
Was Newman a «Theologian»?

¿Fue Newman un «teólogo»?

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Keith BEAUMONT

Association Francophone des Amis de Newman
París. Francia
keith.beaumont806@orange.fr

Abstract: John Henry Newman is widely recognized as the greatest Catholic thinker of the 19th century; why then did he refuse the title of «theologian»? This refusal expressed above all a rejection of the dominant Catholic theology and philosophy of his day which was essentially conceptual, profoundly unhistorical, and – most importantly – divorced from the domain of spiritual experience. Newman's own theology is steeped in history, is profoundly biblically-based, and above all is inseparable from his spirituality. He insists on the importance of the «real» as opposed to the purely «notional». And if he insists on the importance of «dogma», it is because he is keenly aware that our manner of thinking about God determines our ability to *pray* to him and to *seek* him.

Keywords: John Henry Newman, Dogma, Theology and Spirituality, Church Fathers, «real» and «notional».

Resumen: John Henry Newman es ampliamente reconocido como el más importante pensador católico del siglo XIX. ¿Por qué, entonces, rechazó el título de «teólogo»? Esto expresaba sobre todo un rechazo a la teología y filosofía católica de su época, que era esencialmente conceptual, profundamente antihistórica y –lo que es más importante– que estaba separada de la experiencia espiritual. La teología de Newman está impregnada de historia, tiene una profunda base bíblica y, sobre todo, es inseparable de su espiritualidad. Si Newman insiste en la importancia del «dogma», es porque es muy consciente de que nuestra manera de pensar acerca de Dios determina nuestra capacidad de *rezar* a Dios y de *buscarle*.

Palabras clave: John Henry Newman, Dogma, Teología y espiritualidad, Padres de la Iglesia, real y teórico.

INTRODUCTION

The title of this essay may seem at first glance slightly absurd. After all, Newman is universally recognized as one of the seminal Christian thinkers of the nineteenth-century. He was capable of producing a series of powerful and original theological syntheses: his *Lectures on the Doctrine of Justification* (1838), his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845), his *Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (1870), his *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk* (1875) and his long ecclesiological sketch which forms the preface to volume I of the *Via Media* (1877) are outstanding examples of this. Following the calling by Pope Pius IX of the first Vatican Council he was invited by several bishops, both from his own country and abroad¹, to be their *peritus* or theological expert at the Council; Pius IX himself offered him the position of «Consultor» at the council². And his elevation to the rank of Cardinal by Leo XIII in 1879 was intended in part as a belated recognition and validation, at the highest ecclesial level, of his ideas.

Several twentieth-century Popes have also stressed his importance as a theologian. Paul VI, for example, declared in 1964 in a telegram addressed to the organizers of a Newman congress in Luxemburg that «the clarity of his insights and his teaching shed precious light on the problems of the Church today»³. In 1970, on the occasion of a further Newman congress in the same city, he described Newman as an «inspired precursor» who «had explored beforehand several of the paths to which our contemporaries are deeply committed»⁴. And in 1975, he spoke of the influence of Newman on the Second Vatican Council in the following terms: «Many of the problems which he treated with wisdom – although he himself was frequently misunderstood and misinterpreted in his own time – were the subjects of the discussion and study of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, as for example the question of ecumenism, the relationship between Christianity and the world, the emphasis on the role of the laity in the Church and the relationship of the Church to non-Christian religions. Not only this Council but also the present time can be

¹ Foremost amongst them was the Bishop of Orleans, Mgr Dupanloup, regarded as the leader of the «liberal» wing among the prelates.

² Letter of 14 November 1868 to PUSEY, E. B., in *Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman* [hereinafter *L&D*], vol. XIV, 171.

³ Quoted in *L'Osservatore Romano* (English edition), 4 June 1970.

⁴ *Ibid.*

considered in a special way as Newman's hour [...]»⁵. John Paul II, in an address of April 1990 at a symposium organized to commemorate the centenary of his death, referred to «the importance of this extraordinary figure, many of whose ideas enjoy a particular relevance in our own day», and to «the *unity* which he advocated between theology and science, between *the world of faith and the world of reason*»⁶. And in his encyclical *Fides et ratio* (1998) he placed the name of Newman at the head of a long list of «great Christian theologians» of recent centuries «who also distinguished themselves as great philosophers»⁷. Finally, in a lecture given at the same Newman symposium in Rome in 1990, the then Cardinal Ratzinger and future Pope Benedict XVI declared that Newman's two teachings on conscience and doctrinal development constituted a «decisive contribution to the renewal of theology», adding that with his conception of doctrinal development he «placed the key in our hands to build historical thought into theology, or much more, he taught us to think historically in theology and so to recognize the identity of faith in all developments»⁸.

NEWMAN'S REFUSAL OF THE TITLE OF THEOLOGIAN

And yet Newman resolutely and systematically refused the title of «theologian». For example, writing to his former Tractarian colleague, Edward Pusey, after a series of comments on various philosophical points he declared: «Mind, I do not write as a theologian, which I am not»⁹. He repeated this disclaimer the following year in a letter to the same correspondent on the subject of his decision not to attend the Vatican Council: «I am not a theologian, and should only have been wasting my time in matters which I did not understand»¹⁰. Two years later, in 1970, he stated in a letter to the Dominican Reginald Buckler: «I have no claim as a theologian»¹¹. And in 1871, in a letter to Henry James Coleridge, the Jesuit editor of *The Month* on the subject of a review of his *Grammar of Assent*, he confessed to his «ignorance of theo-

⁵ Quoted in *L'Osservatore Romano* (English edition), 17 April 1975.

⁶ In *John Henry Newman, Lover of Truth*, Rome: Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana, 1991, 7, 9. Author's italics.

⁷ *Fides et ratio*, n° 74.

⁸ «Newman gehört zu den grossen Lehrern der Kirche», in *John Henry Newman, Lover of Truth*, *op. cit.*, 144.

⁹ Letter of 14 November 1867, *L&D*, XXIII, 369.

¹⁰ Letter of 14 November 1868, *ibid.*, XXIV, 171.

¹¹ Letter of 15 April 1870, *ibid.*, XXV, 100.

logy and philosophy»¹². How are we to interpret these systematic and emphatic denials?

They can be explained in part, of course, by the immediate context, that of the imminence and then the aftermath of the first Vatican Council. As already stated, despite several pressing invitations Newman refused to attend the Council, giving as his reasons his advanced age (he would be 69 in 1870), his poor health (he was however to live another twenty years) and his lack of competence in theological matters. In reality he was fearful of being drawn into acrimonious debates on the question of papal infallibility, which everyone knew would be at the centre of the conciliar debates (though this was never explicitly stated beforehand). Refusing to be labelled a «theologian» was therefore in part a strategy designed to avoid being involved in a bitter controversy.

A second and somewhat similar reason lay in the fact that Newman had greatly suffered as a Catholic from attacks on his orthodoxy. The novelty of the ideas expressed in his *Essay on Development* had led to a virulent denunciation by the recent American convert and self-proclaimed theologian, Orestes Brownson, and to misgivings in certain quarters in Rome. His 1859 article in *The Rambler*, «On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine», had created a stir and had even been delated to Rome by the Bishop of Newport in Wales; the affair was so badly managed by the head of the English hierarchy that Newman never received the request from Propaganda for explanations, and for close on eight years his silence was interpreted in Rome as a proud and obstinate refusal to justify himself. He knew also that he was the object of a deep mistrust on the part of Archbishop Manning, the Primate of the Catholic Church in England and Wales from 1865 onward, and even the object of open hostility on the part of certain intransigent Catholics grouped around the latter (in a confidential letter to his own Bishop, Ullathorne, in Rome for the Council, he referred to Manning and his acolytes as an «aggressive and insolent faction»¹³). As late as 1884, five years after his elevation to the rank of Cardinal by Leo XIII, his views on Biblical inspiration¹⁴ – views which were subsequently thoroughly validated by the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, «*Dei Verbum*», of Vatican II – led once again to doubts being cast on his orthodoxy by several authors of theological manuals used in Catholic se-

¹² Letter of 5 February 1871, *ibid.*, XXV, 279.

¹³ Letter of 28 January 1870 to Mgr Bernard Ullathorne, *ibid.*, XXV, 19.

