

NEWMAN'S CAUSE

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THIS year happens to mark a double centenary of Newman, that of his *Discourses on the Idea of a University* in Dublin, and that of his *Sermon on the Second Spring*. But we do not need the excuse of a centenary to speak about Newman. Rarely, if ever, has it happened in the course of history that the interest in a man's personality and appreciation of his importance as a thinker have grown so fast and spread to so many countries as has been the case since the 1920's with regard to Newman. Before 1920 his was a great name, perhaps the greatest name of the nineteenth century, certainly the greatest since the Reformation as a religious thinker; but he had suffered the misfortune of being 'adopted' by modernists and immanentists, and had been so widely misinterpreted by men as brilliant and seemingly authoritative as Bremond, that his present triumphal progress must have been unthinkable. In 1929, when I presented a thesis to Fribourg University on his *Essay on Development*, many there were who warned me that it was a dangerous subject to choose. No less a man than Cardinal Lepicier, who incidentally had read Newman widely, had uncompromisingly accused him of heresy in the *Essay on Development* and the *Grammar of Assent*. I remember thinking I could justify my hardihood by the consideration that, where cardinals disagree and neither is condemned, it could not be disrespectful to defend one against the other.

Two books¹ have recently appeared, the first from France containing a full account of Newman's life and spirituality, the second an anthology from Newman's lectures and sketches on humanism in education.

It is Father Bouyer's book which has given me the courage to give voice to my long-felt desire to raise the question of

¹ *Newman; sa vie, sa spiritualité*. Par Louis Bouyer (Editions du Cerf, 975 francs; London, Blackfriars Publications.) *Newman's Idea of a Liberal Education*. Edited by Henry Tristram. (Harrap; 10s. 6d.)

Newman's cause. Naturally any Catholic reviewing his claims to be raised to the altar submits in advance to the Church's eventual decision; for it rests with her alone to judge the holiness of her children. But she encourages her children to bring to the notice of men the faith, loyalty and virtues of those among her members who have by their lives and works taught others the meaning of God and holiness, and inspired them to dedicate themselves to his service. If we are to judge by his influence upon others, both during his lifetime and since, surely few men's causes would start under better auspices.² Many will say that the matter should have been brought forward within thirty years of his death. But Newman's story is unique; and within thirty years of his death, it would have been impossible, humanly speaking, to pass a fair judgment on either his works or his character. At that time, he seemed under the cloud of modernism. On the other hand, it is not as though his life and story would be forgotten. Will it ever be forgotten, even in its smallest details? We know much more of the authentic Newman today than any one did either during his life or for many years after his death. Mrs Sheed's book on *The Young Mr Newman* gives us a small idea of the mass of revealing materials every day becoming available. He has often been attacked; he is still sometimes misunderstood; but those of us who have spent a large part of our lifetime in the fascinating study of one who has done so much to make us sincere and to devote us to the grateful service of the providence he loved so much, are beginning to feel that we can restrain ourselves no longer from making our private contribution of homage to one whom God seems so much to have favoured. If we have waited, it has been lest we seem to speak too soon. But we find that others, in the new and old world, are finding it difficult to wait longer.

For many years I have thought that Newman's influence upon the modern world, both within and without the Church, was analogous to that exercised by the saints, and

² The most recent example of a conversion which started and was greatly influenced by Newman was that of Doctor Cornelia de Vogel, of the University of Utrecht. It began with her reading of his *Lectures on Justification*.

