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## **Newman's *Essay* on the Development of Christian Doctrine: Its Genesis and its Enduring Relevance**

*Abstract.* At the occasion of the first translation of the *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* in Slovene, the author attempts to outline the biographical and historical background of the *Essay*, its central propositions and its many-sided importance. The idea of development was the most important single idea which Newman contributed to the thought of the Christian Church, being an expression of that shift from static to dynamic conceptions of Christianity which was characteristic of the period. It is worth noticing that the *Development* was published fourteen years before Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859). Nearly every study of doctrinal development continues to acknowledge the seminal influence of the book and its creative view of the problem of change and continuity in Christian doctrine. The *Essay*, written immediately before Newman entered the Roman Catholic Church (1845), was intended to give his reasons for becoming a Roman Catholic and to help others in the same position as himself. The theory of development was »an hypothesis to account for a difficulty«, the difference between the teaching of the primitive and the nineteenth-century Church. Newman drew out seven pragmatic tests for distinguishing legitimate developments from corruptions: fidelity to the original idea; continuity of principles; power to assimilate ideas from outside; early anticipations of later teaching; logical sequence discernible when developments were examined; preservation of earlier teaching; continuance in a state of chronic vigour. The book shows Newman's sense of history. His theory was the result of a critical study of Patristic writings themselves.

*Keywords:* doctrine, dogma, development, corruption, change, continuity, Roman Catholic Church, Anglican Church, conversion, Fathers, Oxford

*Povzetek:* **Newmanov Esej o razvoju krščanskega nauka: njegov nastanek in trajni pomen**

Ob izidu prvega prevoda Newmanovega *Eseja o razvoju krščanskega nauka* v slovenščino pisec razprave osvetljuje biografsko in zgodovinsko ozadje Eseja, njegove osrednje trditve in daljnosežni pomen. Ideja razvoja je bila najpomembnejša posamična ideja, s katero je Newman obogatil misel krščanske Cerkve. Izraža premik od statičnega k dinamičnemu pojmovanju krščanstva, ki je bilo

značilno za njegovo obdobje. Vredno je omeniti, da je *Esej o razvoju* izšel štirinajst let pred Darwinovim *Izvorom vrst* (1859). Študije o doktrinalnem razvoju skoraj brez izjeme priznavajo plodoviti vpliv knjige in njen ustvarjalni pogled na vprašanje spreminjanja in kontinuitete v krščanskem nauku. Esej je bil napisan, neposredno preden je avtor prestopil v rimskokatoliško Cerkev (1845). Navaja razloge za ta korak in želi pomagati tistim, ki so se znašli v podobnem položaju. Teorija o razvoju je bila zanj »hipoteza, ki naj bi razložila določeno težavo«, razlike namreč, ki so obstajale v nauku med prvotno Cerkvijo in Cerkvijo 19. stoletja. Newman je formuliral naslednjih sedem pragmatičnih »preizkusov« ali »razpoznavnih znakov«, ob katerih je mogoče razlikovati zakoniti razvoj nauka od popačenja: zvestoba izvorni ideji; trajna veljava načel; sposobnost priličenja idej od zunaj; zgodnje anticipacije poznejšega nauka; logično sosledje v razvoju; ohranjanje prejšnjega nauka; ohranjanje čvrstosti skozi čas. Knjiga razodeva Newmanov zgodovinski čut. Njegova teorija je bila predvsem sad kritičnega študija patrističnih spisov.

*Ključne besede:* nauk (doktrina), dogma (verska resnica), razvoj, pokvarjenje, sprememba, kontinuiteta, anglikanska Cerkev, konverzija (spreobrnitev), rimskokatoliška Cerkev, cerkveni očetje, Oxford

No one can understand Newman without studying  
the *Essay*.

Owen Chadwick

John Henry, Cardinal Newman (1801–1890) was one of the most brilliant, controversial, far-seeing figures of the nineteenth century. His influence has spread far beyond the country of his birth, the century in which he lived, and the Church in which he ended his life: he is not only of great importance in the history of religious thought but is known to a much wider circle for his hymns, his books, the text of Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* and the Oratorios he founded in Birmingham and London. »He is widely loved and remembered – by Catholics and non-Catholics alike – as a saintly and gentle figure: yet his conversion to the Church of Rome sparked off one of the bitterest and most divisive controversies of the Victorian age, and one which lost him friends and respect, and was, for many years, to sever him from his beloved university of Oxford. He is important in the history of Roman Catholicism because many of his ideas disregarded under the pontificate of Pius IX but more favoured under Leo XIII, were, in the end, to be adopted by the second Vatican Council almost a century later in the 1960s.« (Martin 1982, 7)

Newman was born with the nineteenth century and died at the beginning of its last decade; he was to see the whole face of his country change, and he was one of the few who foresaw something of the century to come. Not that he was a prophet of events, but his profound insight into the conflict of ideas behind the transformation enabled him to forecast the trend things were likely to take. »His

was the century of evolutionary theories which shattered men's idea of a static world, just as the astronomical theories of the sixteenth had shattered the image of a static earth. Newman often compared these two revolutions of thought, which have radically altered the human perspective and seemed at first destructive of all traditional beliefs and values. But from his study of early Christian history Newman thought out a theory of the development of ideas which antedated the theory of the biological development of mankind: his mind had already made the transition from the static to the dynamic view of the world which his contemporaries found it so hard to make.« (Trevor 1974, 11) Ian Ker comes to a similar conclusion: »The book (i.e. *An Essay on Development*) is the theological counterpart of the *Origin of Species*, which it pre-dates by over a decade.« (Ker 1988, 300)