¹⁴ See Newman's two articles of 1884 on Biblical inspiration in his posthumous *Stray Essays* (1890).

minaries in the English-speaking world¹⁵. Refusing to be considered a theologian was thus a tactic of self-defence.

A third and not insignificant reason lay in the fact, of which Newman was painfully aware, that he had never received any formal theological education. Although the University of Oxford was, along with that of Cambridge, the principal centre of formation of the Anglican clergy – the first Anglican seminary was not founded until 1854, at Cuddesdon just outside Oxford – courses in theology (as opposed to Biblical studies) were not compulsory for intending candidates for ordination. Newman was thus very largely an autodidact in matters of theology, his thought having been shaped chiefly by his own intensive reading of the Church Fathers. (A certain number of younger members of the clergy, conscious of their lack of theological formation, even sought for their first appointment a living involving a relatively light workload, in order to allow them to undertake serious theological studies *after* their ordination!).

One can perhaps add that Newman was – despite a remarkable capacity for sustained research and writing when required – by temperament far removed from the mindset of the academic theologian. As is well known, most of his works are in one sense or another «occasional» works (the French expression *œuvres de circonstance* is more appropriate here), written in response to an immediate need – providing Anglicanism with a coherent theological basis (*The Prophetical Office of the Church, Lectures on Justification*), putting to the test and defending his «theory» of development (the *Essay on Development*), answering the ill-founded allegations of his friend Pusey concerning Catholic devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary (*Letter to Pusey*), and replying to Gladstone's vitriolic attack on Catholics who, he claimed, had been reduced by the dogma of papal infallibility to the level of intellectual slaves of the Pope (*Letter to the Duke of Norfolk*). He found himself also constantly lacking in time for any such work – his letters are full of complaints to this effect. We too easily forget, too, that almost one-third of the books published during his lifetime – twelve out of just under forty – are volumes of sermons. If Newman was in

¹⁵ See my article on «Newman et la question de l'inspiration biblique», in *Newman et la Bible. Études Newmaniennes* 29 (2013) 143-164. This was by no means the end of the matter. The fact that certain theologians and Biblical scholars considered by Rome to be «modernists» claimed the authority of Newman for their views led to a widespread suspicion of his ideas on the part of many members of the Church hierarchy. And although Pope Pius X explicitly recognized his orthodoxy – but in a simple pastoral letter to an Irish Bishop – this suspicion appears to have lingered on in certain quarters of the Curia right up until the eve of Vatican II.

a sense a theologian, despite his denials, he was also, and perhaps above all, a *pastor* and *spiritual guide*.

Finally, there was almost certainly a fifth reason for Newman's refusal of the term theologian, which is the sense in which that word was generally understood in his time. The neo-scholasticism which dominated Catholic philosophy and theology throughout the whole of the 19th century and the early years of the 20th was essentially *conceptual*. Catholic theology had lost contact with its Biblical roots; it was profoundly unhistorical; and, most importantly, it had lost touch with the realm of spiritual experience. For these and possibly other reasons also, Newman, despite his best efforts, never felt comfortable with the categories of thought of this neo-scholasticism.

A brief historical note may be useful here for it further underlines the gap between Newman's thought and that of his contemporaries. In the sixteenth-century debate initiated by the Lutheran theologian Philip Melancthon on the subject of *loci theologici* or the authoritative sources of theology, the classical Catholic riposte was that formulated by the Spanish Dominican theologian Melchior Cano in his *De locis theologici* published in 1563. Cano distinguished seven such *loci*: Sacred Scripture; apostolic tradition; the teachings of the universal Church; the deliberations of Church councils; the pronouncements of Popes and of the Magisterium; the Church Fathers; and the work of theologians and canonists. A striking absence from this list is that of individual spiritual experience (however one may define that term) as testified to by a host of Christian mystics over the previous millennia and a half. The extent to which a gap exists between Cano's (and the Catholic Church's subsequent) fundamentally intellectualist conception, on the one hand, and the views of Newman on the other, is striking. It can be clearly seen in (amongst other examples) the following two statements in the *Apologia*, which Cano would doubtless have judged to be *a priori* invalid:

[T]he being of a God [...] is as certain to me as the certainty of my own existence, though when I try to put the grounds of that certainty into logical shape I find a difficulty in doing so in mood and figure to my satisfaction [...]. Were it not for this voice, speaking so clearly in my conscience and my heart, I should be an atheist, or a pantheist, or a polytheist when I looked into the world¹⁶.

¹⁶ *Apologia pro vita sua*, Longmans (Normal edition), 241. Unless otherwise indicated, references to Newman's works are to the «Normal» edition published by Longmans, Green & Co. and reprinted many times since by various publishers.

I am a Catholic by virtue of my believing in a God; and if I am asked why I believe in a God, I answer that it is because I believe in myself, for I feel it impossible to believe in my own existence (and of that fact I am quite sure) without believing also in the existence of Him, who lives as a Personal, All-seeing, All-judging Being in my conscience¹⁷.

Our manner of understanding theology in the 21st century is, of course, profoundly different from that of the neo-scholasticism of Newman's time. The 20th century witnessed a massive return to the Biblical roots of theology, and a slow but progressive recognition of the reality of history. Moral theology, too, underwent a profound transformation from a system of casuistry, with its division of sins into various «categories», to a more global and personalistic approach. But what of the link between theology and spirituality? This is a question which has been all too little studied in the case of Newman; and yet it is – at least implicitly – at the very heart of his thought and teaching.

The real question which needs to be asked, therefore, is not «*was* Newman a theologian?» but rather «what *kind* of theologian was he?» And the answer to that question will focus above all on the relationship in his mind between theology, on the one hand, and spirituality, together with morality or ethics, on the other.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE CHURCH FATHERS

The influence of the Church Fathers is decisive here. It was they, according to Newman, who were responsible for his embracing Catholicism. In his 1850 lectures on *Difficulties Felt by Anglicans*, he declared that «the writings of the Fathers» constituted «simply and solely the one intellectual cause of his having renounced the religion in which he was born and submitted himself to [the Catholic Church]», and that «he joined the Catholic Church simply because he believed it, and it only, to be the Church of the Fathers»¹⁸. And in his *Letter to Pusey* (1866) he repeats this affirmation in the words: «The Fathers made me a Catholic, and I am not going to kick down the

¹⁷ *Apologia pro vita sua*, 198.

¹⁸ *Certain Difficulties Felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching*, I, 367. Newman is of course speaking of himself here in the third person.

ladder by which I ascended into the Church»¹⁹. The extent of the debt which he felt he owed to the Fathers is expressed also in the «Introductory Remarks» to the same work: in the Anglican Church, he declares, «I recollect well what an outcast I seemed to myself, when I took down from the shelves of my library the volumes of St. Athanasius or St. Basil, and set myself to study them; and how, on the contrary, when at length I was brought into Catholic communion, I kissed them with delight, with a feeling that in them I had more than all that I had lost; and, as though I were directly addressing the glorious saints, who bequeathed them to the Church, how I said to the inanimate pages, “You are now mine, and I am now yours, beyond any mistake”»²⁰. There is of course an apologetic intent in such statements, Newman wishing to justify his embracing of Catholicism; but there is no denying the profound influence on him, as both an Anglican and a Catholic, of the Fathers.

What was the exact nature of this influence? Newman took over from them a certain number of themes; but above all he found in them, and largely made his own, a certain way of understanding the relationship between theology, spirituality and morality; for the Fathers refused to *separate* these three domains (as would occur many centuries later with disastrous results). The mention in the above quotations from the *Letter to Pusey* of the names of Athanasius and Basil is significant here, for both were leading figures in the development of dogmatic theology – Athanasius was the author of, amongst other works, a treatise *On the Incarnation* and Basil the author of a treatise *On the Holy Spirit* – who sought to grasp and to explain the *spiritual* implications of these doctrines.

A brief survey of the changing meaning of the words «theology» and «spirituality» may help to illustrate this. Today, theology refers to knowledge concerning God, or the study or «science» of God, as, for example, geology is the knowledge or science of the earth (Greek *gè*) or psychology the knowledge or science of the human mind (Greek *psuchè*). The theologian strives to make this knowledge as complete, systematic and rational as possible: the word thus designates an essentially intellectual activity, involving knowledge *about* or *concerning* God, rather than direct or experiential «knowledge» (such, for example, as that referred to by St. Paul in a passage of his Letter to the

¹⁹ *Certain Difficulties Felt by Anglicans*, II, 24.

