



## Newman and Vatican II

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Not only has Vatican II often been said to have been ‘Newman’s Council’, but it is often said that Pope Paul VI called it ‘Newman’s Council’. (I have even heard it said that Newman is the author most often cited, after scripture, in the conciliar decrees whereas, in fact, there is not, in those documents, a single reference to his work. The runners-up to scripture appear, unsurprisingly, to be Pius XII, Augustine and Aquinas.)

Addressing a Newman Symposium in Rome, in April 1975, Paul VI said that ‘Many of the problems which [Newman] treated with wisdom. . . were the subjects of the discussion and study of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, as for example the question of ecumenism, the relationship between Christianity and the world, the emphasis on the role of the laity in the Church and the relationship of the Church to non-Christian religions. Not only this Council but also the present time can be considered in a special way as Newman’s hour’.<sup>1</sup>

It is, I think, important to notice that Paul VI did not, in that address, suggest that Newman’s thought exercised any direct influence on the conciliar debates. The massive five-volume *History of the Second Vatican Council*, edited by the late Giuseppe Alberigo, contains only a handful of references. In the second session, during the beatification of Dominic Barberi, Paul VI upset non-Catholic observers by extolling Barberi’s role in ‘the ‘conversion’ of John Henry Newman’,<sup>2</sup> and, during the third session, Cardinal Shehan of Baltimore quoted with approval the remark of John Henry Newman in his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*: ‘a power of development is a proof of life’.<sup>3</sup> And that is just about it.

Articles 10 to 13 of the Constitution *Lumen Gentium* might seem, at first sight, to indicate Newman’s influence, because they consider

<sup>1</sup> From the website of the cause for Newman’s canonisation.

<sup>2</sup> Alberto Melloni, ‘The Beginning of the Second Period: the Great Debate on the Church’, *History of Vatican II*, edited by Giuseppe Alberigo, Vol. III. *The Mature Council. Second Period and Intersession. September 1963 – September 1964* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), pp. 1–115; p. 94.

<sup>3</sup> Norman Tanner, ‘The Church in the World (*Ecclesia ad Extra*)’, *History of Vatican II, Vol. IV, Church as Communion. Third Period and Intersession. September 1964 – September 1965* (Peeters, 2003), pp. 269–386; p. 288.

the church's sharing in Christ's threefold office as prophet, priest and king. Although the theme of the threefold office goes back at least as far as the fourth-century, it was only in the sixteenth-century that it came to be treated as an *ecclesiological* topic, and, as such, I still believe that the finest treatment of it is Newman's great Preface to the third edition, in 1877, of the *Via Media*.

Yves Congar (who was a great admirer of Newman) took close interest in the threefold office from as early as 1932<sup>4</sup> and used it to structure the second part of *Lay People in the Church*. Some years ago, I rather rashly said that, in doing so, he was 'drawing upon a text which he regarded (as I do) as one of the richest and most profound reflections on the doctrine of the Church in modern times'; namely, Newman's 1877 Preface.<sup>5</sup>

I am no longer sure that Congar was even familiar with the text. He certainly knew of its existence, having taken a very active part in a Colloquium in Strasbourg in 1960, at which Mgr Henry Francis Davis (who first taught me to read Newman) discussed and quoted from the Preface in his paper on 'Le Rôle et l'Apostolat de la Hiérarchie et du Laïcat dans la Théologie de l'Église chez Newman'.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, the Preface is nowhere mentioned either in *Lay People in the Church*, or in Congar's lengthy and detailed review of Schick's exhaustive study of the threefold office (which, in turn, makes no mention of it).<sup>7</sup>

Avery Dulles, who seems to have misread the Preface,<sup>8</sup> deplored Newman's apparent lack of familiarity with nineteenth-century European Catholic studies of the threefold office, and said that the Preface 'does not seem to have significantly influenced the developments that led from Vatican I to Vatican II'.<sup>9</sup> It is, I think, therefore clear that it played no significant part in the drafting of articles 10 to 13 of *Lumen Gentium*.

<sup>4</sup> See Yves Congar, 'Sur la Trilogie "Prophète-Roi-Prêtre"', *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques*, 67 (1983), pp. 97–116; p. 107.

<sup>5</sup> Lash, 'Authors, Authority and Authorization', p. 61.