unlike the influence of any purely human greatness. I remember a non-Catholic clergyman saying to me some twelve years ago that he thought that nothing would do so much good to the Catholic Church at the present day as the canonisation of Newman. He, like so many others, had found his sermons and personal example the greatest inspiration of his life in the direction of Christian sanctity. Yet many of us in the Church, who know better than non-Catholics how exacting is the Church's test of heroic sanctity, thought that more time was needed in order to see Newman's character and writings in true perspective. More than any character almost in history, details are known over at least eighty-five years of his life, so much of it lived both in the public eye and in close contact with his relatives and many friends. Few of his letters have been destroyed; his intimacies, whether to himself or to others, have been kept for the world to examine and analyse. Thoughtfulness, confessions of unworthiness or failure, prayers to the God ever-present to his conscience, expressions of annoyance, cries of distress, aspirations of abandonment and utter trust in God's providence, protestations of innocence—one might say, almost every one of the sentiments of the psalms, which in most men would be known only to God, or at most to their confessors, can be read in abundance by the trivial reader. How difficult it becomes to see the wood for the trees! How easily we lose sight of his life of dedication, with deep consciousness of his unique mission, in the midst of the thousand and one details of a busy public and private life, and an ever-growing burden of correspondence! Yet I have increasingly grown in my confidence that God's providence was watching over Newman's good name and influence in the Church in the same way as Newman knew he watched over his personal life; and that, just as God had led him eventually into the haven of the Church's highest recognition before his death, so he would lead him after death to the honours of the altar.

I do not think that any book as yet produced has done so much to depict Newman's life in its true proportions as Father Louis Bouyer's *Newman*. The author clearly wishes to give his personal vote for Newman's sanctity, though duly

submitting his judgment to that of the Church. He endorses Father Przywara's declaration many years ago that, as St Augustine was the great apostle of the early period of the Church, and St Thomas of the Middle Ages, so is Newman that of modern times.

Fr Bouyer writes his book on the principle that the child is the father of the man. In harmony with this, he spends the greater part of it on Newman's early life, before his submission to the universal Church. On the same principle, even in the shorter part dealing with the Catholic life, he spends many pages on the private journal written while Newman was in retreat for his priesthood. Though a small book compared with Wilfred Ward's great monograph, it succeeds in giving the reader a fair and proportioned picture of Newman's inner life, from which one may judge the accuracy of the author's judgment.

Fr Bouyer accepts fully Newman's own estimate of the overwhelming importance for his spiritual life of his 'conversion' at the age of sixteen. Though the evangelicalism of Walter Mayers was, as it were, the catalyst which brought it about, and though Newman continued to refer to this conversion in evangelical terminology, Fr Bouyer rightly points out that it was not, strictly speaking, calvinistic or even normally 'evangelical'. It was rather a return to an inner sense of the presence of God, and to an implicit trust in God's providence, which he remembered having from his earliest childhood—indeed which he thought was normal in children—but had lost for a while during a short lapse into rationalism at the age of fourteen. This conversion remained for the rest of his life, and the presence of God never deserted him, with the exception of his second great temptation to rationalism during his first years as fellow of Oriel.

It is this conviction of God's presence and personal care for him which underlies his various expressions of the loneliness of the soul with its Creator and his vivid realisation of two beings only, himself and his Creator. Yet it was not in any sort of opposition to an equally vivid realisation of the reality of the Church and the communion of saints.

Fr Bouyer shows how Newman's consciousness of two great periods of temptation to unbelief, and the connection

of conversion each time with the mercy and providence of God, were but concrete signs in his own life of the great struggle between the devil and Christ, the world and the Church, rationalism and faith, wilfulness and obedience. Newman saw his life as a struggle, within his own soul and in the world outside, against what he usually called the spirit of liberalism in religious belief. There was no other way to deal with the enemy than by struggle; and this shows us the significance of Newman's early motto, 'holiness rather than peace'.