²⁰ *Certain Difficulties Felt by Anglicans*, II, 3.

Philippians²¹). This modern meaning of the word, however, only emerged gradually from the middle of the 12th century on, beginning with Abelard. For the Church Fathers and the mediaeval tradition up to that time, the «theologian» was first and foremost one who *sought* God, through the meditative and prayerful reading of Scripture or even simply in prayer. Thus Gregory of Nyssa, in his fourth-century *Life of Moses*, stated that it is the «contemplation»²² of God which constitutes true «theology». In the fifth century, Diadochus, Bishop of Photice in northern Greece and a former monk, identified the «theological» and the «contemplative» minds, expressing the widely-held view that it is only *after* he has acquired an experience of God that the «theologian» can legitimately discourse on Him²³. And there is of course the celebrated formula of Evagrius Ponticus, one of the most intellectual of the Desert Fathers: «If you are a theologian, you will truly pray, and if you truly pray you are a theologian»²⁴. In the patristic sense, then, theology is «not so much knowledge *about* God as knowledge *of* God through communion with him and union with him, knowing by “being known”»²⁵.

«Theology» was thus intimately linked to, and even to an extent designated, what we would today call spiritual knowledge or experience. As for the word «spiritual» itself (the noun «spirituality» is a relatively recent derivation from it), it will be considered here in its strictly etymological and traditional sense such as we find it in the Epistles of St. Paul and in the Church Fathers²⁶.

²¹ Cfr. Phil 3:8.10: «Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. [...] that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings; becoming like him in his death [...]» (RSV translation). Curiously, the English language is lacking in a word to distinguish between these two forms of «knowing», unlike, for example, French or German which possess two words: *savoir/connaitre* and *wissen/kennen* respectively. This relative weakness of English is often the source of considerable confusion.

²² In Greek, *theoria*, another example of a word whose meaning has become «intellectualised».

²³ Cit. SOLIGNAC, A., S.J., article «Théologie», *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique*, Paris: Beauchesne, vol. 15/1 (1990), col. 470.

²⁴ *Traité de l'oraison*, cit. SOLIGNAC, A., S.J., article «Prière», *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, vol. 12/3 (1986), col. 2259.

²⁵ LOUTH, A., article on Denys the Areopagite in *The Study of Spirituality*, eds. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright & Edward Yarnold, S.J., London: SPCK, 1986, 187. Italics mine. The words quoted refer to St. Paul in I Cor 13:12: «then I will know [God] as I am known [by Him]».

²⁶ These two terms have become in recent years both immensely popular and invested with a multiplicity of divergent meanings, a situation which recalls to mind the oft-quoted declaration of Humpty Dumpty in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*: «When I use a word, it means exactly what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less!». They refer to everything from the «feel-good» factor in religion, via woolly-minded New Age practices such as communing with nature by embracing trees, to being a (preferred) substitute for the words «religious» and «reli-

«Spiritual» translates, via the Latin *spiritualis* (or *spiritalis*), the Greek *pneumatikos*. This word exists in classical Greek with a relatively weak meaning: it designates the breath, or sometimes the wind. But – as with a number of other key terms – Christianity brings about a radical transformation of meaning. St. Paul's 1st Epistle to the Corinthians contains a passage (1 Cor 2:10–3:3), which is one of the foundation-stones of Christian spirituality, in which the author expresses a conception of the Christian person as made up of three dimensions designated respectively by the terms *sarkikos*, *psuchikos* and *pneumatikos*. The first is ordinarily translated by «carnal»; the second most commonly by «natural» (though in at least one noteworthy case, that of the RSV, it is translated as «unspiritual»); and the third by «spiritual» in a clear reference to the Spirit of *God* or *Holy Spirit*. From St. Paul onwards, this sense of the term *pneumatikos* (and hence of *spiritualis* and «spiritual»), when applied to human experience²⁷, is a *constant* for the greater part of the history of Christianity: the word refers to the presence and the work of the Holy Spirit, or, through Him, of Christ dwelling in the «heart» or soul of the Christian. Thus Basil of Caesarea in his treatise *On the Holy Spirit* explains that «he who lives no longer according to the flesh but under the guidance of the Spirit of God [...] is given the name “spiritual” (*pneumatikos*)»²⁸. Thirteen centuries later, Pierre de Bérulle, founder of the French Oratory and principal source of the «French school of spirituality» – following St. Paul who declares in Gal 2:20: «it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me» – defines the «spiritual life» as «the life of Jesus Christ» in us, and declares that «the highest degree of a perfect spiritual life» consists in «allowing Jesus Christ to invade and dwell in our souls»²⁹. And his disciple Jean-Jacques Olier, founder of the Company of

gion». Many people claim to be «spiritual but not religious». The authors of the Charter of the European Union refused to speak of Europe's religious or Christian heritage, but were quite happy to refer to its «spiritual» heritage. And a certain number of French philosophers (though in France, it is true, anyone who writes or speaks on a philosophical subject can claim to be a «philosopher») lay claim to a «secular» or even «atheistic» spirituality, basing their claim on a totally false etymology, the word spiritual being, so they argue, a translation of the Greek *psuchikos*.

²⁷ There are of course other meanings in other contexts, for example the «spiritual» power of the Church as opposed to the exercise of «temporal» power, or «spiritual» goods as opposed to «worldly» goods, etc.

²⁸ *Sur le Saint Esprit*, XXVI, 61–64, Paris: Éditions du Cerf, Sources chrétiennes, n° 17 bis, 1968, 467.

²⁹ *Conférences* (1611–15) in *Œuvres complètes*, Paris: Éditions du Cerf & Oratoire de France, vol. I, 1995, 184. Cfr. also the work of the Jesuit SAINT-JURE, J.-B., *L'Homme spirituel*, Paris, 1646, which contains the following definition: «The spiritual man is none other than an excellent Christian, who possesses more abundantly and more deeply than others [...] the Spirit of Jesus Christ».

Saint-Sulpice dedicated to the formation of the clergy, in the very first lesson of his *Catéchisme chrétien de la vie intérieure* defines the Christian as «he who has within him the Spirit of Jesus Christ»³⁰.

Theology and spirituality – in the modern sense of those words – are thus inseparable in the thought of the Fathers. But they are both equally inseparable from a third factor, that of morality or ethics: the pursuit of theological truth, both in the form of the interior «knowledge» of God and in that of knowledge *about* God, presupposes and requires a work of *inner* purification or spiritual «training»³¹. Until the middle of the 12th century and even for most of the 13th, according to the historian of spirituality, Aimé Solignac,

theologia refers directly to the *knowledge (connaissance)* of God and this knowledge, to be authentic, always implies a spiritual attitude, at least in Christian writings. [...] from the Fathers right up to the 13th century, *theologia* remains linked to the spiritual life (even, to a certain extent, in the case of Abelard). It always refers to a way of «knowing God» (*connaître Dieu*) and of «speaking of God». It therefore presupposes, and at the same time encourages, the humble submission of the human mind to the divine mystery, the opening up of the heart and the will to salvation and to the sanctification which the Old Testament promised and which the New Testament achieves³².

Thus St. Athanasius of Alexandria declares that the man who «wishes to understand the thought of the “theologians” must firstly purify his manner of

³⁰ *Catéchisme chrétien de la vie intérieure* (1656), Paris: Le Rameau, 1954, 11. Olier's definition is of course inspired by St. Paul: «he who has not the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him» (Rom 8:9).

³¹ This was the original meaning in Christian vocabulary of the Greek word *askèsis*, which has given us «ascetic» and «asceticism». It was taken over from the «exercise» or «training» undertaken by soldiers and athletes, two omnipresent realities in the Greco-Roman world, and its meaning «internalised». The term «spiritual exercises», far from being confined to the work of St. Ignatius of Loyola, is in fact a generic term in the history of Christian spirituality.

