

NEWMAN STUDIES: PRESENT AND FUTURE

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This essay deals with some of the recent literature about Newman such as Ker's recent biography,¹ Jeremy Miller's book on Newman's ecclesiology, Clyde Nabe's book on Newman's epistemology of religion and Walter Jost's monograph on *Rhetorical Thought in John Henry Newman*.² Also, eight areas are listed where further research is needed.

Ian Ker's biography of Newman possesses one distinct advantage over the other biographies of Newman. Ker was able to take advantage of the thirty volumes of Newman's *Letters and Diaries*. Letters offer immediacy without second thoughts and often without later publication in mind, over against both biography and autobiography.

It is difficult to compress Ker's life into a few brief paragraphs. Nevertheless, here in summary fashion, are some of the special features of Ker's biography. First, Ker provides us with various examples of Newman's gift of insight. Apropos of Newman's spirituality, for example, we find out that for Newman spirituality is marked by its utter lack of pretentiousness, the continual practice of small duties which are distasteful to us. Newman made consistency the mark of a saint, stating that the greatest mortification was to do well the ordinary duties of the day.³ Another example illustrates Newman's gifts of insight. Newman speaks of life as fleeting. He says that in the midst of life, we're in death. It is as if one were standing in a fight, and anyone might be shot down.⁴ Sounding a similar note, Newman writes that "we seem to live and

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1. Ian Ker, *John Henry Newman: A Biography* (Clarendon Press: Oxford 1988).
2. Edward Jeremy Miller, *Newman on the Idea of Church* (Patmos Press; Shepherdstown 1987), Clyde Nabe, *Mystery and Religion: Newman's Epistemology of Religion* (University Press of America, Inc.: Lanham, MD 1988) and Walter Jost, *Rhetorical Thought in John Henry Newman* (University of South Carolina Press; Columbia, South Carolina 1989).
3. Ker, *Newman*, 94.
4. *Ibid.*, 172

die as the leaves; but there is One who notes the fragrance of every one of them, and, when their hour comes, places them between the pages of His great Book."⁵

Second, Ker provides us with an introduction to most of Newman's major writings. For this reason Ker's biography is more than a life of Newman, because it gives us important insights into Newman's thought. Particularly noteworthy are Ker's comments on Newman's *Lectures on Justification*, the *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* and the *Grammar of Assent*.

Third, Ker pays special attention to Newman the writer and Newman's use of language. Ker points out, for example, how the crisis of 1822 first inspired the satirical masterpiece of his Anglican period, the essay, the "Tamworth Reading Room." In the *Lectures on Justification* Ker makes reference to the richness of imagery, the new brilliance of aphorism and to the sharpened sarcasm and satirical wit, all signs of Newman the eloquent rhetorician.⁶

In regard to the *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, Ker notes that it is akin to Thomas Scott's book, *The Force of Truth*. Scott, who lived between 1747-1821, was an evangelical clergyman whose autobiography had a wide circulation. The dominant form of autobiographical writing in England when Newman wrote was the spiritual autobiography. Newman did not want to write his autobiography in the standard English mode because his Catholic theology inclined him against using literary forms that were Protestant. By using T. Scott's *The Force of Truth* as a model for the *Apologia* Newman could write within the English tradition of autobiography without acquiescing, in narrative pattern, to radical Protestant ideas about conversion.⁷ Ker points out the fact that the *Apologia* is an intellectual or theological autobiography, rather than an autobiography in the usual mode. He also remarks that the book persuades by deliberately abandoning all argument in favour of cold facts, adopting sober documentation instead of polemical rhetoric.⁸

Ker shows how Newman did not write for the sake of writing but because of the controversies into which he was thrown. To write a book for the sake of

5. Ibid., 538.

6. Ibid., 157.

7. See Linda H. Peterson, "Newman's *Apologia pro vita sua* and the Traditions of the English Spiritual Autobiography," in *PMLA* 100 (April, 1985) 300-314.

