders of Protestantism this sometimes leads to ridiculous conclusions. This is most noticeable among literary critics who in

² *Apologia*, (Everyman Edition) pp. 118-119.

their determination to see that Newman's fame shall lend no lustre to his religion make a number of distinctions, some of them contradictory one to the other.

In any given period an author's general reputation does not rest directly on the learned and exact studies issued by the major critics of the day. It is sustained rather by the smaller handbooks, convenient for the use of the hard pressed University student or curious reader who assumes that these texts represent a distillation of the best critical opinion. Sometimes, of course, this is the case but on occasions the compiler is not himself a competent critic and introduces some perverse or ill-founded notions of his own which in time become more influential than the views of the sounder scholars who are consulted only by the specialist. Newman's work has been badly treated in some of these compilations and as a result appreciation of his writings has suffered. Two examples will suffice.

In his popular and useful manual of Victorian Literature which first appeared in 1910 Hugh Walker has included an excellent description of Newman's style. However, he follows it with some extraordinary observations about his writings in general.³ A favourite assertion of the cruder opponents of Newman had been that his Catholic works were much inferior to his Anglican books because he had surrendered all independence of thought once he had become a Catholic. Walker is familiar with the idea and indeed substantially accepts it with certain improvements of his own, but he feels the necessity of escaping the contradiction which was so obvious in these older critics. They had explained that Newman's later writings were inferior but commonly contradicted this estimate by devoting most of their space to these supposedly less important works! Walker maintains the position but evades the difficulty by implying instead that Newman never fulfilled his earlier promise once he bowed to Rome. True, in the "Apologia" his old genius roused by bitter indignation broke through the fetters and we have a great work, but in general his intellectual life reveals a process of deterioration which set in even before his conversion. In conclusion Walker quotes with approval Dean Stanley's famous description of an interview with Newman late in 1864 which left him with the impression that Newman's was "a totally wasted life". Walker's handbook was reprinted many times but he never seems to have suspected the absurd contradiction which he has here maintained. In May, 1864, Newman completed the "Apologia" and earned thereby a place in English literature which was secure if he had written nothing else. Yet in October, 1864, we are invited on the authority of Dean Stanley to contemplate "a totally wasted life".

In his youth Dean Stanley had been briefly attracted to the Oxford

³ *The Literature of the Victorian Era* (Cambridge, 1910) pp. 114-121.

Movement but had subsequently lost interest. He was a man of genial and expansive personality with a vivid and picturesque literary style and by reason of these qualities had won a position of some prominence within the Anglican Church. On the other hand he had little capacity for the profound problems of philosophy or theology⁴ and his friends, among them the celebrated Bishop Lightfoot had advised him to leave such matters alone and to concentrate on the popular lectures and sermons which he could do so well. When we read his story⁵ of the visit to Newman with this background in mind it takes on a new significance. Stanley mentions several recent books, which to his horror he finds his host has not read. He discusses some of the biblical theories of the higher critics but fails to draw Newman out. In his own account he emerges clearly as one of those men commonly met with in academic circles who know what the questions of the moment are and who read all the latest magazine articles and books, mistaking this rather feverish activity for solid intellectual labour. Anyone who has read Newman's letters knows that he generally regarded such preoccupation as a waste of time and avoided it in favour of concentration on the problems which he had set himself. Stanley's interview, so often quoted by critics of Newman, is really a reflection upon Stanley himself since it displays the superficial character of his own interests. Unfortunately this ironical fact has escaped the attention of many readers who still accept Stanley's estimate of Newman at face value.

The point of view which Walker supported and adorned with this quotation was too exaggerated to commend itself unreservedly even to those who shared his disapproval of Newman. It is instructive to compare his opinion with that of a recent critic, George Sampson, who has just published an attractive manual which seems destined to be widely used since it is a one-volume condensation of the fourteen volumes of the Cambridge History of English Literature.⁶ This writer devotes some space to Newman and exhibits a sharp bias which is lacking in the larger work which he has undertaken to abbreviate. He is much neater than Walker, preferring the glancing blow and the light allusion to any direct attack. He explains for example that Newman had "no great learning", an observation which will astound anyone who has

⁴ R. H. Hutton: *Contemporary Thoughts and Thinkers* (London, 1894) Vol. 2, p. 133; *Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol. XVIII, p. 933.