The greatest objection to Newman's holiness has been made on the grounds of his sensitive, some would say morbid, temperament. Since when, asks Fr Bouyer, has sanctity been a matter of temperament? Since when are the robust, insensitive, healthy temperaments an exclusive seed-ground for sanctity? Surely sanctity consists in merit, and merit depends upon what one does with one's temperament under the influence of grace, not upon any natural qualities. As far as feelings go, Newman had every reason to labour under an almost continuous sense of frustration, whether as an Anglican or as a Catholic. It was God's will that every one of his undertakings should seem to be ruined by human obstruction and pettiness. It happened with his attempts to revive early Christian Catholicism in Oxford in the 30's, with his efforts to establish a Catholic and Christian humanist university, with the bishops' commissioning of a Newman translation of the Scriptures, with his efforts to encourage an enlightened Catholic lay apostolate, with his desire to set up an Oratory to care for the needs of Catholics at the universities. We now know that none of his undertakings was without its enduring fruit; but how hard it must have been for him to see it at the time! A lesser man would have lost his faith in God's providence, or have relinquished the struggle to make his life a service for God to mankind. He would have lost his practical trust in the divine guidance of the Church. Such a course would have made him more cynical but less desperate; and, as his cynicism grew, his suffering at apparent frustration would have been less.

But he was content to suffer. Even in his Anglican days, he had preached a sermon to show that suffering, not pros-

perity, was the promised lot of the Christian; and that the very well-being of his audience was a challenge to their Christian sincerity. When, humanly speaking, almost despairing of the success which seemed to elude him, his faith in the Church was greater than ever, he wrote: 'Let me never for an instant forget that Thou hast established on earth a kingdom of Thy own, that the Church is Thy work, Thy establishment, Thy instrument; that we are under Thy rule, Thy laws and Thy eye—that when the Church speaks Thou dost speak. Let not familiarity with this wonderful truth lead me to be insensible to it—let not the weakness of Thy human representatives lead me to forget that it is Thou who dost speak and act through them.' Or again, as showing his untarnished love of the Truth, which comes to us through the Church, he wrote: 'I need the mind of the Spirit, which is the mind of the Holy Fathers, and of the Church, by which I may not only say what they say on definite points, but think what they think; in all I need to be saved from an originality of thought, which is not true if it leads away from Thee.' How different is the attitude shown in these extracts³ from that of a Simone Weil, who, for all her admiration of the Church, was not able to make the act of faith necessary to see God present in unworthy human ministers.

Fr Bouyer has done a service to us in pointing out the great harm done to Newman through omission of passages by Anne Mozley from Newman's autobiographical memoir, published in her edition of Newman's Letters. Some subsequent writers have drawn a false picture of Newman from the truncated passages. Thus, from his account of his Sicilian illness, she omits the passages where he shows consciousness of a struggle with the devil, seen by him as attempting to ruin the work to which God was calling him. This is the point of his often repeated words, a motto for his life, 'I have not sinned against the light'. He has done still further service by publishing (with a sympathetic commentary) what must be the most touching spiritual testament of Newman's life, namely the private document in which he recorded in

³ Quoted from his *Meditations and Devotions* by Ward, *Life of Newman*, vol. ii, 365-6; quoted in French by Bouyer, pp. 428-9.

Latin on the eve of his ordination his reasons for doubting his worthiness for the priesthood and his unfitness for the Oratorian life. This humble and intensely sincere judgment on himself is the best refutation of Bremond's brilliant caricature. It is inspired by Newman's passion for truth and honesty, which is the great appeal of his Anglican sermons. No devil's advocate, thinks Fr Bouyer, could discover more serious accusations against him than Newman's pitiless psychological insight sees in his own fallen nature. Yet his faith and trust see also the workings of God's providence. Though he is forced to admit much that appears good in himself, he fears that it is superficial or perhaps merely natural. He deploras a strong natural preference for health and ease and peace rather than for poverty, annoyances, difficulties, disagreements, and bad health. But he is bound to admit that he does not approve this preference. He believes he would be able to accept God's will, if God ordered for him poverty and difficulties instead of ease and plenty. Though conscious of a firm desire to do God's will, he confesses that he often fails in smaller actions. He is especially worried at his insufficient appreciation of certain Catholic devotions, such as novenas, prayers to gain indulgences and the like, though he admits that he loves the Mass, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, rosary, litanies and the breviary. He confesses the pain caused to his sensitiveness by small annoyances. He fears he no longer serves God with the joy and spontaneity which he possessed in his youth.