8. Ker, *Newman*, 549.

writing would be for Newman an impossibility. Ker also observes that for Newman the study of the classics, particularly Horace, had a religious influence on the imagination. Why so? Newman believes that the classics remind us of our state by nature, increase in us a sense of our dependence on God, and arm us against the false promises of the world, namely, the promise of literature and science to provide us with liberty and life.⁹

Finally, Ker reminds us of the fact that in his writing Newman's main goal was to express his meaning clearly and exactly, taking Cicero as his master of style. Newman explicitly acknowledges his debt to Cicero to whom he owed a great deal.¹⁰

Edward J. Miller's recent study, *John Henry Newman On the Idea of Church*, takes an in-depth look at Newman's view of the church. Miller argues that Newman had a threefold orientation to the church, namely, 1) the foundational view which deals with the first principles of Newman's thinking and deals with the question: Why does someone practice religion in a church?; 2) the pastoral view which concerns processes in the church and asks the question: How ought that church to behave?; and 3) the theological view which treats of God's grace and treats the question, Does that church express more than the native abilities of its members?¹¹

Miller attempts to provide a systematic framework for Newman's idea of the church, allowing Newman to speak for himself as much as possible. Miller does not believe that he is forcing Newman's thought into three airtight compartments, but genuinely believes that Newman himself saw the church from the vantage-point of perspectives.¹² Miller also underscores the fact that these three views of the church, the foundational, the pastoral and the theological, are related one to another. Thus the notion of the church as a sacrament is treated in the chapter on the foundational view of the church but also in Chapter Four on the theological view of the church.

Miller's thesis about Newman's three basic orientations to the church is

9. Ibid., 730.

10. Ibid., 630. Wilfrid Ward observes that the sources of Newman's much praised style were his ideas, his style arising from his desire to communicate to others the experience of his own life, which moved him to deep feeling. See Martin J. Svaglic, "John Henry Newman: Man and Humanist," in *Victorian Prose: A Guide to Research*, (ed. David J. De Laura) (The Modern Language Association of America: New York 1973) 161.

11. Miller, *Newman*, xx.

12. Ibid., 143.

certainly an intriguing one. However, I wonder if Miller's study pays sufficient attention 1) to the role of the Holy Spirit in the church and 2) to the historical context and development of Newman's ideas on the church. If, for instance, Miller's tripartite framework — foundational, pastoral and theological — really reflects Newman's instincts about the church, why have no other scholars noted such a schema, particularly those like Was de Pol, Stanislas Jaki, Norbert Schiffers and John Coulson who have written specifically about Newman's ecclesiology?¹³

It would transcend the parameters of this study to deal at length with Miller's thesis. I merely want to sketch an alternative perspective for Newman's ecclesiology. In his Anglican period Newman's ecclesiology was dominated by his understanding of the church as sacrament with particular attention paid to the role of the Holy Spirit in the church as seen in both the *Parochial and Plain Sermons* and in the *Lectures on Justification*. During his Catholic period Newman did not speak much about the role of the Holy Spirit in the church. As a Roman Catholic, Newman did not have a unified view of the church. Rather, it arose from the various controversies into which he was drawn.

In the *Discourse on the Scope and Nature of University Education* (1852), Newman was deeply concerned with the relationship between the church and the world. In the *Rambler* article of 1859, "On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine," Newman tries to resolve one major difficulty in his theory of doctrinal development, namely, how is the mind of the church to be discovered before a definition of the church is made?

In the *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* Newman shows the need for Christianity to take on flesh and blood in a visible and infallible church. Only in this way could our wild, living intellect be tamed. On the *Apologia* Newman underscores two factors without relaxing the tension between them: 1) the sacramental nature of the church and 2) the need for freedom and diversity of theological investigation within the church. Newman never relinquished his Tractarian view of the church found in his early period but merely stressed other factors as a Roman Catholic. Newman's ecclesiology reaches its highpoint in the Preface to the 3rd edition of his *Via Media I* published in 1877.¹⁴

13. See the fine study of Norbert Schiffers, *Die Einheit der Kirche nach Newman* (Patmos; Dusseldorf 1956) and that by John Coulson, *Newman and the Common Tradition* (Clarendon Press; Oxford 1970).
14. See Richard J. Penaskovic, *Open to the Spirit: The Notion of the Laity in the Writings of J.H. Newman* (W. Blasaditsch Verlag; Augsburg 1972) 237-251.

