

NEWMAN AND THE FATHERS

IN 1850 John Henry Newman wrote: 'Even when I was a boy, my thoughts were turned to the early Church, and especially to the early Fathers, by the perusal of the Calvinist John Milner's *Church History*, and I have never lost, I have never suffered a suspension of the impression, deep and most pleasurable, which his sketches of St. Ambrose and St. Augustine left on my mind. From that time the vision of the Fathers was always, to my imagination, I may say, a paradise of delight to the contemplation of which I directed my thoughts from time to time, whenever I was free from the engagements proper to my time of life.'

Brought up as an Evangelical, he studied the Fathers through Protestant spectacles even as late as his twenty-eighth year, when he was already under the influence of Whately and beginning to reach out to idea of a National Church with teaching powers and Sacraments. So he tells us:

'When years afterwards (1828) I first began to read their works with attention and on system, I busied myself much in analysing them, and in cataloguing their doctrines and principles; but when I had thus proceeded very carefully and minutely for some space of time, I found, on looking back on what I had done, that I had scarcely done anything at all; I found that I had gained very little from them, and I came to the conclusion that the Fathers I had been reading, who were exclusively those of the ante-Nicene period, had very little in them. At the time I did not discover the reason of this result, though, on the retrospect, it was plain enough: I had read them simply on Protestant ideas, analysed and catalogued them on Protestant principles of division, and hunted for Protestant doctrines and usages in them. My headings ran: 'Justification by faith only,' 'Sanctification,' and the like. I knew not what to look for in them; I sought what was not there, I missed

what was there; I laboured through the night and caught nothing.

'But I should make one important exception: I rose from their perusal with a vivid perception of the divine institution, the prerogatives, and the gifts of the Episcopate that is, with an implicit aversion to the Erastian principle.'¹

The Oxford Movement dated, according to Newman himself, from Keble's sermon on National Apostasy, in 1833. The sermon was a protest against Erastianism, against the subservience of the National Church to the State, and the Movement was entirely against this same Erastianism, and was an attempt to revive the High Church tenets of the earlier Anglican divines.

Accordingly we find Newman some years later ridiculing the way in which his contemporaries wrote about the Fathers, and laying down the law thus:

'To read then a particular Father to advantage, we must, as a preliminary, do these two things—divest ourselves of modern ideas and prejudices, and study theology. The work of Bull, for instances, above mentioned, or the fifth book of the Ecclesiastical Polity, or Laud on Tradition, will give quite a new character to our studies; it will impart to them a reality, and thereby an interest, which cannot otherwise be gained, and will give an ancient document a use by giving it a meaning.'²

¹ From *Difficulties of the Anglicans*, Lect. xii, § 3 (1850) Newman had referred to the same labours some years earlier, when still an Anglican, in the *British Critic*: 'We knew a person who . . . read and analysed Ignatius, Barnabas, Clement, Polycarp, and Justin, with exceeding care, but who now considers his labour to have been all thrown away, from the strange modern divisions under which he threw the matter he found in them.' (*The Theology of the seven Epistles of St. Ignatius*, republished in 1871, as the sixth of *Essays Critical and Historical*, ed. 1901, p. 227). Newman was now moderately High Church, and he gives a characteristically lively account of an imaginary writer, who says: 'I want to write a book upon the Fathers; I know exactly what to think of them, and pretty well what I mean my work to be.' (*ib.* p. 230).

² *Theology of St. Ignatius* (as in preceding note), p. 233.

Thus the Fathers are no longer to be tested by Evangelical doctrine, but are to be prefaced and introduced by Anglicans such as Bull, Hooker, Laud. This is an advance, and a valuable one: for though these worthies had little idea of the Sacraments, no rule of Faith, no respect for tradition, yet they were orthodox and learned on the theology of the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation as discussed in the fourth century and even in the fifth. Under their guidance to some limited extent, but mainly by laborious study of the theological language of those centuries, the young Newman between thirty and forty became an expert in the technical vocabularies of the great Greek and Latin Fathers.