## 1. The biographical context of the *Essay* – a struggle for certitude

Before 1839, Newman had not doubted that the Church of England was a branch, or local embodiment, of the Church of Christ. However defective and corrupt that English Church which the participants in the Oxford Movement sought to restore to its former purity and independence from state control, it was not in schism. That it was not was of vital importance to one who believed that the saving grace of God was communicated to man in and through the community of the visible church. The more convinced he became that the Church of England was in schism, the more he believed his personal salvation to be imperilled (Lash 1979, 7–8).

This conviction only came slowly. In July 1841, he could still write: »We are neither accusing Rome of being idolatrous nor ourselves of being schismatical, we think neither charge tenable.« (Ess. II 1919, 367; quoted in: Apo. 1982, 75) In the Advent of that year, his diminishing confidence in the anglican Church's possession of the »visible Notes« of a true Church led him to emphasize the »inward« signs of holiness that nevertheless pointed to the presence of Christ within it (SD 1869, 308–380).

Part IV of the *Apologia* begins: »From the end of 1841, I was on my death-bed, as regards my membership with the Anglican Church, though at the time I became aware of it only by degrees.« (Apo. 1982, 99) In 1842, following his decision, and his promise to Bagot (his bishop), not to take part publicly in Church affairs, apart from carrying out his duties at St Marys, he retired from Oxford to Littlemore. It was there that he embarked on his study of Athanasius, and began to attract a number of young men around him, sympathizers who liked the cloistered life (Martin 1982,69).

Before the end of 1842 Newman began to turn his thoughts to the problem of the development of doctrine, to which he was to devote the last of the university sermons he was now preparing for publication. In January 1843 he was »much

plagued« with the final university sermon, which he was due to deliver on 2 February. »I have now for 12 years been working out a theory, and whether it is true or not, it has this recommendation, that it is consistent. I have kept to the same views and arguments for 12 years. They are not theological or ecclesiastical, though they bear immediately upon the most intimate and practical religious questions.« (To Mrs J. Mozley, 23 Jan. 1843; quoted in: Ker 1988, 257)

If there is one work of Newman which may truly be called »seminal«, it is surely the *Oxford University Sermons*, where he first explores some of his most brilliantly original ideas. The last two sermons, in fact, contain respectively the genesis of the *Idea of a University* and of the *Development of Christian Doctrine*. The last and most brilliant of the sermons is »The Theory of Developments in Religious Doctrine«, preached on 2 February 1843. Taking as his text »Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart«, Newman points to the Virgin Mary as »our pattern of Faith, both in the reception and in the study of Divine Truth. She does not think it enough to accept, she dwells upon it ... not enough to assent, she develops it.« (US 1970, 312)

Newman now turns to consider the actual process of development: »Theological dogmas are propositions expressive of the judgments which the mind forms, or the impressions which it receives, of Revealed truth. Revelation sets before it certain supernatural facts and actions, beings and principles; these make a certain impression or image upon it; and this impression spontaneously, or even necessarily, becomes the subject of reflection on the part of the mind itself.« The development is »but the carrying out of the idea into its consequences«, so that, for example, penance may be seen as a development of baptism, and »yet still is a distinct doctrine.« The sermon would soon be developed into the full-length book on the development of doctrine that is one of the great classics of theology (Ker 1988, 269).

In March 1843 Newman contacted John Keble<sup>1</sup> about the possibility of retiring from St Mary's. He confessed that his »feeling« about Rome, »though fading and reviving, has been on the whole becoming stronger and deeper«. »As far as I can realize my own convictions, I consider the Roman Catholic Communion the Church of the Apostles. ... I am very far *more* sure that England is in schism, than that the Roman additions to the Primitive Creed may not be developments, arising out of a keen and vivid realizing of the Divine Depositum of faith.« (To J. Keble, 4 May 1843; quoted in: Ker 1988, 274)

In 1844 Newman took two significant and dramatic steps. He had gradually come to see, as he wrote himself, »that the Anglican Church was formally in the wrong; on the other (hand), that the Church of Rome was formally in the right, then that no valid reason could be assigned for continuing in the Anglican, and

<sup>1</sup> John Keble (1792–1866), Tractarian leader, Fellow of Oriel College since 1811. In 1816 he was ordained priest. In 1831 he was elected professor of poetry at Oxford. He took a leading part in the Oxford Movement and cooperated with Newman in the issue of the *Tracts for the Times*. In 1838, with Newman and E. B. Pusey, he became one of the editors of the Library of the Fathers. After the cessation of the *Tracts*, he continued the close friend and adviser of Newman.

