



Newman and the Fathers of the Church

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Abstract

John Henry Newman's study of the Church Fathers began during his years as a fellow of Oriel College and continued through his Anglican and Catholic periods almost to the end of his life. Among the various motives that attracted Newman to patristic theology, there are two that I consider especially important: scriptural hermeneutics and ecclesiology. He saw in the Fathers authentic interpreters of scripture, who read the Bible in and with the church in an exemplary way; he also found in them witnesses to the church's understanding of herself and of her offices. Through his ever more extensive reading on the doctrinal controversies in the patristic period, Newman formulated his theory of the development of doctrine, which is one of his major contributions to modern Catholic theology. Newman read the Fathers as contemporaries, as participants in the theological conversations and controversies of his own day. In the writings of the early bishops and theologians, he found a theological method that was congenial to his own.

Keywords

Newman; Church Fathers; patristics; scripture; ecclesiology

In his *Letter to Pusey on Occasion of His Eirenicon* of 1866, now Blessed John Henry Newman gave his well-known testimony: 'The Fathers made me a Catholic, and I am not going to kick down the ladder by which I ascended into the Church'.¹ In this paper I should like to retrace Newman's reading of the Church Fathers and look for what precisely attracted him in these early bishops and theologians. I am aware that I am following a well-trodden path that has been explored many times and in many different ways by

¹ J. H. Newman, *A Letter Addressed to the Rev. E. B. Pusey, D.D., on Occasion of his Eirenicon of 1864*, in *Certain Difficulties Felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching Considered*, 2 vols., London: Longmans, Green, and Co., new impression 1901, vol. II, p. 24.

Newman scholars, but I hope that thus a clearer picture of Newman as a reader of the Fathers will emerge.²

Early Years until the Publication of *The Arians* of the Fourth Century

It was the encounter with High Churchmen at Oxford that led to Newman's scholarly engagement with the theologians of Christian antiquity. In the Long Vacation of 1828, he set out to read the Fathers systematically, beginning with St Ignatius of Antioch and St Justin Martyr. In his lectures given at the London Oratory in 1850,³ Newman recalls that back then he had read only Fathers of the ante-Nicene period and claims that he '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'.⁴ In fact, the Birmingham Oratory Archives contain Newman's *Theological commonplace Book*, in which he wrote notes under such headings as justification by faith alone, personal conversion, and so on.⁵ In retrospect, Newman does not make much of this reading, with one exception: 'I rose from their perusal with a vivid perception of the divine institution, the prerogatives, and the gifts of the Episcopate'.⁶

This comment shows one of the key motives for Newman's attraction to the Fathers: their ecclesiology. Newman was profoundly impressed by the early Fathers as witnesses to the church's understanding of herself and of her offices, and this was to remain

² Among the most recent publications, see B. E. Daley, 'Newman and the Alexandrian Tradition: "The Veil of the Letter" and the Person of Christ', in I. Ker & T. Merrigan, *Newman and Truth* (Louvain Theological & Pastoral Monographs, 39), Louvain: Peeters, 2008, 147–188, B. E. Daley, 'The Church Fathers', in *The Cambridge Companion to John Henry Newman*, I. Ker & T. Merrigan (eds), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 29–46, and B. J. King, *Newman and the Alexandrian Fathers: Shaping Doctrine in Nineteenth-Century England*, Oxford: University Press, 2009. In the volume *Una ragionevole fede. Logos e dialogo in John Henry Newman*, E. Botto & H. Geissler (eds), Milan: Vita & Pensiero, 2009, see the papers of I. Biffi, 'I Profili storici di John Henry Newman', 155–181, and K. Dietz, *John Henry Newman and the Fathers of the Church: The Birth of an Ecclesiology*, 211–220.

³ They were published in the same year under the title *Lectures on Certain Difficulties Felt by Anglicans in Submitting to the Catholic Church*, London: Burns & Lambert, 1850, and are, according to S. Gilley, 'Life and Writings', in *The Cambridge Companion to John Henry Newman*, I. Ker & T. Merrigan (eds), Cambridge: University Press, 2009, 1–28, p. 16, 'Newman's most anti-Anglican publication'. Later they were published in the first volume of *Certain Difficulties Felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching*.

⁴ J. H. Newman, *Certain Difficulties, Lecture 12: Ecclesiastical History No Prejudice to the Apostolicity of the Church*, p. 371.

⁵ I owe this information to K. Dietz, *John Henry Newman and the Fathers of the Church*, p. 212, n. 3.

⁶ J. H. Newman, *Certain Difficulties, Lecture 12*, pp. 371–372.

a theological interest in Newman's life, both in his Anglican and in his Catholic period.