The results of his labours were considerable. In 1833 he published his *Arians of the Fourth Century*, a good history of an involved and difficult period. In the hundred years that have elapsed since then, a certain amount of light has been added, and perhaps clearer histories have been written, but none more sympathetic and sincere. But it is the theological side which was permanently valuable to Newman himself, for he was laying the foundation of detailed study which produced the wonderfully learned and acute notes which accompanied later (in 1841-4) his translation of Select Treatises of St. Athanasius in Dr. Pusey's *Library of the Fathers*. These have never been surpassed by Gwatkin or Loofs or Harnack, or even Lebreton.³

In the *British Magazine* during 1833-6 appeared a series of historical sketches which were published in one volume

³ Soon after his conversion Newman turned some of them into Latin in order that they might be accessible to the Roman theologians, who were attacking bits of his book on Developments, though unable to read it as a whole. To Dalgairns he wrote (beginning of 1847):

'What do you think of my being engaged in translating into Latin and publishing here four disputations from my Athanasius? . . . You see I am *determined* to make a noise, if I can. It shan't be my fault if people think small-beer of me. Is not this ambitious?'—(*Life*, by W. Ward, I, p. 173).

in 1840 as *The Church of the Fathers*, and dedicated to Isaac Williams. In later editions certain parts were omitted as being too controversial, and useless for Catholic readers.

The book begins with chapters from the very interesting life of St. Ambrose. Next comes a sympathetic account of St. Basil. Where Duchesne remarks 'Basil tells us he suffered from dyspepsia; we should have guessed it from his letters,' Newman contrariwise shows us the suffering felt by the great bishop because he could get no help from the West for his schemes of reunion. But then he chose to take a course of compromise the opposite of the policy of St. Damasus and St. Athanasius, and Newman loved the latter too much to be able to agree wholly with Basil's strictures on the pride of the Westerns; yet he ends in a sad strain: 'The notes of the Church were impaired and obscured in his part of Christendom, and he had to fare on as best he might—admiring, courting, yet coldly treated by the Latin world, desiring the friendship of Rome, yet wounded by her superciliousness, suspected of heresy by Damasus, and accused by Jerome of pride.' He might have added that Gregory Nazianzen rebuked him for his condescension to heretics. That much more attractive saint is then dealt with, and his unkind treatment by Basil is not glossed over. But an invocation of the dead Basil by Gregory is quoted, with the comment. 'The English Church has removed such addresses from her services, on account of the abuses to which they have led, and she pointedly condemns what she calls the Romish doctrine concerning invocation of Saints, as "a fond thing."'

A short chapter on St. Vincent of Lérins emphasises the necessity of keeping the deposit of faith inviolate in the smallest detail. 'At present the beau idéal of a clergyman in the eyes of many is a "reverend gentleman," who has a large family, and "administers spiritual consolation." Now I make bold to say, that confessorship for the Catholic faith is one part of the duty of Christian ministers, nay, and Christian laymen too.' Newman makes much of Vincent's

BLACKFRIARS

celebrated canon, universality, antiquity, consent, for he says: 'We receive the Catholic doctrines as we receive the canon of Scripture, because, as our Article expresses it, "of their authority" there "was never any doubt in the Church."' ⁴

The question 'What Catholic doctrines?' does not yet trouble the writer. He is still quite satisfied with the Thirty-nine Articles and High Church Anglicanism. It is also natural that he does not quote St. Vincent's condemnation of St. Cyprian for resisting Pope St. Stephen, nor any of the other very 'papal' passages in the treatise. And he fails to discover that *quod ubique* comes first, that is, the present teaching of the Church, and that it is only when that seems for the moment to be doubtful because authority has not yet spoken, that *quod semper* comes to be investigated. He rightly perceives that 'the Fathers are principally to be considered as *witnesses*, not as authorities.' But he does not explain why their witness is likely to be clearer than that of Holy Scriptures, which it is to interpret: 'It is *abstractedly* the right of every individual to verify tradition by Scripture for himself, yet it is not so in matter of fact . . . this said private inquiry is, in the case of ordinary men, a mistake; and they who attempt to exercise it are as reasonable and wise as anyone who goes out of his depth in a matter of this world.'

Who then is to judge? The bishops? The learned? We are not told. But the original form of the chapter concludes: 'I come to the conclusion that Vincent was a sorry Protestant.'

⁴ It is difficult to imagine that Newman was still unaware of the distinction drawn by Eusebius between books of the New Testament which were universally received and those which were not: or that he did not know that the Apocalypse was for centuries rejected by a great part of the East, that Hebrews was not received at Rome till the end of the fourth century, that the Lutherans excluded books from the canon for a hundred years. And what about the Protestant mutilation of the Old Testament?

In the chapter on Demetrias, he declares 'that the monastic life holds a real place in the dispensation of the Gospel, at least providentially.' The chapter on Aerius, Jovinian and Vigilantius is amusing: 'When corruptions began to press themselves upon the notice of Christians, here you find three witnesses, raising their distinct and solemn protest in different parts of the Church, independently of each other, in Gaul, in Italy, and in Asia Minor, against prayers for the dead, veneration of relics, candles in the day-time, the merit of celibacy, the need of fasting, the observance of days, difference in future rewards, the defectibility of the regenerate, and the divine origin of episcopacy. Here is pure and Scriptural Protestantism.'