Surely this honest inability to see good in himself, and this vivid realisation of the weaknesses to which his temperament exposes him, are in the spirit of humility with which the saints saw their faults in the light of God's love and purity. Newman never loses for a moment his conviction that God is with him, and that, in spite of his imperfections, God will support him to the end, when he will pass *ex umbris et imaginibus in veritatem*.

From the point of view of Newman's inner life, Fr Bouyer's book must be the most important that has yet appeared. He is less concerned with Newman's works than with the history of his soul. He steadily removes one after another of the more important misunderstandings. He shows

how the decree of the Pope's infallibility was as much a triumph for the attitude of moderation represented by Newman as it was for the extreme attitude of Manning. He shows us the wisdom and charity of the method of apologetics which Newman all his life preferred, rather recognising the sincerity of the non-Catholic and the plausibility of his case—a case wrong rather by its incompleteness than by its positive error. Heresy, he used to say, is right in what it affirms, wrong in what it denies. His vocation he always felt to be primarily against rationalism; and, though he believed firmly that the Catholic Church was the one true Church for all, he knew that all were not ready to take that step; and he found it impossible to hope for the destruction of the Church of England, as long as it saved people from unbelief who were not yet ready for Catholicism. The only time that he indulged in direct anti-Anglican controversy was under the pressure of the Faber party; and he never felt that this was the work to which God called him. Merely destructive tactics may easily lead people into agnosticism, giving them nothing in its place. It is unfortunate that the group of Catholics, from whom Newman hoped to build up a constructive school of Apologetics, as well as an enlightened Catholic literature, though not lacking intelligence, lacked the reverence for authority and prudence in reform, which were so characteristic of Newman himself.

We shall look forward to an English translation of Fr Bouyer's excellent book, which should do much to clear the way for the introduction of Newman's cause.

Fr Tristram's little book is complementary to that of Fr Bouyer. Apart from Newman's absorbing religious interests, one might say that the secondary vocation of his life was educational. The two were connected, since Newman firmly believed that healthy religion could only exist on a basis of healthy nature; and healthy nature in human life demanded sound humanistic education. Fr Tristram, in his introduction, traces the story of Newman's struggle in the cause of what he called 'liberal' education. Its early stage was at Oxford, where he was called to take an important part in the revival of university studies. The scene of this was Oriel, the time the first third of the nineteenth century.

He and the Oriel party stood for humanism against the pure utilitarianism of the *Edinburgh Review*. After a lapse of several decades, he took the same side in a struggle for the Hellenic ideal in the newly founded Catholic university in Dublin. He wished to make Dublin the Oxford of the English-speaking Catholic world. He desired to enthuse nineteenth-century Ireland with the ideal of being a great centre of Catholic culture—not merely Catholic, but in the highest degree culture. For him the culture of the Catholic should be the best even in the order of culture, since the Catholic must as such be a lover of all that is good in God's world, and especially of those human gifts which naturally make man most God-like. Liberal culture was the culture of the gentleman. In other words, it was not learning itself, but the natural ground in which learning will spring and flourish. His university was to provide education rather than erudition: the latter primarily for the sake of the former.

To illustrate this ideal Fr Tristram gives us two hundred pages of happily chosen extracts from Newman's educational writings, with short but valuable notes. Since his extracts are chosen to illustrate an educational ideal rather than a history of education, Fr Tristram makes no comment on the historical accuracy of Newman's statements of fact. Newman's theory of the origin of colleges and university has been challenged; but it would seem out of place in a work of this nature to discuss such matters, since they hardly affect the underlying philosophy. It is well known that Newman was disappointed with his fellow-Catholics for their insufficient interest in education. It would please him to know that the members of the Association which proudly bears his name today are anxious to be his disciples in this, as in his deeper Christian apostleship. It is in this sphere that Newman's sound Aristotelian common sense comes perhaps nearest in its intellectual spirit to that of St Thomas Aquinas. He knew as well as Newman that we cannot serve God better by neglecting the mind and talents God gave us.