³² Article «Théologie», *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, vol. 15/1, col. 463-464, 481. Author's italics. An interesting case in point here is that of St. Thomas Aquinas. According to the Dominican Yves Congar, the term «theology» in the title of his *Summa theologiae* was not the work of Thomas but that of his pupils and disciples who wrote down, copied and circulated his work after his death. Where we today speak of «theology», Thomas generally used the term *sacra doctrina*; to quote Congar: «*theologia* is found only three times in the authentic text [...] whereas the expression *sacra doctrina* is found close on eighty times: and moreover, *theologia* is not used in the modern sense of theology but in the etymological sense of reflection or discourse on God». (Article «Théologie», *Dictionnaire de Théologie catholique*, Paris: Letouzey et Ané, vol. 15 (1950), col. 346).

living»³³. For Diadochus of Photice the «charisma of theology» requires a spiritual preparation involving the giving up of all ones goods for the sake of the Kingdom³⁴. Athanasius, Augustine and others – to be followed by Newman – employ the metaphor of the eyes which need to be cleansed of grit and dust if they are to «see» God. Many of the Fathers quote in this sense the sixth of the Beatitudes, «Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God» (Matt 5:8) (the word «pure» being understood here in the sense of simple, undivided or unmixed, as in the modern expression «chemically pure»)³⁵. Augustine employs the delightful image of the house which must be cleaned and tidied: «If I were to announce my visit, you would hasten to clean and to tidy up your house. And it is *God* who wishes to dwell in your heart and you do not hasten to prepare a place for Him!»³⁶.

From the 14th century onwards, however, with relatively few exceptions Western Christianity – in contrast to that of the Eastern and Orthodox Churches³⁷ – is characterized by a gradual *loss* of this unified vision. «Scholastic»

³³ Cit. SOLIGNAC, A., S.J., article «Théologie», *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, vol. 15/1, col. 467.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, col. 470.

³⁵ It is worth calling to mind also here the etymology of the word «monk» which designates a major reality of the Church from the 4th century onwards. The Greek *monachos* derives from the adjective *monos*, which in early Christian vocabulary has the meaning not of «solitary» or «alone», but of «one»: the monk is he (or she) who strives to overcome divisions within him – or herself, to unify his or her personality, to become «one» in order to be one or united with God. A common theme in Newman's sermons is that of our inner dividedness and the need to overcome this.

³⁶ ST. AUGUSTINE, *Sermon 261*.

³⁷ Unlike in the West, Eastern and Orthodox Christianity has retained, in faithfulness to the Church Fathers, a *unified* vision of the relationship between theology, spirituality and morality. The discovery of this in the first half of the 20th century led to a radical rethinking of their subject by a number of Western theologians; it bore fruit in the major publishing venture, from 1942 onwards, of the collection *Sources chrétiennes* published by the Éditions du Cerf. This vision is remarkably described by a Russian Orthodox theologian, Vladimir Lossky, in a pioneering and now classic work first published in France in 1944, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. In his introductory chapter the author affirms: «The eastern tradition has never made a sharp distinction between mysticism and theology; between personal experience of the divine mysteries and the dogma affirmed by the Church. The following words spoken a century ago by a great Orthodox theologian, the Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, express this attitude perfectly: "none of the mysteries of the most secret wisdom of God ought to appear alien or altogether transcendent to us, but in all humility we must apply our spirit to the contemplation of divine things". To put it in another way, we must live the dogma expressing a revealed truth, which appears to us as an unfathomable mystery, in such a fashion that instead of assimilating the mystery to our mode of understanding, we should, on the contrary, look for a profound change, an inner transformation of spirit, enabling us to experience it mystically. Far from being mutually opposed, theology and mysticism support and complete each other. One is impossible without the other. [...] There is, therefore, no Christian mysticism without theology; but, above all, there is no theology without mysticism». (LOSSKY, V., *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976, 8-9.)

theology – that of the «schools» or universities – became increasingly conceptual and abstract, its practitioners tending to consider spiritual writers as intellectually inferior. This animosity was reciprocated by many spiritual writers: the author of that classic of late medieval spirituality, *The Imitation of Christ*, expresses in turn a marked contempt for «theologians». Theology increasingly lost contact with spirituality, whilst spirituality found itself increasingly lacking in a theological basis. At the same time, morality was seen less and less as a form of spiritual «training» intended to make person more «capable»³⁸ of receiving God within his or her soul, and more and more in terms of obedience to commandments and laws prescribed by a now largely «external» God. These are of course sweeping generalisations; but they remain globally true.

Then, from the second half of the 17th century onwards, the patristic conception of the «spiritual» life, conceived of as the «indwelling» of Christ within the individual soul, gradually faded. This was part of a broader cultural evolution, as Western culture and its vision of humankind became progressively more intellectualised. The human person was more and more conceived of as a «*thinking* animal» (Descartes' celebrated formula «I think, therefore I am» can be seen as a symptom of this process). Correspondingly, the Christian was more and more defined in terms of the holding of certain «beliefs»; and Christianity itself became increasingly an affair of «dogma» and of moral «values» (all too often finding itself reduced to a mere form of moralizing)³⁹. Only in the 20th century would Christians on the whole become conscious of the spiritual dimension of their religion – and then most often only in a partial and fragmentary way.

WHERE DOES NEWMAN STAND WITH REGARD TO THESE QUESTIONS?

It would be quite erroneous to assert that Newman used the term «theology» in the sense of the Church Fathers. But so deeply was his thought im-

³⁸ Cfr. the traditional formula «*homo capax Dei*», taken up and developed by Bérulle in his celebrated definition of man as «a nothingness (*un néant*), surrounded by God, needful (*indigent*) of God, capable of God, and filled (*rempli*) with God, if he wishes it» (*Oeuvres de Piété*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, *op. cit.*, IV, 10).

³⁹ There is an interesting example of the intellectualisation of Western thought and culture in the evolution, at least in the French language, of the word *spirituel*: in the literary and philosophical *salons* of the 18th century, the word came to designate a person of clever and witty conversation, Voltaire being seen by many of his contemporaries as a shining example of *l'homme spirituel*! Compare this with the above-mentioned work of 1646 by Jean-Baptiste Saint-Jure bearing the same title.

pregnated by theirs, so fully had he assimilated theirs, that it was impossible for him *not* to have been aware of this earlier meaning of the word and its associations. More importantly, he shares implicitly the patristic vision of the necessary *relationship* between the three domains of theological reflection, spiritual life and experience, and morality, declaring in the *Essay on Development* that «Christianity is dogmatical, devotional [i.e. spiritual] and practical [i.e. ethical] all at once»⁴⁰. He saw the need for a theology which places itself at the service of our spiritual lives; for a spirituality which has a sound theological foundation; and for an ethical system conceived of as a form of spiritual training or inner purification (in a sermon entitled «Obedience the Remedy for Religious Perplexity», he refers explicitly to the necessity of «training our hearts» into what he calls the «fulness of a Christian Spirit», that is openness to God)⁴¹. If he appears to certain critics as obsessed with tracking down «heresies»⁴², it is because he is keenly aware that our way of *thinking about* God influences and even determines our way of *seeking* Him and *praying to* Him – as also our inability, or our refusal, to do so. Certain theologies invite us to seek to deepen our spiritual lives; others lead to a distorted conception of what is truly spiritual; and others again constitute an impediment to the development of a true spirituality by reducing Christianity to a mere set of dogmas and/or moral injunctions.

One can see in this mode of thought, moreover, an instance of a more general characteristic of Newman's mind. In the Preface to *The Idea of a University*, he attributes to university education the aim of forming in the student «a connected view or grasp of things»⁴³. This idea is taken up again and developed in Discourse VI of the same work: a «truly great intellect», he declares,

is one which takes a connected view of old and new, past and present, far and near, and which has an insight into the influence of all these one on another. [...] It possesses a knowledge, not only of things, but also of their mutual and true relations⁴⁴.

⁴⁰ *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, I, 1, 3, 36.

⁴¹ *Parochial and Plain Sermons* [hereinafter PPS], vol. I, n° 18, 233.

⁴² Cf. THOMAS, S., *Newman and Heresy. The Anglican Years*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

⁴³ *The Idea of a University*, xvii.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 134.

Newman is himself an illustration of these words, for he constantly searches for the «connections» between phenomena and ideas.