But, he continues, 'we know what they protested *against*, not what they protested *for* Though they differed from the ancients, there is no proof that they agreed with the moderns Now does anyone mean to maintain that Aerius, Jovinian or Vigilantius, held justification by faith only in the sense of John Wesley, or of John Newton? Did they consider that baptism was a thing of nought; that faith did everything; that faith was trust,' etc. . . . 'Let then these three protesters be ever so cogent an argument against the Catholic creed, this does not bring them a whit nearer the Protestant.'

And presently he argues still more adroitly: 'I observe, then, that if two or three men in the fourth century are sufficient, against the general voice of the Church, to disprove one doctrine, then still more are two or three of an earlier century able to disprove another. Why should protesters in century four be more entitled to a hearing than protesters in century three? Now it so happens, that as Aerius, Jovinian and Vigilantius in the fourth protested against austerities, so did Praxeas, Noetus and Sabellius in the third protest against the Catholic or Athanasian doctrine of the Holy Trinity. A much stronger case surely could be made out in favour of the latter protest than of the former. Noetus was of Asia Minor, Praxeas taught in Rome, Sabellius in Africa' 'Again, the only value of the protest

of these three men would be, of course, that they *represented* others; that they were exponents of a state of opinion which prevailed either in their day or before them, and which was in the way to be overpowered by the popular corruptions. What are Aerius and Jovinian to me as individuals? They are worth nothing, unless they can be considered as organs and witnesses of an expiring cause: Now it does not appear that they themselves had any notion that they were speaking in behalf of anyone, living or dead, besides themselves. If Jovinian had known of writers of the second and third centuries holding the same views, Jovinian would have been as prompt to quote them as Lutherans are to quote Jovinian.'

He goes still further: 'It is natural to feel distrust of controversialists who, to all appearance, would not have been earnest against a doctrine or practice, except that it galled themselves. Now it so happens that each of these three Reformers lies open to this imputation. Aerius is expressly declared by Epiphanius to have been Eustathius's competitor for the see of Sebaste, and to have been disgusted at failing. *He* is the preacher against bishops. Jovinian was bound by a monastic vow, and *he* protests against fasting and coarse raiment. Vigilantius was a priest; and therefore *he* disapproves of the celibacy of the clergy.'

These are only some examples of Newman's lively argumentation about 1833-4 against what he called Protestantism. He had himself begun by studying the ante-Nicene Fathers in order to find an antidote to Erastianism at a date when the Empire was not yet Christian and Emperors were not yet interfering in Theology. He found this all yet clearer in the history of Arianism, where he makes Athanasius the protagonist against Imperial authority (and somewhat disregards the greater influence of the Popes) and in the life of St. Ambrose. He has arrived at the view that the Catholic Church had unity and authority up to the end of the fourth century, and the supposed 'corruptions' were holy and laudable customs. He does not yet know how long the Catholic Church remained uncorrupted; but he

is quite sure that 'Romanism' is full of corruptions. He greatly dislikes the 'Protestant' reformers of the sixteenth century, and continues to hold that the Anglican divines of the seventeenth century had returned to primitive doctrine. He names this view the *Via Media*: it is a half-way house between the horrible corruptions of Rome and the exaggerated reactions of the 'Protestants.' Until 1839 he continues to denounce Romanism: and then he is afraid to scorn an immense, organised, historical body of Christians, distinguished by so much success and saintliness. But how many years it has taken to get rid of a Protestant prejudice which no educated person to-day would share!⁵

But at last, in January 1840 Newman brings out a final defence of *The Catholicity of the Anglican Church*, a title which strikes one as a contradiction in terms, for the writer has not yet grasped the idea of a Universal Church authoritatively teaching one faith. But at least he hopes for union with Rome, when Anglicanism has proved itself to be a branch: 'When we do become like a branch, consent to acknowledge us,' but also when Rome has learnt 'manliness, openness, consistency, truth.'

Thus, up to 1840 Newman's study of the Fathers had slowly led him towards the conception of a Catholic Church with more authority than Hooker and Hammond and Bull could supply. He is no longer satisfied with High Church teaching, and the Anglican position is beginning to show itself to him as something abnormal, like the position of Elijah and Elisha in the northern kingdom of Israel, cut off from Jerusalem and the Temple, or like

⁵ The most complete defence of this *Via Media* is in the parochial lectures on *The Prophetical Office of the Church* and in *Tract 38* of 1834. Another tract (*No. 71*, in 1836) is *The Mode of conducting controversy with Rome*. In 1836 appeared a paper *How to accomplish it*, being a dialogue supposed to take place at Rome between two Anglicans, both convinced of the corrupt nature of Romanism, but who 'aim at giving vitality to their Church, the one by uniting it to the Roman See, the other by developing a nineteenth-century Anglo-Catholicism. The narrator sides on the whole with the latter of these.'