In March 1831, the High Churchman Hugh James Rose (1795–1838) asked Newman to write a 'History of the Principal Councils', which was to be part of a new series of publications intended to raise the Church of England's awareness of its own doctrinal and liturgical tradition (p. 26).⁷ Newman embarked on this project, but soon found that the complex theological issues involved made it necessary to limit the temporal scope of the investigation to the period around the Council of Nicaea.

Newman was working in a tradition of scholarship, which he received and transformed. He stood on the shoulders of the Anglican divines who had studied the early Fathers with a view to defending their claims against the Roman Catholic Church and with a view to maintaining traditional Christian doctrine against the growing sectarian movements in the Church of England. In 1850, Newman looked back on those years, noting that he read the Fathers 'with Bull's *Defensio*, as their key, as far as his subject extended'.⁸ The *Defence of the Nicene Creed* by George Bull, Anglican Bishop of St David's (1634–1710), published in 1685, attempted to demonstrate that the ante-Nicene Fathers' Trinitarian theology was essentially that of the Nicene Creed. Newman also acquired some familiarity with French patristic scholarship, which flourished in the age before the Revolution, for instance, Pierre Daniel Huet's *Origeniana* of 1668.⁹

The fruit of these labours was Newman's first book and major contribution to theology: *The Arians of the Fourth Century* (1833), in which he presents the most improbable thesis that the doctrine of Arius, who was an Alexandrian presbyter, was in fact influenced by Antiochene theology. Newman dedicates about a third of the book to what he identifies as two profoundly different schools of exegesis and theology: on the one hand, there was the school of Antioch and surrounding Syria, which developed a rationalist and historicising reading of the Bible and consequently gave birth to the Arian doctrine of Jesus Christ as a created mediator between the transcendent God and the world; on the other hand, there was the school of Alexandria, which privileged the spiritual sense of the scriptures and consequently developed a theological vision that was, according to Newman, 'based on the mystical or sacramental principle,

⁷ This part of my paper follows essentially Newman's own narrative in his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*; page numbers in brackets refer to its 1865 edition, later reprinted as: *Apologia Pro Vita Sua, Being a History of His Religious Opinions*, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., new impression 1908.

⁸ J. H. Newman, *Certain Difficulties*, Lecture 12, p. 372.

⁹ Cf. B. J. King, *Newman and the Alexandrian Fathers*, p. 41.

and spoke of the various Economies or Dispensations of the Eternal' (pp. 26–27).

Newman saw these ideas already exemplified in the works of Clement and Origen, and he believed that they naturally led to the theology of Athanasius, the great defender of the Trinitarian profession of faith. What attracted Newman to Alexandrian theology was its 'allegorical' reading not just of scripture, but also pagan literature and philosophy, which was considered a preparation for the gospel. Newman was also fascinated by the spiritual life and vigour of the Alexandrian church; in his eyes it compared very favourably with the state of his own Church of England, which he saw threatened by the strong tide of liberalism.

The Arians of the Fourth Century shows that Newman's study of the Fathers was inextricably linked to the arguments and controversies he faced in his own ecclesial context. Thus several commentators have observed that Newman's 'Antioch' and 'Alexandria' are ideal types rather than historical realities.¹⁰ The Antiochenes Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, John Chrysostom and Theodoret of Cyrus are often seen – and were certainly seen by Newman – as constituting a 'school of exegesis', but their approach as biblical commentators is by no means as uniform as that term would suggest, even if they share common patterns of interpretation, which are quite distinct from those of their Alexandrian contemporaries.¹¹ The Antiochenes gave priority to the 'historical' and 'literal' interpretation of the Old Testament and were reluctant to read it from the perspective of the New. However, they were not completely opposed to allegory, as is sometimes claimed, and by the time of Theodoret and Cyril there was a clear cross-fertilisation between Antioch and Alexandria (where, incidentally, the 'historical' reading of the Old Testament was considered to be the foundation of its Christological and ecclesiological interpretations). Nonetheless, with the exception of Chrysostom, there is something a bit prosaic in the Antiochenes' understanding of the spiritual life, which has been characterised by Louis Bouyer as 'asceticism without mysticism'.

In short, *The Arians of the Fourth Century* is the work of a neophyte in patristic studies. In the years to come, Newman had much opportunity to deepen his knowledge of the early Christian centuries. What never left him, however, was his fondness for the Alexandrian tradition, which profoundly resonated with his own intellectual and spiritual convictions.

¹⁰ Cf. R. Williams, "Introduction", in J. H. Newman, *The Arians of the Fourth Century* (Birmingham Oratory Millennium Edition, 4), Leominster: Gracewing, 2001, pp. xix–xlvii.