The pages that follow will attempt to illustrate this mode of thought, in the context principally of his parochial sermons, of his *Oxford University Sermons* and of the *Grammar of Assent*.

EXAMPLES OF THE LINK BETWEEN THEOLOGY,
SPIRITUALITY AND MORALITY IN NEWMAN'S SERMONS

To discuss this subject fully would require a whole book⁴⁵; here are merely a few examples in illustration⁴⁶.

Newman's Anglican sermons are noted for the deep spirituality which pervades them, a fact which has often been commented upon. But this spirituality always has a solidly theological (as well as Biblical) foundation. It has even been argued, conversely, that the sermons of Newman, as of several of his Tractarian colleagues such as Edward Pusey and Isaac Williams, express the conviction that «theology is rooted in spirituality and worship»⁴⁷, an example in point being their espousal of the patristic doctrine of the «indwelling» of the Holy Spirit which lies at the heart of the Tractarian movement. In either case, the two are inseparable.

Thus we find a number of sermons exploring the spiritual implications of the doctrine of the Trinity. From a spiritual point of view, the Trinity proposes a vision of God in terms of *communication* of the divine Life, making us, in the words of 2 Pet 1:4, several times quoted by Newman, «partakers of the divine nature». This communication proceeds *from* the Father (the source), *through* the Son, and *in* or *by* the Holy Spirit. God is not merely external to us, but is – or rather can be – *within* us, as a living and transforming spiritual

⁴⁵ This is what I have attempted to do in my *Dieu intérieur. La théologie spirituelle de John Henry Newman*, Paris: Ad Solem, 2014, 520 pp.

⁴⁶ The link between theology, spirituality and moral dispositions is at the heart also of Newman's first book, *The Arians of the Fourth Century*, which contains a subtle but distinct polemic directed at his own contemporaries. He clearly saw that if arianism, with its denial of the divinity of the Son – and hence of the possibility of a spiritual or mystical «union» with God the Father, through the Son and in the Holy Spirit, – had triumphed, Christianity would have evolved – as it was tending to do in his own day, and as it has all too often done in ours – in the direction of a pure intellectualism and a simple moralism.

⁴⁷ Cfr. TOWNSEND, R. D., «The Catholic Revival in the Church of England», in *The Study of Spirituality*, *op. cit.*, 468.

Presence. If Newman is consistently hostile to all forms of Christianity, such as Unitarianism, which deny the Trinity – and thus also the divinity of Christ – it is because they implicitly reduce Christianity to a simple moral code, devoid of any spiritual dimension.

The Incarnation constitutes also a recurrent theme, figuring in the title of several sermons both Anglican and Catholic⁴⁸. Newman emphasizes the *kenosis* or self-emptying of the Son of God in becoming man. But he sees also in the Incarnation the opening up of a «channel» of communication leading to a radical transformation of our whole being. As St. Athanasius (perhaps Newman's favourite author among the Fathers) put it in a formula subsequently embraced by the whole of Orthodox and Eastern Christianity, the Son of God «was made man that we might be made God»⁴⁹.

His reflection on the Incarnation is intimately linked to the doctrine of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Numerous sermons contain an eloquent expression of this theme:

The Holy Ghost, I have said, dwells in body and soul, as in a temple. [...] He pervades us (if it may be so said) as light pervades a building, or as a sweet perfume the folds of some honourable robe; so that, in Scripture language, we are said to be in Him, and He in us. [...] In St. Peter's forcible language, he becomes «partaker of the Divine Nature», and has «power» or authority, as St. John says, «to become the son of God». Or, to use the words of St. Paul, «he is a new creation; old things are passed away, behold all things are become new»⁵⁰.

This indwelling of the Holy Spirit is also that of Christ Himself:

Through the Holy Ghost we have communion with Father and Son. [...] The Holy Spirit causes, faith welcomes, the indwelling of Christ in the heart. Thus the Spirit does not take the place of Christ in the soul, but se-

⁴⁸ «The Incarnation», *PPS* II, 3; «The Humiliation of the Eternal Son», *PPS* III, 12; «Christ, the Son of God Made Man», *PPS* VI, 5; «The Incarnate Son, a Sufferer and Sacrifice», *PPS* VI, 6; «The Mystery of Divine Condescension», *Discourses Addressed to Mixed Congregations*, n° 14.

⁴⁹ *De Incarnatione*, quoted in *The Study of Spirituality*, *op. cit.*, 161-162.

⁵⁰ «The Indwelling Spirit», *PPS* II, 19, 222-223. The Biblical references given by Newman are 2 Pet I:4; John 1:12; 2 Cor 5:17. Newman's language changes somewhat (though not totally) between his Anglican and Catholic sermons. In the latter he refers far less to the doctrine of the «indwelling of the Holy Spirit»; however the word «grace» now expresses very much the same idea. The language may change, but the basic ideas remain constant.

cures that place to Christ. [...] The Holy Spirit, then, vouchsafes to come to us, that by His coming Christ may come to us, not carnally or visibly, but may enter into us. And thus He is both present and absent; absent in that He has left the earth, present in that He has not left the faithful soul [...] ⁵¹.

This is no ethereal or other-worldly doctrine. Newman proposes a spirituality for people who live *in* the world and who seek «perfection» in the ordinary round of everyday activities. In this way the Christian will come to «see Christ revealed to his soul amid the ordinary actions of the day, as by a sort of sacrament» ⁵². The doctrine of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit leads, according to Newman, *both* to an attitude of contemplation *and* to active service of God, uniting the «contemplative» and «active» lives:

In this, then, consists our whole duty, first in contemplating Almighty God, as in Heaven, so in our hearts and souls; and next, while we contemplate Him, in acting towards and for Him in the works of every day; in viewing by faith His glory without and within us, and in acknowledging it by our obedience. Thus we shall unite conceptions the most lofty concerning His majesty and bounty towards us, with the most lowly, minute, and unostentatious service to Him ⁵³.

Newman reflects also, at great length, on the crucial theological question of the nature of salvation, emphasizing in particular its spiritual implications. All are agreed today that it is Christ who saves us. But in what does «salvation» consist? And *how* exactly does Christ save us? Is it by a *past* action – his atoning death on the cross – or does he save us, here and now, by the *present* action of His Spirit? These and other questions regarding the nature of salvation have profound implications for our spiritual lives. For Newman, who in no way minimizes the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross, salvation is for each and every one of us essentially a *present* event, or rather *process*: it consists in our *receiving* into ourselves the Spirit of Christ, and in *allowing* ourselves to be thereby transformed into what He was Himself. Salvation thus involves a communication, and a reception, of the very life of Christ. Thus he declares in 1838 in his *Lectures on Justification*:

⁵¹ «The Spiritual Presence of Christ in the Church», *PPS* VI, 10, 126-127. The passage is rich in Biblical quotations, omitted here for reasons of economy except for the last from John 14:19.

⁵² «Doing Glory to God in Pursuits of the World», *PPS* VIII, 11, 165.

⁵³ «The Gift of the Spirit», *PPS* III, 18, 269-270.

Christ, who is the Well-beloved, All-powerful Son of God, is possessed by every Christian as a Saviour in the full meaning of that title, or becomes to us righteousness; and in and after so becoming, really communicates a measure, and a continually increasing, measure, of what He is Himself. [...] He makes us gradually and eventually to be in our own persons, what He has been from eternity in Himself, what He is from our Baptism towards us, righteous⁵⁴.

And in a sermon preached two years later, «Righteousness Not of Us, But in Us», he returns to this theme, emphasizing that we are not, and cannot be, the authors of our own salvation, but that salvation must nonetheless occur *within* each and every one of us:

[T]he Spirit came to finish in us, what Christ had finished in Himself, but left unfinished as regards us. [...] As then His mission proves on the one hand that salvation is not from ourselves, so does it on the other that it must be wrought in us. [...] As a light placed in a room pours out its rays on all sides, so the presence of the Holy Ghost imbues us with life, strength, holiness, love, acceptableness, righteousness⁵⁵.

All of these themes are closely related to another recurrent theme, that of «mystery», which involves amongst other things our ability (or inability) to «know» God⁵⁶. From the end of the 17th century onwards an attack was launched by opponents of Christianity on this concept of mystery in the name of «reason»⁵⁷. The doctrines most under attack were those of the Trinity, the Incarnation and the Resurrection of Christ, which were declared to

⁵⁴ *Lectures on the Doctrine of Justification*, 104.