⁵ It can be found in R. E. Prothero: *Life and Letters of Dean Stanley* (London, 1893) Vol. 2, pp. 340-342.

⁶ *Concise Cambridge History of English Literature* (Cambridge, 1941) pp. 677-678.

admired Newman's closely documented historical works⁷ or his admirable exposition of difficult theological questions. Note too that these words are calculated to give us a poor impression of Newman, although they actually have no bearing whatever on the discussion even if they are true. Sampson also adds casually that Newman was "unstable" and "irresolute", two words which might have an excuse if he is thinking of Newman's cautious and anxious deliberation on major questions, but are pointless and absurd when applied to his life as a whole, the chief characteristic of which was a tenacity and resolution which was the despair of his more politic friends.

Sampson is clever enough to set that the Anglican works are generally too tentative and provisional in character to satisfy the later reader who knows that Newman himself subsequently abandoned many of the views which he was there supporting, but he does not balance this concession with any generous appreciation of the later works. Even the "Apologia" is so described that the uninformed reader is left with the impression that Kingsley was worsted not because his case was bad but because his tactics were clumsy and he allowed himself to be confined to an untenable position. We are assured that "Kingsley had a sound sense that something was wrong with Newman", and that the "Apologia", "does not entirely dispel doubts". One cannot argue with the bland effrontery of such evasion of the evidence since it displays the utter absence of even the small amount of goodwill which is presumed to be indispensable in the understanding critic. Unfortunately it is not original with Sampson and cannot be dismissed as an irritating but isolated example of artful dialectic. Others have argued occasionally in the past on the same lines, hoping to rescue some shreds of Kingsley's case.⁸ There is no refutation useful in these cases except the reminder that Newman himself dealt with Kingsley's specific charges and then, anticipating just such sly and stubborn reservations as those I have quoted, broadened the scope of his reply into the full story of his religious life. The pages of the "Apologia" are alight with candour and carry overwhelming conviction into any mind not already determined to cling desperately to old prejudices and to resist at any cost the impact of unwelcome truth.

The damage done to Newman's historical reputation by these critics,

⁷ Dollinger declared that Newman was the greatest living authority on the history of the first three centuries of the Christian era. Ward: *Life of John Henry Cardinal Newman* (London, 1912) Vol. 1, p. 444.

⁸ A notorious example of this was the short preface written by Charles Sarolea and printed in the first edition of the "Apologia" which appeared in the Everyman Series. This introduction was a most offensive piece of sectarian argument and was withdrawn by the publishers from later editions.

whom we may now dismiss with relief from this discussion, is frequently increased by many biographers who put excessive emphasis on the trials and failures of his Catholic career. Undoubtedly these events possess a certain dramatic quality and they deserve to be recounted in detail in view of the interest which attaches to the persons involved, but too often his biographers have neglected to mention counterbalancing factors.

It is quite true that Newman suffered humiliation and encountered undeserved opposition. Time and again in the space of the twelve years between 1852 and 1864 schemes of great utility on which he was engaged came to nothing, but this is not unique in human history and the tears which Newman's biographers shed over his "persecution" seem to show a lack of perspective. I venture to make two observations which may not be very popular but which I feel will restore some proportion in this matter.