again that no valid objections could be taken to joining the Roman.« Firstly, in February he published in the *Conservative Journal* under the heading *Oxford and Rome* an anonymous *Retraction of Anti-Catholic Statements*. There was no doubt in anybody's mind that the author was Newman. He explained to his sister that he was merely negating any abuse which he might have levelled at Rome: he was not pronouncing at all on doctrines. He was, it is obvious, clearing his conscience. Secondly, he decided to take a step which he had been considering for three years: he resigned the living of St Mary's. He preached his last sermon at St Mary's on 25 September 1844. A friend of him wrote asking why he had resigned. The answer was »because I think the Church of Rome the Catholic Church, and ours not a part of the Catholic Church, because not in communion with Rome, and I felt I could not honestly be a teacher in it any longer.« (Martin 1982,71–73)

In June 1844 Newman wrote Mrs Froude<sup>2</sup> a long letter on the development of doctrine in which, he explained, he had always believed, although he had limited it to the Apostolic, or at least to the primitive, Church. However, the idea he had formulated in his *Lectures on the Prophetic Office* of a »Prophetic Tradition« existing within the Church had allowed for the possibility of development »at any time«. Then, in the last of his *University Sermons*, he had gone even further, by saying that »developments are not only *explanations* of the sense of the Creed, but further doctrines involved in and arising from its articles.« It was an »argument or theory« which he had been trying to put into words for years, at least since 1836. He was »far more certain« that they (i.e. Anglicans) were in schism than that Roman Catholic developments in doctrine were »not true ones«. Granted they were »not found drawn out in the early Church«, still there was »sufficient trace of them in it, to recommend and prove them, *on the hypothesis* of the Church having a divine guidance, though not sufficient to prove them by itself«. Moreover, there »was more evidence in Antiquity« for some Roman doctrines than there was for certain doctrines which Anglicans also held – for instance, »for the necessity of Unity..., for the supremacy of the See of Rome..., for the practice of the Invocation... (To Mrs W. Froude, 9 June; 15 July 1844; quoted in: Ker 1988, 287)

At the end of October 1844 he set down on paper an account of his religious position for Henry Wilberforce<sup>3</sup>. He felt very strongly that he had a responsibility towards people who had been influenced by his writings. After once again recounting the events of the summer of 1839, he went on to say that he could not resist the conclusion that it was »irrational to believe so much« as Anglo-Catholics did without believing »more«. He had long wondered on what ground Anglicans only accepted the first Councils: why was Trent »not a true council also«? If it was because the first Councils were »scriptural«, then they were not really receiving these Councils *as* Councils. With regard to individual doctrines, he could not »see why prayers for the dead are primitive, and not the Pope's Supremacy«.

<sup>2</sup> The wife of Richard H. Froude (1803–1836), Tractarian, Fellow and tutor of Oriel. Intimacy with his colleague, J. H. Newman, greatly influenced both.

<sup>3</sup> Henry William Wilberforce (1807–1873), a friend of Newman's, who was his tutor in Oriel College. He was ordained priest and followed Newman to the Catholic Church in 1850.

He thus found himself in the position that he »must either believe all or none« (To H. Wilberforce, 30 Oct. 1844; quoted in: Ker 1988, 292).

About that time, he wrote to H. E. Manning<sup>4</sup> he was »going through what must be gone through«. It was »like drinking a cup out« – and »the more of it the sooner over«. He had only one real reason for joining the Roman Church, and that was his belief that the Church of England was in schism. »And this most serious feeling is growing on me ... that the reasons, for which I believe *as much* as our system teaches, *must* lead me to believe more – and not to believe more, is to fall back into scepticism.« (To H. E. Manning, 16 Nov. 1844; to Mrs J. Mozley, 30 Nov. 1844; quoted in: Ker 1988, 293)

He was by now on the defensive and, in November 1844, he could say that »A clear conviction of the substantial identity of Christianity and the Roman system has now been on my mind for a full three years«. In the previous month, he had written that he »saw more in the early Church to convince me that separation from the See of Peter was the token of heresy and schism, than that the additions which that great body ... has received upon the primitive faith were innovations« (KC 1917, 21; quoted in: Lash 1979, 8).

In March 1845 he explained in a letter he was planning to publish a book after giving up his fellowship, which would give his reasons for becoming a Roman Catholic and which might help others in the same position as himself. In fact, as he explains in the *Apologia*, he had decided at the end of 1844 to write »an Essay on Doctrinal Development; and then, if at the end of it, my convictions in favour of the Roman Church were not weaker, of taking the necessary steps for admission into her fold« (Apo. 1982, 153).

At the beginning of 1845, he started to write his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, although he did not want this to be known. As he worked steadily at it his reservations about the Roman Church gradually disappeared. He wrote in the *Apologia*: »As I advanced my view so cleared that instead of speaking any more of 'the Roman Catholics', I boldly called them Catholics. Before I got to the end, I resolved to be received.« (Apo. 1982, 158) In August (1845) he warned his sister Jemima that the publication of his book would be »the signal of my going – and people must take it as such«. But still it was not finished and he was unable to »arrange the last and most important chapter«, which he had written »several times in vain«. Never before had he written and rewritten anything so many times (To Mrs J. Mozley, 17 Aug. 1845; quoted in: Ker 1988, 301).

