

## NEWMAN'S ANALYSIS OF DEVELOPMENT

THE notion of a development of Christianity is found in Tertullian and in Vincent of Lérins; indeed it is an immediate conclusion from the words of Our Lord, 'I am not come to destroy but to fulfil.' Yet no one gave the subject especial attention before Newman. The historical spirit is not rarely alien to the mind of the theologian, and theology has been received with little sympathy since the rise of modern historical science in the eighteenth century.

Newman, widely read in the Fathers, but saturated in the spirit of the Oxford of his day, approached the question by attempting to explain away a suspicion that the Roman Catholic Church of 1845 was the same body as the Primitive Church of historical research. Startling divergence seemed to reveal, as well as to conceal, an ultimate identity. His reconciliation of this seeming contradiction was the conclusion, but not the purpose, of his writing the essay on the *Development of Christian Doctrine*. The historical, theological, philosophical and psychological vistas which the book opens up are manifold: we can here concern ourselves only with its analysis of the subject itself.

The development of a thing is an increase in its parts with such a correlation to the whole as to leave the latter its identity. Alteration in parts without subordination to a whole produces a new thing. A mere increase in parts gives a larger thing. But the drawing out of what is potential in the original by a fuller explication of constituent elements is development. An increase in complexity is only an increase in *being* in so far as what is relative is real—which it is: relatively. That is all that can be said. Ultimates are undefinable.

The concept of development contains three factors: an essential identity, but for which change would be effective of a new or a corrupted entity: a body of accidental alteration, but for which there would be no development at all; and the relation of the various stages of change by their

inherence in a common whole. The term *growth* is applied to development in vegetative and animal bodies: while conversely the growth of a moral entity, informed by a single idea, is in the stricter sense development. By an analogous use of the term, an idea can be said to receive development. It is in this sense that Newman uses the word: for his subject is Christian doctrine, although it follows from the nature of that doctrine itself, that his work deals also with the development of the Church, which is the embodiment in an institution of that doctrine.

A development arises by the presence of an idea, entailing antecedent and consequent ideas, in a number of minds possessed by varying presuppositions. It is rarely possible for a man to apprehend a new conception without integrating it into his conscious personality; that is, the totality of his previous ideas. Thus, a philosophic system among the Greeks could become a moral system among the Romans, because the Roman mind was dominated by the notion of the good rather than by that of the true. But it is not legitimate on account of this difference to regard Stoicism as one thing in Cleanthes and another in Marcus Aurelius.

Newman analyses Christian doctrine, which as abstract truth cannot develop, but which can be developed by those who hold it, by the clarification of presuppositions and the drawing of conclusions implied in the original deposit of faith. These two mental elaborations are historically practical and disciplinary enlargements also, for the Church signifies its doctrine by its action as well as by its definition, although the latter only can give complete certitude to the meaning of the former.

To the three constitutive parts of a development it is possible to reduce the seven characteristics which Newman posits as guiding lines in his thesis. They are: Preservation of Type, Continuity of Principles, Power of Assimilation, Early Anticipation, Logical Sequence, Conservation of Past, and Chronic Vigour.

The Identity of Type by which the Tridentine Church is one with the Primitive is illustrated by a searching histori-

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cal analysis of the latter. In the days of persecution, argues Newman, the civilised world stigmatised the Christian body as immoral and superstitious: when heresies flourished, these all acknowledged it to be Catholic: when they received political establishment they recognised it as Roman. These striking facts are equally true of the Church in all ages, he says, and particularly in the modern, paganised protestant Europe

Magnificent as is this theme, and cogent as is its presentation, it is not beyond criticism. In the first place, there is a distortion founded on the mental habits of Newman himself. He saw differences more acutely than resemblances. It required an intellectual *tour de force* for him to reconcile early with Tridentine Catholicism. That he was a convert taking a leap in the dark speaks much for his faith, courage and honesty, but it does not lessen an unreality in his outlook. Actually, the primitive church was more 'Catholic' in the Tridentine sense than he dared to guess, and the modern Church is 'primitive Christianity' to a degree inconceivable to those who imagine the former as hidebound with Vatican red-tape and the latter as a number of pious other-worldly people meeting on the Lord's day for a love feast. The divergence is founded on externals and first impressions; the substantial identity is revealed only by careful inspection, best obtained from within. But Newman was without when he wrote.

But the same allegation can be urged in his comparison of the Church and the world around it. A broad view unquestionably presents the contrast which he describes, and in view of the public which he addressed, it was licit for him to use rhetoric to heighten scholarship. But his theme is not justified as the whole truth, but rather as an aspect of events which has controversial utility. A majority of the facts of history support Newman, but not all—nor would he have denied this, for he wrote to prove a thesis, not to outline early Church history. Many pagans despised Christianity: it is clear that many respected it, and some who were fully pagan in the looser sense, as accepting the

ancient civilisation, became Christians without consciousness of conversion as a violent change: Clement of Alexandria, St. Justin, St. Hilary are examples. Other mitigations of the theory of a clear cut line of division are discoverable: The Church can be compared with its own members, isolated or in groups. It survives their waverings and weaknesses, and their strong internal dissension. What is divergent is partial in time or place, however great it may appear in bulk and power: but what is of common unity is permanent and universal, although it appear often to be under a shadow. The homogeneity which Newman saw in the early Church is a just generalisation—a separation of the wheat from the tares: not an obvious historical fact which hits the eye.