Newman was a party leader whether he wished it or not. This always surprised him and in the "Apologia" he frequently mentions that men looked to him of their own accord and came to him without invitation. He did not seek leadership; it was granted to him or rather thrust upon him. And this is the heart of the matter, he remained a party leader even as a Catholic. Now party leaders must expect opposition and periods of ill fortune when their views and influence are misrepresented or accounted of little consequence. This was Newman's fate for a time and, here indeed he was only repeating his Anglican experience. It is odd that few biographers realize this. They see nothing unusual or sinister in the fact that he was hotly opposed in his Anglican days and that his opponents did all in their power to isolate him and to counteract his views but they are strangely disturbed when Manning and others within the Catholic Church criticize Newman or make use of their greater influence in Rome to thwart projects which they thought undesirable. Nor will it do to represent Newman as quite friendless and powerless, brushed aside by the great ecclesiastics of the moment. He was at all times befriended by his superior, Archbishop Ullathorne, a man of strong intellect and blunt honesty whose sheer weight of character made him the second figure of the hierarchy, scarcely less important than Manning himself. Remember that this doughty man, a bishop for over forty years, before Newman was a priest or Manning even a Catholic, deeply appreciated⁹ and staunchly supported Newman in every venture, and it becomes clear that if Newman had to suffer many disappointments and persistent opposition which some times

⁹ Many proofs of this were given but the most touching was Ullathorne's dedication to Newman of what he knew to be his last book. The text and Newman's reply, both couched in warmer language than mere courtesy required, can be found in Butler: *Life and Times of Bishop Ullathorne* (London, 1926) Vol. 2, pp. 277-278.

approached persecution, he still had powerful champions.¹⁰ Newman's unhappy experience can be matched with others in secular and ecclesiastical history and is altogether consistent with the uncertainty and injustice which is such a common feature of human affairs. Few important lives have been comfortable and tranquil or free from vexation nor did Newman ever expect that his would or should be. He was singularly free of bitterness and measured his troubles with the yardstick of eternity. And in the end he was, after all, made a Cardinal, the highest dignity which the Pope could bestow. Leo XIII who made this one of the first acts of his great pontificate had himself experienced misunderstanding and hostility. After a youthful failure in the diplomatic service he had been relegated to one of the lesser Italian sees and had waited much longer than was customary for one in his position for the honour of the cardinalate. Even when he received it he remained out of favour with many papal officials and for over twenty years wielded little or no influence in Rome.

One further consideration remains in dealing with Newman's failures. His best biographer, Ward, has admitted and indeed emphasized certain qualities in Newman which contributed to his difficulties. He did not pretend to be a man of any great experience in practical matters or of special aptitude in administration. He was extremely sensitive and found it very difficult to ignore personal differences. Criticism and opposition hurt him more than it should have. This he knew but found difficult to remedy or offset. For one of his disposition and temperament it seems to me that through good fortune Newman found the very environment which suited him best. The Birmingham Oratory with its modified community life, had certain obvious resemblances to the college system in Oxford. It was there that Newman had been happiest and had developed his great powers. The chief features of life in Oxford are difficult to describe to those who have never experienced them and this is particularly so of the intellectual stimulation which comes from the intimate contact with persons of similar tastes and interests. Conversation and discussion play a large part in Oxford and no one who reads the history of the Oxford Movement can miss the importance of this factor in the growth of Newman's opinion. I do not believe that it has ever been sufficiently emphasized that Newman's foundation of the Oratory on his return to England after his ordination in Rome was the most fortunate decision in his life since it provided him with a new home having many of the familiar features of the old ways in Oxford. Newman had a great adjustment to make in leaving the Anglican Church and an added problem in giving up Oxford, but he made the

¹⁰ Ignorance of this fact is one of the many flaws in Lytton Strachey's flashy and meretricious essay on Manning in *Eminent Victorians* and quite ruins his attempt to portray the relations of Newman and Manning

transition with rare success. He was a man who depended greatly on his friends and who drew much consolation from their esteem and affection. In the Oratory he was surrounded by men of mature mind and similar aim and what this meant to him is clearly revealed in the final page of the "Apologia" on which he pays moving tribute to his comrades.

The kind of life he lived in Birmingham is frankly portrayed in the remarkable letter from Archbishop Ullathorne which is usually appended to editions of the "Apologia".¹¹ Those who think of Newman as an intellectual somewhat remote from his common fellow men will be agreeably surprised by the revelation of the pastoral activity which Ullathorne makes on behalf of Newman. His life was full of such devoted tasks both before and after 1864 and they formed the consolation for his disappointments in more publicized enterprises.