Newman's move was foreseen by those who knew him. On 3 October 1845 he wrote to the Provost of Oriel (Oxford) resigning his Fellowship. To the very end his progress was to be made difficult: his unhappy mind and troubled soul was not to

<sup>4</sup> Henry Edward Manning (1808–1892), studied at Oxford, where he was ordained deacon (1832). In 1841 he became Archdeacon of Chichester. Manning, who had begun life as an Evangelical, now gradually swung round to the Tractarian side. After Newman's secession he was looked on as one of the leaders of the Oxford Movement. In 1851 he was received into the Roman Catholic Church. In 1865 he succeeded N. Wiseman as Archbishop of Westminster. In 1875 he was made a cardinal.

receive comfort from any University quarter. Yet he was resolute: the *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, whose composition had carried him rationally through the last stages towards Rome, was left unfinished, mid-sentence. One of Newman's close friends had asked Father Dominic Barberi of the Passionist Congregation, who was passing through Oxford, to visit Littlemore. On 8 October Newman wrote to his numerous friends telling them what was about to happen. One of those letters said: »I am this night expecting Father Dominic the Passionist, whom I shall ask to admit me into the One True Fold.« (Martin 1982, 73)

The Advertisement to the book is dated 6 October, with a Postscript which informs the reader that »Since the above was written, the Author has joined the Catholic Church. It was his intention and wish to have carried his Volume through the Press before deciding finally on this step. But when he had got some way in the printing, he recognized in himself a conviction of the truth of the conclusion to which the discussion leads, so clear as to supersede further deliberation.« According to the Advertisement, the book is not »a finished composition« (Dev. 1960, vii–viii), and in the *Apologia* Newman explains why: »Before I got to the end, I resolved to be received, and the book remains in the state in which it was then, unfinished« (Apo. 1982, 158). Two months after his change of allegiance he wrote: »My book attempts to show that *so much* may be said for the consistency of the Roman system, which is the outward token and test of its infallibility, that it is safest and best to submit to it.« (LD XI, 69)

## 2. An antecedent probability for developments

»C<sup>h</sup>ristianity has been long enough in the world to justify us in dealing with it as a fact in the world's history.« (Dev. 1960, 3) So begins the *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, which, its author tells us, »is directed towards a solution of the difficulty ... of our using in controversy the testimony of our most natural informant concerning the doctrine and worship of Christianity, viz. the history of eighteen hundred years.« (Dev. 1960, 21)

The »difficulty« is that Christianity has apparently undergone so many changes and variations over the centuries that the question arises whether there has been any »real continuity of doctrine« since the time of the Apostles (Dev. 1960, 4). This has led to Protestants »dispensing with historical Christianity altogether, and of forming a Christianity from the Bible alone« (Dev. 1960, 6). Anglicans, on the other hand, have traditionally appealed to the famous dictum of Vincent of Lerins that »Christianity is what has been held always, everywhere, and by all«, a rule which »is irresistible against Protestantism, and in one sense indeed it is irresistible against Rome also, but in the same sense it is irresistible against England. It strikes at Rome through England ...« (Dev. 1960, 9)

Newman's idea of development cannot be understood without first understanding his concept of a »living idea«. Ideas such as mathematical ones are »real« eno-

ugh, but can »hardly properly be called living«: »When an idea, whether real or not, is of a nature to arrest and possess the mind, it may be said to have life, that is, to live in the mind which is its recipient ... then it is not merely received passively in this or that form into many minds, but it becomes an active principle within them, leading them to an ever-new contemplation of itself, to an application of it in various directions, and a propagation of it on every side.« (Dev. 1960, 27)

A living idea grows gradually into a »body of thought«, which »will after all be little more than the proper representative of one idea, being in substance what that idea meant from the first, its complete image as seen in a combination of diversified aspects, with the suggestions and corrections of many minds, and the illustration of many experiences«. It is the »process ... by which the aspects of an idea are brought into consistency and form« which Newman calls »its development, being the germination and maturation of some truth or apparent truth on a large mental field... The development then of an idea is not like an investigation worked out on paper, in which each successive advance is a pure evolution from a foregoing, but it is carried on through and by means of communities of men and their leaders and guides; and it employs their minds as its instruments, and depends upon them, while it uses them.« (Dev. 1960, 28–29)

As usual, Newman portrays the intellectual life in terms of conflict and conquest: »It is the warfare of ideas under their various aspects...« The context, too, is not unimportant: »An idea not only modifies, but is modified, or at least influenced, by the state of things in which it is carried out, and is dependent in various ways on the circumstances which surround it.« There may be »the risk of corruption from intercourse with the world around«, but »such a risk must be encountered if a great idea is duly to be understood, and much more if it is to be fully exhibited. It is elicited and expanded by trial, and battles into perfection and supremacy.« In other words, an idea is brought out rather than obscured by development, as Newman argues in a classic passage, which concludes with one of the most frequently quoted sentences from his writings: »It is indeed sometimes said that the stream is clearest near the spring. Whatever use may fairly be made of this image, it does not apply to the history of a philosophy or belief, which on the contrary is more equable, and purer, and stronger, when its bed has become deep, and broad, and full. ... From time to time it makes essays which fail, and are in consequence abandoned. It seems in suspense which way to go; it wavers, and at length strikes out in one definite direction. In time it enters upon strange territory; points of controversy alter their bearing; dangers and hopes appear in new relations; and old principles reappear under new forms. It changes with them in order to remain the same. In a higher world it is otherwise, but here below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.« (Dev. 1960, 28–30)