Meletius of Antioch, neither recognised by the Pope nor excommunicated by him. At last he looks forward, if not to Unity at least to ' Reunion ' or intercommunion.

Meanwhile the *Tracts for the Times* have been running their course, and (far more important) the great preacher's weekly sermons in St. Mary's have urged a solemn piety and awe-struck worship which attracted equally the learned and the young, and gave the Oxford Movement its solidarity and strength.

It is curious to notice how Newman is the leader: he feels responsible to his followers, and tries by patristic study to find a firm ground for their feet. But it is Keble who writes on Eucharistic Adoration, and Pusey who later gets together (out of rather obvious sources) catenae of the Fathers in favour of the Real Presence. Newman refers but little to the doctrine of the Blessed Sacrament, and even less to the Sacrifice of the Mass.⁶ His care is to dis-

⁶ In *A letter addressed to the Margaret Professor of Divinity* he defends Hurrell Froude's words about the Real Presence by comparing them with the Homilies and with Hooker (§ 24) and contrasts the splendid rhetoric of the latter with the Zwinglian doctrine current at the time (1838). He is fairly satisfied with this High Calvinist doctrine, even though Hooker defends ' even the Zwinglians from the charge of denying that Christ's Person as well as His grace, His Person whole and entire, is in the Lord's Supper.' He seems to admit that the Lutheran Consubstantiation is not consistent with the Articles and Prayer Book. Later, as everyone knows, in *Tract 90* (1841) he argued that the Transubstantiation denied in Article 28 is ' a shocking doctrine,' but not one ' of this or that Council, but one generally received or taught both in the schools and in the multitude ' ; that the ' philosophical position ' involved ' is itself capable of a very specious defence.' He concludes that there is nothing in the article ' to interfere with the doctrine, elsewhere taught in our formularies of a real super-local Presence in the Holy Sacrament.' It is not clear that Newman even here goes much beyond the Calvinism of Hooker or Laud; but his ignorance of Catholic teaching is still so dense that it is difficult to tell how far, if at all, he has progressed. Similarly, on Article 31, he has invented the absurdity that ' " the sacrifice of the Mass " is not there spoken of, but " the sacrifices of Masses," certain

cover a foundation for a National Church, and a Rule of Faith.

The publication in 1841 of *Tract 90*, which explained away a number of the more anti-Catholic of the Thirty-nine Articles, marks an epoch in Newman's views. He had always practised and taught obedience to bishops as an essential part of his High Church doctrine. Now the bishops issued charges against him, and within two years he felt bound to resign his post as Vicar of the University Church, and he retired altogether to Littlemore and into lay communion. The great series of his grave and soul-searching sermons came to an end. The bishops seemed to have rejected the Oxford Movement so far as Newman had understood it and led it, and Newman was up against a blank wall.

Yet he felt innocent: he had been working for the Church of England. 'I considered,' he wrote in the *Apologia*, 'that to make the *Via Media* concrete and substantive, it must be much more than it was in outline; that the Anglican Church must have a ceremonial, a ritual, and a fulness of doctrine and devotion, which it had not at present, if it were to compete with the Roman Church with any prospect of success. Such additions would not remove it from its proper basis, but would merely strengthen and beautify it: such, for instance, would be confraternities, particular devotions, reverence for the Blessed Virgin, prayers for the dead, beautiful Churches, munificent offerings to them and in them, monastic houses, and many other observances and institutions, which I used to say belonged to us as much as to Rome, though Rome had appropriated them and boasted of them, by reason of our having let them slip

observances, for the most part private and solitary, which the writers of the Articles knew to have been in force in times past,' etc. He shows strange ignorance of the teaching of the Reformers as to Masses, and equally as to Catholic doctrine, which, however, he seems to be ready to accept, if it be explained or explained away. Transubstantiation he did not accept (or understand in its severe simplicity) until he was received into the Church,

from us' (ed. 1902, p. 166). Here is as yet no desire for 'Reunion,' nor for Authority, nor any dissatisfaction with the Calvinist doctrines as to Communion and Sacrifice.