I hope that these extended criticisms have made clear what I regard as the sound interpretation of Newman's career with respect to common errors. At this point I should like to summarize very briefly the important aspects of his life with special reference to those writings and theories which are still influential. In this connection it is important to distinguish between those writings which were directed against largely Anglican doctrines and those which were aimed at the rationalists and agnostics of the day. I am convinced that the first group which were most widely discussed when they first appeared have the less importance for our own day, and that the second which were never adequately appreciated still retain their significance and ought to receive renewed attention from Christian apologists.

I assume that we may leave to one side in so brief a discussion works of largely literary interest. Similarly I believe that Newman's historical studies, with the great exception of the "Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine", have largely served their purpose. Later scholarship has naturally left certain details antiquated and controversy has in any case shifted its ground to other issues. Even within the Anglican Church much less weight is now put on historical arguments than was the case in Newman's day. The tendency to ignore or, to explain away historical objections which were once of the highest controversial interest had begun in Newman's own life-time. In fact it can be attributed to the Oxford movement itself, since it was the obvious reaction for those who disliked but could not disprove the historical theses of Newman to assert that they were not in any case important. Newman was always quick to sense any change in the current of thought about him and I believe that the explanation for his own eventual abandonment of the field of history was his realization that historical arguments were no longer very effective with his opponents.

¹¹ Pages 323-326 (Everyman's Library).

However, beyond the ranks of the professional theologians there remained among the common people in all Anglo-Saxon Protestant countries a strong instinct that the teaching and practice of the Early Church were all-important and represented the pure and uncorrupted version of Christ's doctrine. This, of course, is the reason why every founder of those new evangelical religions which spring up in such numbers in our day claims that he has discovered and refounded Primitive Christianity. No effort is ever made to prove such glib assertions but the eagerness with which they are accepted by considerable numbers of restless adherents is a strong indication that the problem which Newman posed in the "Essay on Development" is still a practical one. The notion that any doctrine which is not set forth in the New Testament must be *contrary* to its teaching has become strongly rooted since the controversies of the Reformation. In a unique and original way Newman showed that there was nothing logical in this assumption of itself and that the usual suspicion of Catholic doctrine as a vast elaboration going beyond the true teaching of Christ and incorporating elements contradictory to that teaching could not be substantiated by a close study of the early history of the Church.

I write here subject to correction but so far as I am aware no Catholic historian has ever attempted to follow up Newman's argument or to present other aspects of it in the same popular and effective manner. "The Essay on Development" is commonly called a great pioneer work but we ought to add that no significant attempts have been made to follow its example. This remains one of the great neglected opportunities of the Catholic historian.

Unfortunately we must speak in the same way of the second group of Newman's writings, those which were aimed at the rationalists of the day. The testimony of these men is itself a revelation. Among the defenders of Christianity the one man to whom they constantly returned was Newman and this was particularly true after the publication of "The Grammar of Assent" in 1870. If you look into the writings of Stephen or Benn, among the most active rationalists of the late nineteenth century, you will find that they do Newman the honour of very close attention and most elaborate attempts at refutation.

The explanation for this is the fact that from early manhood Newman had been deeply interested in the analysis of Faith and Reason. The superficial contrast of these in which faith was equated with mere credulity had become widely accepted among critics of religion and Newman gave his first attention to the question in sermons preached at Oxford before he was thirty. His interest in the difficult problem deepened and he returned to it again and again in sermons of progressive excellence in which he pushed his examination further and further. He gathered the best of these together and published them in 1843 in a volume usually called "Oxford University Sermons". The final edition of this work contained fifteen sermons in all and Newman always

looked back upon it as his best book although he was aware that he had not completed his contribution to the subject..

There is scarcely a work of Newman's after his conversion in which he does not touch in some form or another upon the definition of Faith and Reason and it was a problem to which his thoughts were constantly recurring. At last in 1866 he began in earnest to compose a full treatise. No work ever gave him such trouble or extended his intellectual powers to such a degree. He rewrote parts of it as often as ten times and was frequently in despair that he would ever succeed in completing it. Finally he did so as he approached his seventieth year, conscious that at his age it would remain his last major work. With that awkward but rather delightful academic precision of his he called it "An Essay in Aid of A Grammar of Assent".