⁵⁵ *PPS* V, 10, 138. The English language has the great good fortune to possess two terms, «righteousness» and «justice», to express two related but distinct characteristics of both God and humankind. The Romance languages (French, Spanish, Italian, etc.) possess only one word, deriving from the Latin *justitia*. This fact creates an ambiguity in relation to our image of God which can have terrible pastoral consequences. This ambiguity runs through both the two existing French translations of Newman's *Lectures on Justification*.

⁵⁶ This is expressed also in the titles of several sermons, both Anglican and Catholic. For example, «The Christian Mysteries», *PPS* I, 16; «Mysteries in Religion», *PPS* II, 18; «The Mysteriousness of Our Present Being», *PPS* IV, 19; «The Mystery of Godliness», *PPS* V, 7; «The Mystery of the Holy Trinity», *PPS* VI, 24; «Mysteries of Nature and Grace» (*Discourses Addressed to Mixed Congregations*, n° 13); «The Mystery of Divine Condescension» (*ibid.*, n° 14).

⁵⁷ One of the earliest and most virulent of these attacks was that of John Toland in his *Christianity Not Mysterious or, A Treatise Shewing That There is nothing in the Gospel Contrary to Reason, Nor Above it: And that no Christian Doctrine can be properly called a Mystery*, London, 1696.

be «unreasonable» or irrational. The effect was to reduce Christianity to a mere set of clear and explicable *ideas* (which could then be debated and the more easily refuted) and of moral principles. This «intellectualist» view of Christianity was to be found also in certain of its defenders in the late 18th century, sharply criticized by Newman, such as William Paley whose *Evidences of Christianity* (1794) sought to prove the truth of religion by an appeal to archaeology, geology and the «realisation» of Biblical prophecies, the author placing himself unwittingly, according to Newman, on the same intellectual ground as his opponents. Newman radically refuses this reduction of Christianity. To recognize, as he does, that religion contains «mysteries» – and to see God Himself as «Mystery» – involves a refusal on his (and our) part of a purely intellectualised Christianity (which can easily become a source of intellectual pride through the pretention to «know» and to «understand» everything⁵⁸). All through the history of Christian spirituality this same recognition has gone hand in hand with an attitude of humility and of «receptiveness»: to recognize God as «Mystery» is to open up the possibility of a lived relationship with Him in the innermost depths of our being or, in the words of Bérulle, to «allow oneself to be penetrated by (*se laisser envahir par*) the Mystery».

Every theology presupposes, and rests upon, a certain anthropology or conception of humankind. Hence Christian thinkers throughout the ages have pondered on the question of what it is which makes us able to enter into a relationship with God, as well as on the nature of that relationship. In one of his Anglican sermons, «The Thought of God, the Stay of the Soul»⁵⁹, Newman paraphrases St. Augustine's celebrated words in the opening pages of his *Confessions*, «You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds rest in you»⁶⁰. Although he does not use the patristic formula *homo capax Dei*, the idea that we are «capable» of receiving within ourselves the presence of God is a recurrent theme, the counterpart of the doctrine of the «indwelling» of the Holy Spirit.

A further, related theological theme is that of the relationship between nature and grace. Newman makes his own the old scholastic adage *gratia per-*

⁵⁸ It is worth recalling that the verb «to comprehend» comes from the Latin *cumprehendere*, the literal meaning of which is «to seize», «to grasp», «to take hold of».

⁵⁹ *PPS* V, 22.

⁶⁰ ST. AUGUSTINE, *Confessions*, Book I, 1.

fecit naturam. If he insists on the omnipresence of sin, he argues also that, in the struggle between nature and grace, it is grace ultimately which triumphs over nature, not by destroying it – quite the contrary – but by transforming it from within. Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit we become by grace what Christ is by nature. Though the language of his Catholic sermons is often slightly different, the basic ideas remain the same. Indeed, the word «grace» figures in the title of four of the eighteen sermons in his first Catholic volume⁶¹. And while these sermons emphasize the horror of sin, several of them constitute a veritable hymn of praise to the transforming power of divine grace⁶².

The conscience is a key concept of moral theology. Newman's doctrine of conscience unites moral theology and spirituality. The word designates for him not just a moral phenomenon – important though this is – but also, and inseparably, an awareness of God's mysterious presence within us, in the depths of our *consciousness*. He defines the «true Christian» in terms of this awareness:

A true Christian, then, may almost be defined as one who has a ruling sense of God's presence within him [...] – present not externally, not in nature merely, or in providence, but in his innermost heart, or in his *conscience*⁶³.

Being attentive to the «law of conscience» involves therefore far more than simply distinguishing between right and wrong or good and evil: it involves cultivating an inner disposition of attentiveness to God, or of «receptivity». And listening to the «voice of conscience» thus involves on our part what Newman would call a «work» – a sustained effort – which is necessary in order both to clarify our perception of God's will and to deepen our awareness of His presence.

Finally, an important dimension of the relationship between theology, spirituality and morality is to be found in Newman's many reflections on the subject of faith. All too often today, faith is conceived of chiefly in intellec-

⁶¹ «Perseverance in Grace», «Nature and Grace», «Illuminating Grace» and «The Mysteries of Nature and Grace», in *Discourses Addressed to Mixed Congregations* (1849).

⁶² This is so to such an extent that, in searching for a suitable title for a forthcoming French translation of his first volume of Catholic sermons, *Discourses Addressed to Mixed Congregations*, I proposed to the publisher the title *La Puissance de la grace* («The Power of Grace»).

⁶³ «Sincerity and Hypocrisy», *PPS* V, 16, 225-226. Newman's italics.

tual terms, as the equivalent of «believing»; all too often we characterize human beings as either simply «believers» or «non believers». Newman, on the contrary, conceives of faith in the Biblical sense: faith is above all looking to God, placing our trust wholly in him, and desiring to *receive* Him into our hearts. Quoting Ephesians 3:17, «Strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith», he comments: «The Holy Spirit causes, *faith welcomes*, the indwelling of Christ in the heart»⁶⁴. Faith is thus fundamentally a desire, and a *capacity*, to «receive».

He deals at length also with the relationship between faith and what he calls «obedience». The theological context here is the debate between salvation by «faith» and salvation by «works». Newman refuses to see an opposition between these two. «Obedience», when it is based on humility, according to him *leads to* belief. On the other hand, a man «may be obedient and yet proud of being so»; in such a case, he argues,

a man is proud, or (what is sometimes called) self-righteous, not when obedient, but in proportion to his disobedience. To be proud is to rest upon one's self [...]; but a really obedient mind is necessarily dissatisfied with itself, and looks out of itself for help, from understanding the greatness of its task; in other words, in proportion as a man obeys, is he driven to faith, in order to learn the remedy of the imperfections of his obedience⁶⁵.

«Faith» and «obedience» – or believing and acting –, far from standing in opposition to each other, are simply «two states of mind» which are «altogether one and the same»:

To believe is to look beyond this world to God, and to obey is to look beyond this world to God; to believe is of the heart, and to obey is of the heart [...]. They are but one thing viewed differently⁶⁶.

Through «obedience», in particular through embracing an attitude of humility and of what Newman calls «teachableness», we place ourselves «*in*

⁶⁴ «The Spiritual Presence of Christ in the Church», *PPS* VI, 10, 126. Italics mine. These words of Newman have already been quoted in the context of a longer passage.

⁶⁵ «Faith and Obedience», *PPS* III, 6, 80-81.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

the way to arrive at the knowledge of God»⁶⁷. Conversely, he declares, «the supernatural works which [God] does towards us are in the heart, and impart grace; and if we disobey, we are not disobeying His command only, but *resisting His presence*»⁶⁸.

He emphasizes also that if faith is a «gift of God», we must *prepare* ourselves to receive this gift. He argues that if God is not merely external to us but – potentially at least – within us, the nature of morality changes radically: «appearing before God, and dwelling in His presence» is then «a very different thing from being merely subjected to a system of moral laws», it requires a «preparation of the soul»,

a special preparation of thought and affection, such as will enable us to endure His countenance, and to hold communion with Him as we ought. Nay, and, it may be, a preparation of the soul itself for His presence, just as the bodily eye must be exercised in order to bear the full light of day, or the bodily frame in order to bear exposure to the air⁶⁹.