<sup>6</sup> See *L'Écclésiologie au XIXe Siècle*, Unam Sanctam 34 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1960), pp. 329–349. The essays in this collection first appeared, earlier the same year, as numbers 2, 3 and 4 of the *Revue des Sciences Religieuses*.

<sup>7</sup> Congar's essay 'Sur la Trilogie' reviews L. Schick, *Das Dreifache Amt Christi und der Kirche* (Europäische Hochschulschriften, Reihe XXIII Théologie. Bd 171), published in Frankfurt by Peter Lang in 1982. See Bertulf van Leeuwen's essay on 'La Participation à la Fonction Prophétique du Christ', in *L'Église de Vatican II*, Unam Sanctam 51, edited by Guilherme Baraúna, French edition directed by Congar (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1966), pp. 425–455.

<sup>8</sup> He speaks of Newman 'apportioning' the offices 'among different classes (theologians, devout laity, and popes)': Avery Dulles, 'The Threefold Office in Newman's Ecclesiology', *Newman after a Hundred Years*, edited by Ian Ker and Alan Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 375–399; p. 397.

<sup>9</sup> Dulles, 'The Threefold Office', p. 397.

We underestimate at our peril the suffocatingly dark cloud of the fear of 'Modernism' which hung over Catholic theology throughout the first half of the twentieth-century. Newman's reputation came under this cloud.

Serious Newman scholarship only really began to flourish around 1950. The first volume of *Newman-Studien* appeared in 1948, and it contained an impressively comprehensive list of work published on Newman, so comprehensive as to include Kingsley's original attack which had provoked the writing of the *Apologia*, and Marin-Sola's nine-hundred page massively influential 1924 study of the 'homogeneous evolution of Catholic dogma'.<sup>10</sup> There are, in fact, only five references to Newman in Marin-Sola's work, four of which give him merely passing mention, while the fifth devotes four pages to the *Essay on Development*, a work which Marin-Sola misunderstands to the extent of describing its author as 'the modern theologian who had the clearest vision of the existence of dogmatic progress'.<sup>11</sup> As Owen Chadwick rightly remarked, over half a century ago, 'Newman never believed in progress'.<sup>12</sup>

It is, I think, significant that none of the papers at a congress on the development of doctrine which took place in Rome in 1950 contained any discussion of Newman's essay on the subject.<sup>13</sup>

At a Newman Symposium in Oriel College, Oxford, in 1966, Bishop Christopher Butler said: 'Now, after a hundred years, we have had another [Vatican] Council, marked like the first by the emergence of two broadly contrasting wings of opinion and aim. But this time, it is those who can be considered the heirs of the neo-ultramontanes who have constituted the minority, and have been forced back on their defences – though they have had, on the other hand, the immense advantage of strong curial support, not to say leadership – which, however, has been insufficient to bring victory to their cause. The tide has been turned, and a first, immensely important, step has been taken towards the vindication of all the main theological, religious, and cultural positions of the former Fellow of Oriel'.<sup>14</sup>

The following year, the seventh volume of *Newman-Studien* appeared. It contained an essay by the German theologian Heinrich

<sup>10</sup> F. Marin-Sola, *L'Évolution Homogène du Dogme Catholique*, 2 vols (Fribourg, 1924).

<sup>11</sup> 'Le théologien moderne qui a eu la plus claire vision de l'existence du progrès dogmatique' (Marin-Sola, Vol. I, p. 310).

<sup>12</sup> Owen Chadwick, *From Bossuet to Newman. The Idea of Doctrinal Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1957, p. 97.

<sup>13</sup> See Nicholas Lash, *Newman on Development* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1975), p. 153.

<sup>14</sup> B. C. Butler, 'Newman and the Second Vatican Council', *The Rediscovery of Newman. An Oxford Symposium*, edited John Coulson and A. M. Allchin (London: Sheed and Ward, 1967), pp. 244–5.

Fries, entitled: 'J. H. Newman – Ein Wegbereiter des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils'. 'Wegbereiter': path-breaker, pioneer. If Vatican II can be said, with Paul VI, to have been 'Newman's hour' and if it can therefore be said to have been, in some sense, 'Newman's Council', this is not because his thought had much influence on the conciliar debates, but rather, we might say, because during the Council the Catholic Church 'caught up' with Newman.

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