Far from being unexpected, there is an »antecedent probability« in favour of developments in doctrine. After all, »If Christianity is a fact, and impresses an idea of itself on our minds and is a subject-matter of exercises of the reason, that idea will in course of time expand into a multitude of ideas, and aspects of ideas, connected and harmonious with one another, and in themselves determinate and

immutable, as is the objective fact itself which is thus represented.« The more an idea claims to be »living, the more various will be its aspects«. Since Christianity in particular is not a local but a universal religion, »it cannot but vary in its relations and dealings towards the world around it, that is, it will develope,« for »Principles require a very various application according as persons and circumstances vary, and must be thrown into new shapes according to the form of society which they are to influence.« New problems and questions arise which »must be answered, and, unless we suppose a new revelation, answered by means of the revelation which we have, that is, by development«. Scripture, for instance, does not solve the difficulties which are raised about its own authority and interpretation, but »in matter of fact the decision has been left to time, to the slow process of thought, to the influence of mind upon mind, the issues of controversy, and the growth of opinion«. And the fact that »Scripture needs completion« suggests that the »defect or inchoateness in its doctrines« constitutes »an antecedent probability in favour of a development of them«. In the Bible itself we find a »prophetic Revelation« in the form of »a process of development«, in which »the earlier prophecies are pregnant texts out of which the succeeding announcements grow; they are types. It is not that first one truth is told, then another; but the whole truth or large portions of it are told at once, yet only in rudiments, or in miniature, and they are expanded and finished in their parts, as the course of revelation proceeds.« (Dev. 1960, 41–47)

The truth is that »the whole Bible, not its prophetic portions only, is written on the principle of development. As the Revelation proceeds, it is ever new, yet ever old.« Moreover, the sayings of Christ and the Apostles »are of a typical structure... predictions as well as injunctions of doctrine. If then the prophetic sentences have had that development which has really been given them, first by succeeding revelations, and then by the event, it is probable antecedently that those doctrinal, political, ritual, and ethical sentences, which have the same structure, should admit the same expansion.« (Dev. 1960, 48–49) It is not surprising that after the Ascension it is impossible »to fix an historical point at which the growth of doctrine ceased, and the rule of faith was once for all settled«, or to find »one doctrine... which starts complete at first, and gains nothing afterwards from the investigations of faith and the attacks of heresy« (Dev. 1960, 50).

If there is an antecedent probability for developments, then »this is a strong antecedent argument in favour of a provision in the Dispensation for putting a seal of authority upon those developments«. After all, Christianity »is a revelation which comes to us as a revelation, as a whole, objectively, and with a profession of infallibility«, for ... »[it] is an objective religion, or a revelation with credentials« (Dev. 1960, 58). »The common sense of mankind ... feels that the very idea of revelation implies a present informant and guide, and that an infallible one. ... The inspired volume is not adapted or intended to subserve that purpose. ... We are told that God has spoken. Where? In a book? ... The Ethiopian's reply, when St. Philip asked him if he understood what he was reading, is the voice of nature: 'How can I, unless some man shall guide me?' The Church undertakes that office;

she does what none else can do, and this is the secret of her power.« (Dev. 1960, 64)

Again, »a revelation is not given, if there be no authority to decide what it is that is given.« And so, in order to distinguish true from false developments, a »supreme authority« is necessary. Nor is »the notion of development under infallible authority« an implausible »hypothesis ... to account for the rise of Christianity and the formation of its theology.« (Dev. 1960, 65–67)

The various developments of doctrine that took place in the East and West are »suggestive, or correlative, or confirmatory, or illustrative of each other«; whereas »the heretical doctrines were confessedly barren and short-lived, and could not stand their ground against Catholicism«. It would have to be generally accepted that, »of all existing systems, the present communion of Rome is the nearest approximation in fact to the Church of the Fathers.« There follows one of the most rhetorically daring passages in Newman's writings, as eloquent and evocative as it is pointed and specific: »Did St. Athanasius or St. Ambrose come suddenly to life, it cannot be doubted what communion he would take to be his own. All surely will agree that these Fathers, with whatever opinions of their own, whatever protests, if we will, would find themselves more at home with such men as St. Bernard or St. Ignatius Loyola, or with the lonely priest in his lodging, or the holy sisterhood of mercy, or the unlettered crowd before the altar, than with the teachers or with the members of any other creed.« (Dev. 1960, 68–71)

The general point that there has existed since Apostolic times a continuous developing body of doctrine called Catholicism becomes vividly real for Newman through the concretely personal argument that it is »the nearest ... to say the least, to the religious sentiment, and what is called *ethos*, of the early Church, nay, to that of the Apostles and Prophets« (Dev. 1960, 73).