True faith leads us ultimately to place ourselves unreservedly in God's hands, or to what Newman calls an attitude of spiritual «surrender». To have faith is

to feel in good earnest that we are creatures of God; it is a practical perception of the unseen world; it is to understand that this world is not enough for our happiness, to look beyond it on towards God, to realize His presence, to wait upon Him, to endeavour to learn and to do His will, and to seek our good from Him. [...] To have faith in God is to surrender one's-self to God, humbly to put one's interests, or to wish to be allowed to put them into His hands who is the Sovereign Giver of all good⁷⁰.

It was stated earlier that our way of *thinking about* God determines our way of praying to Him and of seeking Him. One can further argue that, for Newman, it is true also that our *moral dispositions* determine our ideas and our ability to *believe*, as well as our ability to seek and to find God.

⁶⁷ «Inward Witness to the Truth of the Gospel», *PPS* VIII, 8, 113. Newman's italics.

⁶⁸ «Miracles No Remedy for Unbelief», *PPS* VIII, 6, 87. Italics mine.

⁶⁹ «Worship, a Preparation for Christ's Coming», *PPS* V, 1, 6-7.

⁷⁰ «Faith and Obedience», *PPS* III, 6, 79-80. Newman's italics.

THE FUNCTION OF «DOGMA»: THE *OXFORD UNIVERSITY SERMONS*

His whole life long Newman championed the cause of «dogma». It is interesting that in his account of his first «conversion» of 1816, the two key elements of his experience are the discovery of dogma and his personal encounter with God: he «fell under the influences of a definite Creed, and received into [his] intellect impressions of dogma», and his mind came to «rest in the thought of two and two only absolute and luminously self-evident beings, myself and my Creator»⁷¹. The juxtaposition suggests a link, even if the nature of this link is not made explicit.

What exactly does Newman mean by «dogma»? Contrary to a widespread misapprehension current today, the word does *not* designate a set of rigid ideas or an attitude of inflexibility. In the original Greek, *dogma* signifies «thought» or «opinion». The word took on a specific and technical meaning, however, with the development of Christianity: the «dogmas» of the Church are the formulations, put forward and refined by theologians down the centuries and subsequently approved and promulgated by the Magisterium, of the great truths pertaining to the «Mystery» of God. It is in this sense that we must understand the use of the word by Newman. From this fact several conclusions follow.

First of all, the existence of dogmas supposes and requires the existence of the *Church*, both as a teaching authority capable of defining and promulgating articles of faith and as a «visible» body or institution with its rites and sacraments. In the *Apologia*, Newman declares that if the first of the three principles on which the «Movement of 1833» was founded was that of dogma, the second, «based on this foundation of dogma», was the existence of «a visible Church, with sacraments and rites which are the channels of invisible grace»⁷². It was no accident in his eyes that «Protestantism» (a term which, for him, embraced also mainstream Anglicanism as it existed in his day) both rejected this conception of the Church and tended to minimise the importance

⁷¹ *Apologia pro vita sua*, 4. Newman is of course looking back here over a distance of nearly fifty years. But a similar expression can be found in a sermon written and delivered over thirty years earlier, in 1833: «we begin, by degrees, to perceive that there are *but two beings in the whole universe, our own soul, and the God who made it* [...]. To every one of us, there are *but two beings in the whole world, himself and God*». («The Immortality of the Soul», *PPS*, I, 2, 20. Italics mine.)

⁷² *Apologia*, 48-49. The third principle, subsequently totally rejected by Newman, was a radical hostility to Roman Catholicism (50).

of dogma – or, as the Gorham case dramatically demonstrated in 1850, led to the subordination of the Church to the State, with the former meekly allowing the *latter* to define its doctrines.

The second conclusion involves a paradox. Reflection on the subject of dogma leads to the conclusion of the *inadequacy* of all statements concerning God. One can detect the influence here of the apophatic theology of some of the Church Fathers from Gregory of Nyssa onwards, for whom God is «incomprehensible» and «unknowable» except through a certain form of «unknowing»⁷³, in an experience which situates us *beyond* words and concepts. We can therefore only speak of Him in terms of analogy and metaphor, or indeed by negative statements: «God is *not* this or that...».

But at the same time – and this is the third conclusion –, dogma is absolutely indispensable. For the function of dogmas is not just to ensure right thinking or believing in the Christian as an end in itself, but to guide us in our *spiritual* quest and to help us to deepen our spiritual lives. This is stated clearly and forcefully in a number of Newman's parochial sermons. He declares for example in «The Incarnation» that

[t]he Object of our faith is but faintly reflected on our minds, compared with the vivid picture which His presence impressed upon the early Christians. [...] But the Creeds are an additional help this way. The declarations made in them; the distinctions, cautions, and the like, supported and illuminated by Scripture, draw down, as it were, from heaven, *the image of Him who is on God's right hand* [...] ⁷⁴.

And in another sermon, devoted also to the theme of the Incarnation, he asks: «What do we gain from words, however correct and abundant, if they end with themselves, instead of lighting up *the image of the Incarnate Son in our hearts?*»⁷⁵.

Newman's *Oxford University Sermons* deal with these questions in greater detail and in a more technical fashion. Reflecting in sermon n° XIII, «Implicit and Explicit Reason», on the nature of divine inspiration of Scripture, he borrows (seemingly) from St. John Chrysostom the concept of divine «con-
descension»:

⁷³ Cfr. the anonymous 14th-century spiritual classic, *The Cloud of Unknowing*.

⁷⁴ «The Incarnation», *PPS*, II, 3, 29. Italics mine.

⁷⁵ «The Humiliation of the Eternal Son», *PPS*, III, 12, 169-170. Italics mine.

Inspiration [of Scripture] is defective, not in itself, but in consequence of the medium it uses and the beings it addresses. It uses human language, and it addresses man; and neither can man compass, nor can his hundred tongues utter, the mysteries of the spiritual world, and God's appointments in this. [...] What, for instance, is the mention made in Scripture of the laws of God's government, of His providences, counsels, designs, anger, and repentance, but a gracious mode (the more gracious because necessarily imperfect) of making man contemplate what is far beyond him? [...] sooner, then, than we should know nothing, Almighty God has *condescended to speak to us so far as human thought and language will admit, by approximations*, in order to give us practical rules for our own conduct amid His infinite and eternal operations⁷⁶.

He returns to the idea that dogmas are indispensable to the correct orientation of our spiritual quest in the last of the *University Sermons*. Creeds and dogmas, he states,

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 [...] and 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 thousand⁷⁷.

Theological knowledge – knowing *about* God – is designed to bring us to the direct and experiential knowledge *of* God. This experience Newman designates also by the word «impression» – that which is «impressed» directly on our minds by God Himself. This, he maintains, is the Biblical sense of the word «knowledge»:

an impression of this intimate kind seems to be what Scripture means by «knowledge». «This is life eternal», says our Saviour, «that they might know Thee the only True God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent». In like manner St. Paul speaks of willingly losing all things, «for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus»; and St. Peter of «the know-

⁷⁶ *Fifteen Sermons Preached Before the University of Oxford Between A.D. 1826 and 1843*, n° XIII, «Implicit and Explicit Reason», 268-269. Italics mine.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, n° XV, «The Theory of Developments in Religious Doctrine», § 23, 331-332.

ledge of Him who hath called us to glory and virtue»⁷⁸. Knowledge is the possession of those living ideas of sacred things, from which alone change of heart or conduct can proceed. This awful vision is what Scripture seems to designate by the phrases «Christ in us», «Christ dwelling in us by faith», «Christ formed in us», and «Christ manifesting Himself unto us»⁷⁹.

Newman even argues that dogmatic formulations may *proceed from* this spiritual experience:

Further, I observe, that though the Christian mind reasons out a series of dogmatic statements, one from another, this it has ever done, and always must do, not from those statements taken in themselves, as logical propositions, but as being *itself enlightened and (as if) inhabited by that sacred impression* which is prior to them, which acts as a regulating principle, ever present, upon the reasoning, and without which no one has any warrant to reason at all. Such sentences as «the Word was God», or «the Only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father», or «the Word was made flesh», or «the Holy Ghost which proceedeth from the Father», are [...] but august tokens of *most simple, ineffable, adorable facts*, embraced, enshrined according to its measure in the believing mind⁸⁰.