Another criticism is that Newman confuses accidental with essential characteristics of the Church. The mutual hatred of Catholic and heretic, and the mutual suspicion of Church and State are natural results, but not essential parts, of Christianity. Neither in time or place or among persons is this opposition universal; it was notably absent in the Middle Ages, when Crusaders and Saracens fought in the name of opposed religions with more chivalry than modern European Christians display for one another when they fight in the name of nationality. Flourishing universities allowed Arab philosophies, unharmed, in a society dominantly Christian, and that, in the case of Pavia, for several centuries.

Finally, the mysterious, almost uncanny unity which the Church impresses on the imaginations of a certain class of non-Catholic observers, so that, in Newman's words, the convert is as if he were 'one of a confederacy which claimed him, absorbed him, stripped him of his personality, reduced him to a mere organ or instrument of a whole'—that peculiarity is capable of a simple psychological explanation. It is a feeling which accompanies two very normal human characteristics—loyalty to a system and acceptance of an immediately unintelligible proposition—very abnormally combined. Many men are loyal to institu-

tions; many accept absurdities. That millions of men should show a loyalty overriding all others to a body propounding such apparent affronts to reason as the dogmas of transubstantiation, papal infallibility and the merit of virginity is bewildering by the extravagance of the tenets, the firmness with which they are held, and the numbers who hold them. The result is to give the Catholic Church something of the characteristics of personality: it is a society which acts with the consistency of a human being; conscious of its own life. The second mark of development explains why this comes about.

This is 'Continuity of Principle.' An identity in what changes is maintained by an identity of some body of ideas which govern its life. Elements which are transformed are developmental; those which are permanent are principles. Identity of type is secured by, and is analysable into, continuity of principle. Newman distinguishes principles from doctrines, recognising that the former may become the latter, and that the latter are derivable from the former. If a principle is a generalisation abstractible from several doctrinal propositions, it must clearly share their certitude: it is not easily discoverable what are and what are not the principles of Christianity, nor whether all or some only are dogmatic truths. An instance of what Newman would consider a principle becoming a dogma is the definition of the instrumental causation of grace by the sacraments. This was held in the case of each of the sacraments separately from the beginning, it was defined as an essential characteristic of the sacraments of the Christian dispensation, at the Council of Trent. On the other hand, the use of Latin in the rites for the definitions of the Church's dogma is not doctrinal, and cannot easily be conceived as definable: nor is the use of scholastic philosophy. An actual enumeration of principles is not to be found in the *Development* and he does not say or imply what they are apart from introducing them under other heads.

But the result of principle is to constitute 'identity of type.' It imparts to the Church a quality associated with

human personality and national character, by which a living thing possesses a unity transcending all divergence of operation, and independent of mere unity of aim. Not only does principle remain the same in all change, but every change is totally informed by principle. Each is immediately recognisable as part of a whole which alone could have produced it. Thus it is that a personification of the Church is a natural mode of apprehension, alike to its members, its friends and its enemies.

We come to the notes which concern the elements of change. There is no need to dwell on 'Chronic Vigour': it is clear that a developing organism must possess a continuous life if it is not to decay, especially if it is susceptible of influence from without.

By 'Logical Sequence' Newman means the consistency of development in its intellectual content. Strict logical succession there is not, as a rule, for the logical development of a revealed truth is the exposition of its pre-suppositions, as the doctrine of the Trinity followed that of baptism, chronologically, but precedes it logically. Likewise it does not follow that because sin is remitted by baptism, there should be another sacrament for the remission of post-baptismal sin, or a penitential discipline or a purgatory. It is fitting that these things should be so: but it is not absolutely necessary. Newman unwittingly discovered the theological notion of *convenientia*: a quasi-logical relation of consistency, which makes of two things each complete in itself a new and harmonious whole. The core of Newman's thesis is to be found in his treatment of logical sequence: the truth known by revelation is the effect of the divine freewill. It cannot be proved by demonstration, yet once it is presented to the mind, it convinces by its overwhelming consistency.

As logical sequence is the process of intrinsic development, power of assimilation is that of extrinsic development, by which it overcomes environmental opposition. Religious systems which Christianity supersedes usually contain elements natural to man. They are therefore to

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be expected in Christianity, and they are found. By logical development new forms of religious expression are created. By assimilative growth, old ones are given new uses. Strictly speaking, the old are no longer present, for a new purpose makes a new thing in such an artificial action as a religious rite, in which the purpose is constitutive of its nature. Pagan customs are not found in Christianity, for when customs are used by Christians for their specific ends they become Christian customs.

The third class of notes includes the relation of the stages of development to the unchanging whole, and to each other, chronologically considered. We have seen that logical sequence is sometimes temporal sequence. Anticipation of the future is the implication or indication in an earlier period of a growth which becomes prominent at a later. A popular practice precedes a dogmatic formulation; local or individual beliefs in one age are general at a later. Spontaneity is supplanted by regularisation. Conversely, there is a conservation of the past. Later development never extinguishes the earlier foundations of doctrine, although it may overlay them. The primitive is the primary. It may lose its prominence but never its value. Progress, a rather shallow modern notion, signifies the loss of the past in the growth of the present: development, a truly philosophic concept, means its retention and enrichment by novelty, as conclusions, however original, are dependent on first principles.

Such is, in outline, Newman's greatest contribution to thought. The *Development of Christian Doctrine* is his account of his conversion to Catholicism in a sense more profound than is the *Apologia*. The march of his mind enriched the world by cultivating a Catholic historical philosophy, linking the concrete with the abstract and serving a vital purpose in supplementing the theological system of the Church.

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