### 3. Seven Notes of a faithful development of an Idea

Although it is undeniable that modern Catholicism is »the historical continuation« of early Christianity, it may still be objected that the »expansion« which has taken place consists not of developments but of corruptions. It is therefore »necessary ... to assign certain characteristics of faithful developments ... as a test to discriminate between them and corruptions«. But it is important first to understand what the word »corruption« means »when used literally of material substances«. It cannot, for example, be used of »a stone«, which »may be crushed to powder, but ... cannot be corrupted«. On the other hand, it can be applied to the human body, when it signifies »the breaking up of life, preparatory to its termination«. On the basis of this »analogy«, Newman proposes seven »Tests« or »Notes« of varying cogency, independence and applicability, to discriminate healthy developments of an idea from its state of corruption and decay, as follows: — There is no corruption if it retains one and the same type, the same

principles, the same organization; if its beginnings anticipate its subsequent phases, and its later phenomena protect and subserve its earlier; if it has a power of assimilation and revival, and a vigorous action from first to last. (Dev. 1960, 124)

1. »Preservation of type« — The first characteristic or mark, that of »unity of type«, »must not be pressed to the extent of denying all variation, nay, considerable alteration of proportion and relation, as time goes on, in the parts or aspects of an idea. Great changes in outward appearance and internal harmony occur in the instance of the animal creation itself. The fledged bird differs much from its rudimental form in the egg. The butterfly is the development, but not in any sense the image, of the grub.« The »variations« in »political and religious developments« are more »subtle still and mysterious«. A familiar »cause of corruption in religion is the refusal to follow the course of doctrine as it moves on, and an obstinacy in the notions of the past« (Dev. 1960, 125–129).
2. »Continuity of principles« — In explaining his second »Note«, Newman distinguishes doctrines from the »principle which they embody« and according to which they develop: »Principles are abstract and general, doctrines relate to facts; doctrines develop, and principles at first sight do not; doctrines grow and are enlarged, principles are permanent; doctrines are intellectual, and principles are more immediately ethical and practical.« The same doctrine will develop differently according to different principles: »Doctrines are developed by the operation of principles, and develop variously according to those principles.« In order to be »faithful«, a development »must retain both the doctrine and the principle with which it started. Doctrine without its correspondent principle remains barren, if not lifeless, of which the Greek Church seems an instance ... Principle is a better test of heresy than doctrine.« (Dev. 1960, 129–132)
3. »Power of assimilation« — For his third »Note«, Newman argues that because »doctrines and views which relate to man are not placed in a void, but in the crowded world«, they »make way for themselves by interpenetration, and develop by absorption«. »Facts and opinions, which have hitherto been regarded in other relations and grouped round other centres, henceforth are gradually attracted to a new influence and subjected to a new sovereign. ... A new element of order and composition has come among them; and its life is proved by this capacity of expansion, without disarrangement or dissolution. An eclectic, conservative, assimilating, healing, moulding process, a unitive power, is of the essence, and a third test, of a faithful development. ... Development is a process of incorporation. ... The power to incorporate [is] thus recognized as a property of life.« (Dev. 1960, 135–136)
4. »Logical sequence« — Fourthly, although development is not »a logical operation« in the sense that it is »a conscious reasoning from premisses to conclusion«, and »the spontaneous process which goes on within the mind itself is higher and choicer than that which is logical«, still the »rules« of logic »must not be transgressed«, and the »logical character which the whole wears becomes a test that the process has been a true development, not a perversion or corrup-

tion«. »Logical Sequence«, then, includes »any progress of the mind from one judgment to another«. »Logic is the organization of thought, and, as being such, is a security for the faithfulness of intellectual developments« (Dev. 1960, 137–142).

5. »Anticipation of its future« — Fifthly, since developments are in great measure only aspects of the idea from which they proceed, and all of them are natural consequences of it, it is often a matter of accident in what order they are carried out in individual minds; and it is in no wise strange that here and there definite specimens of advanced teaching should very early occur, which in the historical course are not found till a late day. The fact, then, of such early or recurring intimations of tendencies which afterwards are fully realized, is a sort of evidence that those later and more systematic fulfilments are only in accordance with the original idea. ... Another evidence, then, of the faithfulness of an ultimate development is its *definite anticipation* at an early period in the history of the idea to which it belongs.« (Dev. 1960, 142–144)
6. »Conservative action upon its past« — Sixthly, a true development is »one which is conservative of the course of antecedent developments being really those antecedents and something besides them: it is an addition which illustrates, not obscures, corroborates, not corrects, the body of thought from which it proceeds; and this is its characteristic as contrasted with a corruption.« Thus, for example, »a gradual conversion from a false to a true religion, plainly, has much of the character of a continuous process, or a development, in the mind itself«, inasmuch as »such a change consists in addition and increase chiefly, not in destruction«. »True conversion is ever of a positive, not a negative character. ... Vincentius of Lerins ... speaks of the development of Christian doctrine, as *profectus fidei non permutatio*. And so as regards the Jewish Law, our Lord said that He came 'not to destroy, but to fulfil.' ... And thus a sixth test of a true development is that it is of a tendency conservative of what has gone before it.« (Dev. 1960, 144–147)
7. »Chronic vigour« — The seventh and final »Note« is that of »chronic vigour«: »Since the corruption of an idea, as far as the appearance goes, is a sort of accident or affection of its development, being the end of a course, and a transition-state leading to a crisis, it is ... a brief and rapid process. While ideas live in men's minds, they are ever enlarging into fuller development: they will not be stationary in their corruption any more than before it; and dissolution is that further state to which corruption tends. Corruption cannot, therefore, be of long standing; and thus *duration* is another test of a faithful development. ... Revolutions are generally violent and swift; now, in fact, they are the course of a corruption« A heresy is always short-lived, because »it is an intermediate state between life and death« – although »an heretical principle will continue in life many years, first running one way, then another«. »Decay« is a »form of corruption« which is »slow«. »While a corruption is distinguishable from decay by its energetic action, it is distinguished from a development by its *transitory character*.« (Dev. 1960, 147–149)