How does this view of Newman's ecclesiology differ from Miller's thesis? I believe that my sketch of Newman's theology of the church shows better how Newman's ecclesiology changed and developed over the years paying greater attention to the historical context in which Newman wrote than does Miller's work. I also feel that Miller's book pays insufficient attention to the role of the Holy Spirit in Newman's ecclesiology. To point this out in detail would exceed the limits of this present study.

Clyde Nabe's book, *Mystery and Religion*, deals with Newman's theory of knowledge in regard to the subject of religion. Nabe shows that much religious truth evades the limitations of human reason. Nabe commences by analyzing Newman's use of human reason. Newman saw reason operating on two levels, first on the level of "implicit reason" and second on the level of "explicit reason."

Implicit reason is used by everyone; explicit reason by some people. Implicit reason occurs at the level of concrete, existential concerns and is preverbal, unconscious and spontaneous reasoning. Explicit reason, on the contrary, may be termed second order thinking or thinking about thinking. Explicit reason involves argument and is a distillation of implicit reason. Both implicit and explicit reason are powers of the mind or faculties for gaining knowledge.¹⁵

Newman, says Nabe, tried to widen our understanding of reason. The Liberals in Newman's day identified reason with explicit reason, whereas Newman argued that everyday reasoning is the foundation of all reasoning. For Newman the process of implicit reason was complete in itself, independently of any subsequent reflection on it.¹⁶

Newman dealt with questions about knowledge and the possibility of knowledge in the context of questions concerning religious belief. Newman wanted to justify the faith of simple folks unable to ground their faith philosophically. Newman says that everyone has a reason for positing an act of faith, although not everyone can give a reason.

Newman merely draws a distinction between implicit and explicit reason, one which should not be pushed too far. Both are different regions on the continuum of human rationality. We always reason in the same way. However, the method of reasoning is either implicit or explicit.¹⁷

15. Nabe, *Mystery*, 3.

16. *Ibid.*, 6.

17. *Ibid.*, 9.

Newman makes the point that the more explicit and verbal our reasoning becomes, the less it can include all that occurs. In other words, every move made toward explicitness involves a loss of the richness and fullness of reasoning. Moreover, reasoning on a concrete matter can never be fully translated into words. Language cannot capture or recapture the fullness of reality but will always be an inadequate representation of reality. Hence, Newman speaks about mystery. Mystery implies a partial view or manifestation of reality. Mystery eludes our intellect and is trans-rational, yet, at the same time, gives us glimpses of reality and partial knowledge. Mystery implies our inability to grasp fully the matter at hand. The concept of what mystery does is this: it forces us to recognize the fact that reality is larger than the natural world; that there is the super-natural which is above reason.¹⁸

In speaking about justifying our beliefs, it is important to consider what Newman calls "first principles" or antecedent probabilities. When we perceive the world, we bring to that perception our own first principles, which are personal to us. The theist and the a-theist each have their own set of first principles, although both disagree sharply over their first principles. These first principles proceed from their respective illative senses. Inasmuch as first principles guide us in our perception of the world, what data are recognized and seen as relevant are determined to a large extent by our first principles.

Those who criticize believers do so because they operate out of a different set of first principles and hence find unacceptable what the believer considers evidence.¹⁹ First principles do not proceed from our intellects alone but are the products of who we are as persons. Believers and unbelievers often talk past each other because their first principles are incommensurate with each other.

Nabe concludes by saying that we live our lives in mystery. Reason can make some sense out of that mystery, but we must be aware of the limits and limitations of reason. Another way of entering the mystery is by religious faith. The believer and the unbeliever will have trouble seeing eye to eye because their disagreement is on the level of first principles which cannot be fully analyzed. Both need to recognize the fact that no one is infallible in determining what is reasonable and what is unreasonable.²⁰

18. *Ibid.*, 21.

19. *Ibid.*, 32.

20. *Ibid.*, 59.

Nabe's essay on Newman's epistemology of religion is important for several reasons. First, Newman anticipates the concern of contemporary philosophers for hermeneutical questions, (that is to say, questions about the interpretation of a text), by his emphasis on first principles or antecedent probabilities. Today we would speak of presuppositions instead of antecedent probabilities. Second, in speaking about mystery, Newman reminds us of the fact that human reason is inadequate and limited and hence should not be deified, although human reason can provide some support for religious assertions.