Such, indeed, he declares, was the case with the Church Fathers:

Moreover, this will account both for the mode of arguing from particular texts or single words of Scripture, practised by the early Fathers, and for their fearless decision in practising it; for the great Object of Faith on which they lived both enabled them to appropriate to itself particular passages of Scripture, and became to them a safeguard against heretical deductions from them⁸¹.

⁷⁸ John 17:3; Phil 3:8; 2 Pet 1:3. [Newman's footnote.]

⁷⁹ *Fifteen Sermons...*, XV, § 24, 332.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, § 26, 334. Italics mine. Newman, as an historian, frequently argues from the witness given by the early Christians in order to make a theological point. Thus he declares, in the sermon «The Apostolical Christian» that «there was no barrier, no cloud, no earthly object, interposed between the soul of the primitive Christian and its Saviour and Redeemer. Christ was in his heart, and therefore all that came from his heart, his thoughts, words, and actions, savoured of Christ. The Lord was his light, and therefore he shone with the illumination» (*Sermons Preached on Subjects of the Day*, n° 19, 281.)

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

NEWMAN'S OPPOSITION TO THEOLOGICAL «LIBERALISM»

This question of dogma is at the heart of his lifelong struggle against what he termed «liberalism». In his «*Biglietto Speech*» of 1879, made on the occasion of his receiving his cardinal's hat, he declared that «[f]or thirty, forty, fifty years I have resisted to the best of my powers the spirit of liberalism in religion»⁸². What did he understand by this term? One can distinguish five strands in his thought here.

The first is obviously liberalism's refusal, as a matter of principle, of all «dogma». Thus in the *Apologia* he describes it as «the anti-dogmatic principle and its developments»⁸³.

In his *Biglietto Speech*, he describes it as a form of relativism in philosophical and religious matters, in words which look forward to the denunciations by Pope Benedict XVI of the modern reign of relativism: «Liberalism in religion is the doctrine that there is no positive truth in religion, but that one creed is as good as another [...]. It is inconsistent with any recognition of any religion, as *true*. It teaches that all are to be tolerated, for all are matters of opinion»⁸⁴.

A third element, as the last-quoted sentences suggests, is the reduction of religion to a mere matter of personal «opinion». This is stated clearly in the third of the propositions condemned as false in the appendix to the *Apologia*: «No theological doctrine is any thing more than an opinion which happens to be held by bodies of men»⁸⁵. This criticism of the reduction of religion to a matter of personal and subjective opinion underlies Newman's many strictures and attacks upon the principle of «private judgment».

A fourth element lies in what he considers to be an abusive use of «reason». This is expressed in another passage of the same appendix: «by liberalism I mean false liberty of thought, or the exercise of thought upon matters, in which, from the constitution of the human mind, thought cannot be brought to any successful issue, and is therefore out of place»⁸⁶. This is no call

⁸² *Biglietto Speech*, in *Addresses to Cardinal Newman with His Replies, etc., 1879-81*. Edited by the Rev. W. P. Neville (Cong. Orat.), London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1905, 64.

⁸³ *Apologia*, Longmans, 48. See also, in the appendix to the same work, Note A, 285-67, in which he undertakes to develop and clarify this formula.

⁸⁴ *Biglietto Speech*, 64.

⁸⁵ Note A, «Liberalism», *Apologia*, 294.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 289.

to obscurantism, but a recognition that certain realities will always be beyond the complete mastery of the human mind. It is thus futile to attempt to «conceptualise» God fully, and the consequences of this attempt, as has already been suggested, can be pernicious from a spiritual point of view, fostering intellectual pride and complacency.

This brings us to the fifth and final element of the liberalism attacked by Newman. Although this is never explicitly stated by him, one finds in his work an intuition concerning the evolution of Western thought since the 17th century which was discussed earlier in this same chapter. Historians customarily speak of this period as the «Age of Reason»; but it would be at least as appropriate to describe it as an age of growing *intellectualism*. *Thought* is increasingly regarded as the highest human activity; and this in turn leads to a rejection of all forms of experience which are *not* reducible to a set of concepts or ideas – beginning with the experience of God, as testified to by a host of spiritual writers and mystics, and by Newman himself.

«NOTIONAL» AND «REAL» ASSENT

Finally, the idea of the interdependence of theology, spirituality and morality is to be found also in the *Grammar of Assent*. The key point here is the distinction made between «notional» and «real» assent. (We must remember that the word «real» here retains the sense of the Latin *res*, «object», or «thing», or eventually «person», a meaning which all of Newman's educated male contemporaries would have instantly recognized, a knowledge of Latin being part of the intellectual accomplishments of a «gentleman».) «Notional» assent belongs to the domain of theology; «real» assent to that of religion – which includes of course, for Newman, the domain of concrete relations and spiritual experience:

A dogma is a proposition; it stands for a notion or for a thing; and to believe it is to give the assent of the mind to it, as it stands for the one or for the other. To give a real assent to it is an act of religion; to give a notional, is a theological act. It is discerned, rested in, and appropriated as a reality, by the religious imagination; it is held as a truth, by the theological intellect⁸⁷.

⁸⁷ *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, 98.

At times (as in the last-quoted sentence) Newman uses the terms «imagination» and «imaginative» in place of «real» and its derivatives. But it is important to grasp that the word «imagination» signifies for him not a capacity for «imagining» or inventing, but a capacity for *representing* to ourselves, by means of a particularly powerful «image», an object which is itself *real* or, as he puts it, «the image of a reality». Thus he at times contrasts the words «notional» and «imaginative», as in the statement that «[t]heology, properly and directly, deals with notional apprehension; religion with imaginative»⁸⁸.

The *Grammar* contains a plea, as will also the long preface of 1877 to volume I of the *Via Media*, on behalf of theology and theologians. «Religion» *needs* the intellectual foundation provided by theology, it «cannot maintain its ground at all without theology»⁸⁹. If it is true that theology cannot be an end in itself, its ultimate aim being to direct our search for God, it is nonetheless essential *to* that search, and must of necessity *precede* it:

[Propositions] are useful in their dogmatic aspect as ascertaining and making clear for us the truths on which the religious imagination has to rest. Knowledge must ever precede the exercise of the affections. [...] we must know concerning God, before we can feel love, fear, hope, or trust towards Him.

Newman even admits that theology – as an intellectual exercise – can exist *without* religion (though adding the rider that it will necessarily, in this case, be lacking in «life»): «Theology may stand as a substantive science though it be without the life of religion». The fact remains, however, that for him it is the *spiritual* life that matters most, and it is therefore necessary to pass from the «notional» to the «real», from theology to religion, and to allow the presence of God to be «realized» in us.

But this «realization» is something which we all too often fail to accomplish. Why is it, Newman asks à propos of our participation in the Church's liturgy, that we are so lacking in fervour for the great religious festivals, if not that «personally we often find ourselves so ill-fitted to take part in them, [...] that we are not good enough, that in our case the dogma is *far too much a theological notion, far too little an image living within us?*»⁹⁰.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 119-120.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 120-121.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 139-140. Italics mine.

In a highly intellectualized culture such as ours today, to pass from the «notional» to the «real», from thinking *about* God to actually «realizing» His presence, represents a difficult and unending challenge. Yet it is one which all Christians are called upon to meet.

CONCLUSION

Christianity, for Newman, is of necessity a dogmatic religion, possessing a coherent and highly developed theology. But it is equally necessary that it should not be *simply* a dogmatic religion, any more than that it should be reduced simply to the level of «values», however elevated these may be. For that would lead, both in the one and the other case, to a total neglect of its all-important spiritual dimension. Lastly, the personal quest for theological truths concerning God, and the quest for an intimate «knowledge» of Him as a living Being, both require a permanent form of *askèsis* or ethical «training», designed to «purify» our hearts and minds in a way which will make us «capable» both of better apprehending the «Mystery» of God and of receiving Him into our «hearts».

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