The rest of the *Essay* is concerned with applying the seven »Notes« to the actual historical development of Christian doctrine. By far the largest space is devoted to the first, not surprisingly: for of course, it was the recognition of the essential identity of contemporary Catholicism and early Christianity which was the cause of Newman's own conversion. There are several rhetorical passages where Newman delineates, vividly and tersely, the various general features of the continuing Church, of which the first serves as an introduction to the lengthy chapter on the first of the »Notes«: »There is a religious communion claiming a divine commission. ... It is well-organized, well-disciplined body. ... It is spread over the known world; it may be weak or insignificant locally, but it is strong on the whole from its continuity; it may be smaller than all other religious bodies together, but is larger than each separately. It is a natural enemy to governments external to itself... and tends to a new modelling of society... And there is but one communion such.« (Dev. 1960, 150)

The conclusion to this chapter offers the most explicit and dramatic identification: »If then there is now a form of Christianity such, that it extends throughout the world, though with varying measures of prominence or prosperity in separate places; – that it lies under the power of sovereigns and magistrates, in various ways alien to its faith; ... – that it has been altogether or almost driven from some countries; ... and that amid its disorders and fears there is but one Voice for whose decisions the peoples wait with trust, one Name and one See to which they look with hope, and that name Peter, and that see Rome; – such a religion is not unlike the Christianity of the fifth and sixth Centuries.« (Dev. 1960, 177–178)

At the beginning of the chapter on the sixth »Note«, Newman had remarked: »This Essay has so far exceeded its proposed limits, that both reader and writer may well be weary, and may content themselves with a brief consideration of the portions of the subject which remain.« He now ends on a personal note of appeal to the reader: »And now, dear Reader, time is short, eternity is long. Put not from you what you have here found; regard it not as a mere matter of present controversy; set not out resolved to refute it, and looking about for the best way of doing so; seduce not yourself with the imagination that it comes of disappointment, or disgust, or restlessness, or wounded feeling, or undue sensibility, or other weakness. Wrap not yourself round in the associations of years past; nor determine that to be truth which you wish to be so, nor make an idol of cherished anticipations. Time is short, eternity is long. *Nunc dimittis servum tuum, Domine, secundum verbum tuum in pace: Quia viderunt oculi mei salutare tuum.*« (Dev. 1960, 319–320)

#### **4. The enduring importance and ecumenical relevance of the *Essay***

Louis Bouyer of the Oratory, a great Newman scholar, underlines the »deep organic unity and the equilibrium of his work«. In his doctrine on deve-

lopment, he did not yield to the temptation of integrism and remained »far from opposing genuine ecumenism«. Bouyer writes: »He has been misinterpreted by the modernists first, and later by interpreters like Jean Guitton, as a champion of the idea that development for its own sake is the chief characteristic of the life of the Catholic Church, while all the distortions of Christianity in the most varied heresies were imagined to be sterile. No greater mistake could be made not only about the real intention of Newman, but about what he himself stated most explicitly. For him, development as a characteristic of every living thing, healthy or unhealthy, leads either to the fulfillment of life or to the decomposition of irreversible death. Calvinism itself, he said, and all the possible Christian 'isms', are either stillborn or develop; their development either leads to lasting life or is a deadly decomposition. He disappointed the modernists precisely because he is not interested in development for development's sake, but in how to distinguish a development that leads to death and decomposition from the development that retains the integrity of its germ.

Therefore, his attempt will not be to demonstrate how abundantly, how gloriously the Catholic tradition has developed, as compared to spurious or partial traditions of Christianity, but to elaborate a series of 'Notes' which may enable us to distinguish genuine, faithful developments from the more or less unhealthy ones.

Here again we catch Newman in the same search for integrity which animated his unswerving fidelity to rational consistency as well as to authentic obedience to God, the two complementary aspects of the right use of reason, above all concerning ultimate truth. The integrity of Newman's reflection on aspects of Christian belief and practice (and also in opposition to all forms of integrism ...), far from opposing genuine ecumenism, brought him to see how and in what manner authentic Catholicism and ecumenism are mutually inclusive, rather than contradictory. From this perspective his often neglected *Lectures on Justification* has been acknowledged by such an ecumenist as Archbishop Michael Ramsey as a model for realistic ecumenism.« (Bouyer 1989, 166–167)

John Courtney Murray, the American Jesuit who is well-known for his contribution to the Second Vatican Council's decree on religious freedom, has written: »I consider that the parting of the ways between the two Christian communities [Catholicism and Protestantism] takes place on the issue of development of doctrine. *That* development has taken place in both communities cannot possibly be denied. The question is, *what* is legitimate development, what is organic in the understanding of the original deposit of faith, what is a warranted extension of the primitive discipline of the Church, and what, on the other hand, is accretion, additive increment, adulteration of the deposit, distortion of true Christian discipline?« (Murray 1964, 53).

The issue of development of doctrine, then, enjoys a many-sided importance. It raises issues of specific concern for Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Anglicanism, and for the Churches of the Reformation. It confronts Catholics with the demand to

show that later dogmas are not importations into, but rather genuine unfoldings of, the once-for-all revelation, and so a veritable witness to the liveliness of revelation and its unfathomable riches (Eph 3,8–9).