Third, Nabe demonstrates how Newman's insights in the philosophy of religion still are valid today in understanding the meaning of religious faith and human reason.

In his book, *Rhetorical Thought in John Henry Newman*, Walter Jost argues that rhetoric is the lens through which Newman considers all problems. Rhetoric may be understood in many ways. Quintilian, for example, defines it as the science of speaking well. Newman understands rhetoric to mean the reduction of reasoning into the calculus of the tastes, opinions, passions and aims of a particular audience. Jost sees Newman as an opportunist inasmuch as Newman believed that questions should be raised and answered, problems located and solved by consulting the facts, circumstances and particulars of each case.²¹

How are religion and/or theology rhetorical for Newman? First, their content consists in the various kinds of persuasive appeals and arguments that people use in coming to the faith and that theologians employ in articulating the rational grounds of the faith and, second, the possibility of coming to any view of what religion is, says Newman, depends on assuming something which, in the final analysis, cannot be proven rigorously.²² What Newman attempts to do in his writings is this: to enlarge the views of his audience using persuasive argument as opposed to logic or abstract science.²³

Newman speaks of persuasion from the perspective of psychological processes that arguments never wholly express in contradistinction to rhetoricians who speak of persuasion from the standpoint of communication. Like Cicero, Newman emphasizes the rhetorical element in all knowing.

21. Jost, *Rhetorical*, 29.

22. Jost, 40.

23. Jost, 71.

Rhetoric remains the only legitimate mode of inquiry or proof for Newman and serves as the forms of his approach to all inquiry and argument. As such rhetoric furnishes a unique perspective on the human element in all knowing and believing. Newman manages to offer us a coherent rhetorical theory and an innovating rhetorical practice. By incorporating classical, empiricist and romantic interests in a theory of belief and practice of persuasion, Newman anticipates modern developments in rhetoric and hermeneutical philosophy/theology.²⁴

What are we to say of Jost's thesis? Jost seems to be very well acquainted with the works of Newman, particularly the *Grammar of Assent* and the *Essay on Development*. He has certainly read the important secondary literature on Newman and is to be commended for the sweep of his vision without sacrificing profundity. It seems to me that he has certainly made his case for demonstrating how rhetoric is architectonic in Newman's thought.

However, I have a few observations to make on Jost's book. First, it does not seem quite right to call Newman an "opportunist." I feel that the word "opportunist" has a pejorative connotation to it. Would it not be more precise to call Newman a controversialist? In fact, I am surprised that Jost does not use the term, controversialist, in reference to Newman. Newman, like St. Augustine, wrote most of his works, (excluding his sermons) against the grain, that is, because of the controversies into which he was drawn.

I wonder if, at times, Jost reads too much into Newman. Jost states that for Newman language is ineluctably perspectival, sermonic or attitudinal. Things, facts, the concrete come to full existence only linguistically, hence rhetorically, argues Jost.²⁵ Jost provides no examples to make his point. It seems to me that Newman has a great deal of respect for individual facts, things and even persons. For Newman, a person's thought and speech are decidedly one-sided, perspectival and attitudinal. Newman believes that thought and speech, matter and expression cannot be separated from each other. Style is simply a thinking out into language.²⁶

24. Jost, 211.

25. Jost, 26.

26. John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University* (Longmans, Green and Company; London 1976) 232.

Areas for Further Research

There have been thousands of books and articles written about Newman, yet there are still several areas where further research is needed:

1) We have critical editions of the *Apologia*, the *Grammar of Assent* and *The Idea of a University* but still lack a critical edition of *The Via Media* and the *Essay on Development*.

2) In all his communities Newman had one close friend, Hurrell Froude at Oxford, Ambrose St. John in Littlemore, Rome and Birmingham and William Neville after St. John died.²⁷ Newman had a large capacity for friendship, hence the story of his friendship with Ambrose St. John and William Neville still remains to be written.