It is not an easy book to read. There is just sufficient technical terminology to deter the ordinary reader and the subject requires close and serious attention. Those who made the effort to master it found themselves in the possession of a rich and clear account of our rational life, possessing a fullness of analysis which was in marked contrast to the confident assertions of the rationalists. It is no wonder that Stephen devoted a lengthy chapter in "An Agnostic's Apology" to Newman's philosophy of belief and that others of similar views expressed something like alarm at this most unexpected assault on propositions which seemed immune from attack. It was considered by freethinkers generally that Newman's book constituted the most formidable rebuttal of their opinions and was a contribution to Logic and Psychology deserving of respect if not acceptance.

The rationalist attack is still in full swing, and that "unprecedented outburst of infidelity all over the world" which Newman foresaw¹² had indeed taken place. Old arguments must still be met but Newman's book has been little used in the debate despite the respectful tributes of his enemies. It was severely criticized by several Catholic writers when it first appeared, and then, despite the efforts of several champions, notably Jesuit writers,¹³ was largely neglected by Catholic as well as Protestant writers. In 1931 the distinguished Jesuit philosopher, Father M. C. D'Arcy, could still describe it as a book which had never received the attention which it deserved. Father D'Arcy's own study of "The Grammar of Assent"¹⁴ may well be a turning point in the history of the book, since it is a careful reconciliation of the language and argument of Newman with the more familiar Scholastic tradition. He deals

¹² Quoted in Ward, o.c., Vol. I, p. 58.

¹³ Writers in the Stonyhurst Philosophical Series refer to it with respect, e. g. M. Maher: *Psychology*, p. 324.

¹⁴ *The Nature of Belief* (London, 1931).

fully with what he regards as the unsatisfactory part of Newman's theory but does so in such a spirit and with such proportion that he does not obscure the essential and permanent value of the work.¹⁵ It is quite conceivable that his interpretation may lead to a revival of interest among Catholic writers in Newman's approach to this most vital question. In the meanwhile, however, the name of Newman rarely occurs in any Catholic work of philosophy.

If the foregoing interpretation of Newman's influence is to be accepted we must describe it as distinctly limited in the intellectual field even within the Catholic Church. It is potential rather than actual at the present time and the likelihood of a revival is entirely a matter of speculation and surmise.

I am well aware that in fields outside those I have described it could be argued that Newman's influence is great and expanding. The large decline of rude bigotry in England is in part his work; his literary style is a delight and a boon to many students of the English language; his prayers and meditations are widely used and have an effect which it would be an impertinence to assess in a paper of this kind. All this I readily grant, but with respect to the two most original and valuable of his books, the "Essay on Development" and "The Grammar of Assent", it must be conceded that it is a story of neglect and inadequate appreciation. Why should this be so? The answer, I believe, is to be found in several historical reasons, chief among which are the brief episode of Modernism, and the rise of Scholasticism in the present century.

The concern over Modernism undoubtedly did Newman's reputation great harm within the Catholic Church, since it revived old suspicions and seemed to justify those critics who had once regarded him as scarcely orthodox. The taint of "liberalism" which Manning and others had made the subject of anxious communication to Rome seemed to have some basis in fact considering the support which certain Modernists declared they found for their theories in Newman's writings. There is something incredible in this last tragedy to befall Newman – the man who assailed rationalism with all his might, who carefully diagnosed the "liberalism" of his day and repeatedly warned his contemporaries of the dangers of the current contempt for dogma, to be adopted after his death as the patron of a movement which was leading the way to a complete dissolution of dogma and tradition. Yet such an attempt was made and for a time, in spite of the obvious contradiction, stubbornly maintained. The history of Modernism has never been written in a satisfactory manner and probably never will be, since deceit, evasion and petty intrigue characterized the actions of the chief leaders of the Movement and make it nearly impossible to see the developments clearly.