»John Henry Newman was not the first theologian to address the theological issue, but he was and still is, undeniably, the first theologian to pay sustained attention to the problem. His *Essay on Development* is not only the starting point for the study of doctrinal development, but so far as Catholic theology is concerned, it is still the last word on the subject, to the extent that no other theologian has yet attempted anything on the same scale or of similar scope, while more recent Catholic theologians, who have rejected the logical scholastic theory as unhistorical and unreal, have looked to Newman as their main inspiration and source. The theologians of the Catholic Church feel more and more the very same difficulties that Newman had to address in the last century.« (Norris 1995, 478)

In 1848 Newman insisted that »my *Essay* on development ... is not written to prove the truth of Catholicism, as it distinctly observes (e. g., in the first four pages), but to answer an objection against Catholicism« (LD XII, 332). It does not offer a »theory« of doctrinal development in the sense in which such a theory is understood in contemporary theology. What it does provide is a »view« of revelation and faith in the concrete circumstances of history, guided by the superintendence of an infallible authority whose credentials are provided in revelation, and consistent with the conviction that, while divine revelation is complete with the death of the last apostle, it is a deposit to be assimilated by the Church until the end of time. His *Essay* is »an hypothesis to account for a difficulty«, as he put it in the preface to the third edition in 1878; it is »not in the first instance written to prove the divinity of the Catholic religion ... but to explain certain difficulties in its history.« (Dev. 1960, 7)

Th. Norris writes: »Newman offers in the *Essay* not an explanatory theory for the derivation of doctrine from the Christian idea in revelation, but rather a comprehensive 'view', a description of a dynamic continuity avoiding the Scylla of corruptive innovation and the Charybdis of a statuesque immobility.« (Norris 1995, 486)

The *Essay* »does not pretend to be a *dogmatic* work« (LD XII, 170), but an »obscure philosophical work ... to advertise people how things stood with me« (KC 1917, 379). Newman's aim in writing the *Essay* was apologetic, but the apology does not claim to be a »demonstration«. Indeed, »the main object of the *Essay*« is to show that »the grounds a person gives for his conversion cannot be expressed in a formula« (LD XI, 109).

The question of development of doctrine »touched on a great matter which Christendom had only lately begun to face. Everyone felt the movement of time, the changing nature of society. Everyone saw that all societies move in history, Churches just like States. Christendom, whether Protestant or Catholic, awoke to the crux of history; a gospel, given for all time, and then understood inside a ceaselessly changing environment with always new intellectual habits and always

new moral predicaments. And Newman came along and honestly and openly recognised the impact of history upon the Churches.

The idea of development was the most important single idea which Newman contributed to the thought of the Christian Church. This was not because the idea of development did not exist already. But it was a very restricted idea, so restricted that it posed insuperable problems for anyone who studied history with open eyes. Newman made it wider and vaguer, and thereby far more fertile in conception, and more useful to anyone who cared about intellectual honesty, or the reconciliation of faith with the evidence of the past which history finds.« (Chadwick 1983, 48)

According to N. Lash, the *Essay* is undoubtedly »a work, the pioneering status of which is widely acknowledged.« The author continues: »Newman was one of the first catholic theologians seriously to attempt to hold in tension the demands of historical consciousness and the Christian conviction that the gospel of Jesus Christ is irreplaceable and unchangeable. ... Nearly every study of doctrinal development continues to acknowledge the seminal influence of the *Essay*.« (Lash 1975, 2)

All Newman scholars would agree that »Newman anticipates the main findings of the Second Vatican Council« (Coulson 1970, 239). He is often called »the invisible father of the Second Vatican Council«, because so many of his views on the nature of the Church and its relation to the world then received formal and collegiate ratification (Trevor 1974, 9). Ian Ker comes to the same conclusion, as he writes: »When studying theology, I came to appreciate the ways in which he anticipated so many of the central themes of the Ecumenical Council (Vatican II) which he predicted and which opened a new era in Christian history. ... My reading and re-reading of his writings over the years has only deepened my conviction that John Henry Newman is to be numbered among the Doctors of the Church.« (Ker 1988, viii–ix)

## Abbreviations

The abbreviations used are those listed in J. Rickaby, *Index to the Works of John Henry Cardinal Newman* (London: Longmans, Green and co., 1914), with the additions recommended by C. S. Dessain, *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, vol. 11 (London: T. Nelson, 1961).

**Apo.** – 1982. *Apologia pro Vita Sua*. London: Sheed and Ward.

**Dev.** – 1960. *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*. London: Sheed and Ward.

**Ess. I, II** – 1919. *Essays Critical and Historical*. 2 vols. London: B. M. Pickering.

**KC** – 1917. *Correspondence of John Henry Newman with John Keble and Others, 1839–1845*. London: Ed. at the Birmingham Oratory.

**LD** – *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*. Ed. Charles S. Dessain et al. Vols. I–VI. Oxford, 1978–1984. Vols. XI–XXII. London, 1961–1972. Vols. XXIII–XXXI. Oxford, 1973–1977.

**SD** – 1869. *Sermons Bearing on Subjects of the Day*. London.

**US** – 1970. *Newman's University Sermons. Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford 1826–43*. London: SPCK.

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