3) Newman's impact on rebels and outsiders needs to be studied, in the distant past on Leslie Stephens,²⁸ who wrote a neglected but important book on the Oxford Movement, nearer to our own time on Lytton Strachey, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Aldous Huxley, Colin Wilson and James Joyce, who called Newman the greatest prose writer in the English language. Colin Wilson, for example, says that in the twentieth century all the problems of which Newman treats, are still with us.²⁹ We also need to study the influence of other writers such as Addison, Hume, Gibbon, Crabbe and Bacon on Newman.³⁰

4) Lest we fall into Newmanolatry, we need to be conscious of Newman's deficiencies and limitations. Newman was very shy and hence could often be seen as aloof, cold and indifferent to people. Moreover, Newman's historical sense was deficient. In his study on Chrysostom, for example, Newman leaves the background so meager that he does not even bother to give dates.³¹ Furthermore, his elitism made him wary of democracy and Newman did not see slavery as intrinsically evil but only as an act of despotism.³²

27. Owen Chadwick, *Newman* (Oxford University Press; New York 1983) 7.

28. Maurice Nedoncelle, "The Revival of Newman Studies: Some Reflections," *Downside Review* 86 (1968) 391.

29. Svaglic, "Man and Humanist," 165.

30. Joseph J. Reilly, *Newman as a Man of Letters* (The Macmillan Company; New York 1925) 156.

31. *Ibid.*, 156.

32. Ker, *Newman*, 531.

Newman also had a negative view of the Reformers and of the Reformation. In this connection Newman was unduly influenced by his friend, Richard Hurrell Froude, who believed that the Reformers were responsible for the Erastian ideas (Thomas Erastus who lived between 1524-1583 argued for the ascendancy of the state over the church in ecclesiastical matters) which came into the Church of England. Newman neglected to see that Hurrell Froude was not a fair historian but a disillusioned churchman who saw history in terms of black and white, good and bad. Neither Froude nor Newman read extensively in the original documents of the Reformation.³³

One should remember that many of Newman's works such as *The Present Difficulties of Catholics in England* and *The Difficulties Felt by Anglicans*, were controversial works, written in the heat of battle. In the latter work Newman was one-sided and made some harsh judgments about the Church of England. Newman was so single minded in the pursuit of the truth that he could bend the facts to suit his case. In the *Apologia*, for example, his tendency was to increase the age of those who collaborated in the production of the *Lives of the Saints* in order to rebut Kingsley's charge that he and his associates were young, headstrong people. Hence Newman claimed that in 1844 Marvel Johnson was 43 years old when he was, in actuality, only just 40.³⁴

5) Newman's attitude toward ecumenism needs further investigation, particularly in the light of Dr. John Griffin's assertion that Newman is anti-ecumenical. Dr. Griffin bases his remarks on an analysis of the book, *Difficulties Felt by Anglicans*. It appears to me that Newman's attitude toward ecumenism is quite complex. Scholars need to sift through Newman's many writings especially the *Lectures on Justification* and the sundry volumes of *Newman's Letters and Diaries*. What would emerge is that it is simply unfair to speak of Newman as an anti-ecumenical figure.³⁵

6) Another fruitful area of study would be a psychological analysis of Newman's self-concept understood as a mental blueprint of the self. Newman was, for instance, excessively hard on himself possibly as a result of his reading of such Calvinistic writers as Thomas Scott. As a youth, Newman says that "among the ordinary mass of men, no one has sinned so much...."³⁶ This was

33. William J. Baker, "Hurrell Froude and the Reformers," in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 21 No. 3 (July, 1970) 254-55.

34. Nedoncelle, "Revival," 392.

35. John R. Griffin, "Newman - the Ecumenist?" *Faith & Reason* 8 (1982) 295.

36. Ker, *Newman*, 662.

certainly an over exaggeration. Because of his low opinion of himself, Newman often saw his life as a failure, as was noted in Chapter One.

7) Other areas for study would be an analysis of Newman's views on universal education which he did not understand, his use of aphorisms, such as the maxim, "Growth, the only evidence of life"³⁷ and his attitude toward the classics. Scholars would do well to take a careful look at Newman's detailed study guide of his readings in the classics which was written in Latin between March 18, 1817 and May 25, 1818.

8) To my knowledge, no study has yet appeared of Newman's views on eschatology, that is the last things death, judgment and after life. For such a study Newman's novel, *The Dream of Gerontious*, would be a good point of departure.³⁸

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37. Apo., 19.

38. Charles S. Dessain, "Newman's Philosophy and Theology," in *Victorian Prose*, 184.