This much, however, is clear, that Modernists like Tyrrell in England quoted Newman frequently in support of their views – when Tyrrell was

¹⁵ O. C., p. 107 and p. 147 for neat summaries.

excommunicated he issued an angry statement declaring that such action was a great affront to those who had followed Cardinal Newman into the Church. In France the chief student of Newman was that brilliant writer and scholar, Abbé Henri Bremond, who had translated many of his works and who had published a searching if somewhat tendentious biography of him. Unfortunately the Abbé Bremond was himself deeply implicated if not compromised in the Modernist heresy through his close personal friendship with Tyrrell and Loisy, and was, indeed, deprived for a brief time of his religious faculties for his irregular conduct in assisting at Tyrrell's funeral when the latter died still under sentence of excommunication.

It seemed, then, that the name of Newman was constantly arising in connection with Modernism and it was only natural that a few began to wonder whether these bold claims might not have some foundation in fact. When the excitement over Modernism was at its height in 1907 and 1908 it finally became necessary to take notice of these fears. Bishop O'Dwyer of Limerick issued a pamphlet which demolished the common assertions and it is stated on excellent authority that Cardinal Bourne commissioned an eminent theologian to prepare a brief in defense of Newman's orthodoxy, especially in "The Grammar of Assent".¹⁶ These and other measures effectively demonstrated that the affirmations of the Modernists had been without foundation but they could not as easily dispose of the unpleasant impression which the whole episode left with those who were already indifferent or unsympathetic to Newman. To their original reasons for neglecting his writings they could now add prudence. Needless to say this view was not long sustained or very widely held but it had the effect of discouraging the study of Newman during the early years of this century at the very time when it was first possible to see his work as a whole.

For a very different reason the revival of Scholasticism indirectly had the same result. It must be remembered that Newman entered the Church at a time when there was limited interest in the Scholastic philosophers and that he was nearly eighty years old when Leo XIII issued the encyclical "Aeterni patris" which initiated the revival of Scholasticism. Newman was not familiar with the tradition of St. Thomas nor did he use the terminology of the Schools. He is therefore outside the tradition in which most Catholic thinkers of the present day have been formed and are doing their most effective work. At first reading such works of Newman's as "The Grammar of Assent" are puzzling, and not very attractive in some particulars, for those who are well grounded in Scholasticism. Once a student has apprehended the richness and fruitfulness of the great Scholastic writers he has much less interest in consulting authors further afield. For this reason Father D'Arcy's learned and

¹⁶ Maisie Ward: *Insurrection versus Resurrection* (London, 1937) p. 337.

sympathetic commentary on “The Grammar of Assent” is of special significance, since he can write as a competent Scholastic philosopher.

To put the matter in another way, Newman has suffered the fate of any isolated genius whose thought is marked by deep originality. He stands apart and cannot be easily related to the older schools. A few students will always make the effort but for the majority he is easier to ignore than to understand in comparative terms.

Perhaps mention should be made of a third reason which has contributed to the current neglect of Newman’s writings. In the past few decades religious writers have broadened the scope of their studies and have begun to give close attention to the moral implications of economic and political questions. These are the new preoccupations of our time and are beyond the range of Newman and his contemporaries. The spirit of the age cannot be ignored and theologians have had to deal with these issues. This was something which Newman would understand clearly and on which he had acted himself when he made a stand against the trends of the nineteenth century with arguments which would have seemed entirely novel to his predecessors. In other words, Newman is no longer a great contemporary or one of the masters of the older generation. He has become one of the giants of yesterday with ever fewer links with the present.

Much of this is inevitable and no matter of complaint or blame but it will be distinctly unfortunate for the vitality of religious apologetic in the face of secular and rationalist attack if Newman’s contributions are further neglected and are not fully assimilated into our tradition. Perhaps the trends which I have regretted in this paper may continue until Newman’s works cease to be of interest except to the antiquarian, but I cannot believe it. Like Pascal, he understands the human mind and heart so well that in these things he must surely continue to be the instructor of even the wisest of men for many generations to come.