Yet he tells us that there was something else at the back of his mind, a haunting fear that the Church of England was nothing else 'than what I had so long fearfully suspected, from as far back as 1836,—a mere national institution' (*Apologia*, Note E). For years, therefore, he half felt a doubt about Anglicanism, whilst yet he thought Romanism a dreadful corruption. But once he had left Oxford, he was obliged to find some theory of the Church, for he had many followers to lead, including a number of Romanizers. As far back as September, 1839, he had received 'the first real hit from Romanism,' Wiseman's famous article in the *Dublin Review* in which the Anglican position was compared with that of the Donatists. But even in 1843 'I could not go to Rome while I thought what I did of the devotions she sanctioned to the Blessed Virgin and the Saints.'

Hence for two years at Littlemore a renewed study of the Fathers and of history in general, and the gradual evolution of the greatest book Newman had written until then, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*. It is a wonderful book philosophically considered, on account of its subtle analysis of the nature of development and of the characteristics of a genuine development. The learning displayed by a young man of forty-two to forty-four is equally astonishing. The range of history covered by his examples is very wide and the illustrations from the Fathers are brilliantly summarised. As the writer proceeded, his latent convictions came to the surface, and his peripheral prejudices faded away. Two years was not a long time; his disciples had less prejudice against Rome than he had: Ward published *The Ideal of a Church*, a panegyric of the 'Roman Communion'; Lockhart and others were received before their leader.

He had long felt the force of Bishop Bull's admission that 'in the controversies of the early centuries the Roman

Church was ever on the right side.' 'I at length recognised in principles I had honestly preached as if Anglican, conclusions favourable to the cause of Rome. Of course I did not like to confess this. . . . The prime instance of this was the appeal to Antiquity; St. Leo had overset, in my own judgment, its force as the special argument for Anglicanism.'

The first Tractarians had agreed that there was to be no 'private judgment' at all. The Rule of Faith was rigid: the teaching of their Bishops, the Prayer Book and the Thirty-nine Articles, the Anglican divines of the seventeenth century, and the Church of the Fathers. When it turned out that none of these agreed together, Newman confessed that he was furious with the Anglican Divines for having misled him as to the witness of the early Fathers. He gave up the former: he adhered to the Fathers; they forced him to doubt even the Prayer Book. As for the living voice of the Bishops, it reviled the Movement.

The Fathers remained, and only the Fathers. And they seemed to be on the side of Rome.

How did Newman arrive at his theory of development of doctrine? Mainly, no doubt, by actually tracing development first in early times and then in subsequent ages. But in his *Apologia* he adds an interesting comment, with regard to his great difficulty as to Invocation of Saints, which oddly seemed to him to disagree with his own feeling of being alone with God, *solus cum solo*. 'I am not sure that I did not also at this time feel the force of another consideration. The idea of the Blessed Virgin was as it were *magnified* in the Church of Rome, as time went on—but so were all the Christian ideas; as that of the Blessed Eucharist. The whole scene of pale, faint, distant Apostolic Christianity is seen in Rome, as through a telescope or magnifier. The harmony of the whole, however, is of course what it was. It is unfair then to take one Roman idea, that of the Blessed Virgin, out of what may be called its context' (pp. 196-7).

BLACKFRIARS

Even before resigning St. Mary's he wrote, May 4th, 1843: 'At present I fear, as far as I can analyse my own convictions, I consider the Roman Catholic Communion to be the Church of the Apostles, and that what grace is among us (which, through God's mercy, is not little) is extraordinary, and from the overflowings of His dispensation. 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.'

And so he proceeded to write his book. In the introduction he seems to make too little of the Rule of St. Vincent, for he does not point out how admirably that Saint defined development of doctrine. But he notes that development 'has at all times, perhaps, been implicitly adopted by theologians, and, I believe, has recently been illustrated by several distinguished writers of the continent, such as De Maistre and Möhler.' He is anxious not to seem an innovator. One well-known remark in his Preface must be quoted again: 'In truth, scanty as the ante-Nicene notices may be of the Papal supremacy, they are both more numerous and more definite than the adducible testimonies in favour of the Real Presence' (p. 20).

It is unnecessary to follow Newman's course any further. The Fathers had been to him a delight, an inspiration. They had been a far-off model to imitate in remodelling the English Establishment. But now he realised that he himself could belong to the Church of the Fathers, that there was but One Universal Church, one and the same in the days of Ignatius or Athanasius or Leo and of Pope Pius IX. And when he had been received into that Church by Father Dominic, he kissed the leather backs of the Patristic tomes around his room, because he was now their brother, not merely an ardent student, not *hospes et advena*, but *domesticus Dei et civis sanctorum*.

H. JOHN CHAPMAN, O.S.B.