¹¹ Cf. R. C. Hill, *Reading the Old Testament in Antioch* (Bible in Ancient Christianity, 5), Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2005.

The Oxford Movement

Newman soon came to realise that the polemic against religious liberalism needed to be founded on sound theology and that the study of the Fathers was an essential element in it. In the early years of the Oxford Movement, he wrote a number of essays of a biographical character that were published first in the *British Magazine* and later reprinted in the volume *The Church of the Fathers* in 1840. In 1834, he began to work on an edition of the extant works of Bishop Dionysius of Alexandria, a disciple of Origen who in the third-century exchanged a number of letters with his contemporary, Bishop Dionysius of Rome, on Trinitarian theology. This correspondence played an important role in the Arian crisis of the fourth-century. Newman never completed this work, but through this research became more familiar with the technical, philological aspect of patristic studies. In 1836, Newman and Pusey had the idea of making patristic theology available in English translation in a new series entitled *Library of the Fathers*. Newman's most significant contribution to the series was the volume *Select Treatises of St. Athanasius*, which appeared after several years' work in two parts, in 1842 and 1844.

Newman's studies of early Christianity also shaped his preaching and his theological writing in general. This is evident from his *Lectures on the Doctrine of Justification* of 1838, where he proposes to overcome one of the key disputes of the Reformation period by introducing the idea of man's deification, which he knew from his studies of the Alexandrian Fathers.¹²

In the *Apologia*, Newman wrote with hindsight that his study of the Fathers was a voyage into uncharted territory and that its outcome was uncertain. He was aware that the energetic recovery of the early Fathers questioned some of the Protestant principles of the Church of England in his day. In his lengthy Preface to the first volume of the *Library of the Fathers*, which contained the works of St Cyril of Jerusalem and was published in 1838, Newman urged his readers not to jump towards conclusions and asked above all for patience; in case of perplexity, they should submit their judgments to that of the Church of England as final arbiter.¹³

This Preface is interesting, because it shows what I consider another key motive for Newman's attraction to the Fathers, that is,

¹² Cf. A. Louth, 'Manhood into God: The Oxford Movement, the Fathers and the Deification of Man', in R. D. Williams and K. Leech (eds.), *Essays Catholic and Radical*, London: Bowerdean Press, 1983, 70–80.

¹³ J. H. Newman, 'Preface', *The Catechetical Lectures of S. Cyril, Archbishop of Jerusalem*, translated, with notes and indices, Oxford – London: James Parker & Co. – Rivingtons, fourth edition 1872, p. ix.

the question of scriptural hermeneutics. He was very aware of the question of biblical exegesis, a question that was as relevant in his age as it is today. In the Fathers, Newman saw authentic interpreters of scripture and they taught him to read the Bible in and with the church.¹⁴ There is an important passage in his *Lectures on Justification*, written around the same time as the *Preface*, which helps to illustrate this point. In the fifth lecture, entitled 'Misuse of the Term Just or Righteous', Newman discusses the Biblical sense of 'being made righteous', which was at the heart of the Reformation controversy. Being aware of the variety and uncertainty of scriptural interpretations, he wants to find the 'the one real sense' of the term, for which a philological methodology is not sufficient. Newman claims: 'Our duty is to be intent on things, not on names and terms; to associate words with their objects, instead of measuring them by their definitions; . . . in short, when we speak of justification or faith, to *have* a meaning and grasp an idea, though at different times it may be variously developed, or variously presented, as the profile or full face in a picture'. For Newman, the Fathers are exemplary as interpreters of scripture, because they 'acquaint us with the things Scripture speaks of'.¹⁵

I find this passage so remarkable, because it is confirmed by what scholars such as Robert Louis Wilken have said more recently about patristic exegesis: the Fathers move from *res* to *verba*, that is, they start from an established (theological, moral, spiritual) reality, which is centred on the mystery of Christ, and explore how the words illustrate or express this truth.¹⁶ This method has its obvious limitations, as any reader of a Church Father's biblical commentaries will find. However, the growing study of patristic exegesis in recent years has made more people realise that it represents a legitimate approach to Holy Scripture. In fact, where patristic exegesis is at its best, it provides an example of the criteria given for biblical interpretation in the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation.¹⁷

¹⁴ J. H. Newman, *Preface*, p. xii.

¹⁵ J. H. Newman, *Lectures on the Doctrine of Justification*, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., ninth impression 1908, p. 121.

¹⁶ See R. L. Wilken, 'Interpreting Job Allegorically: The Moralia of Gregory the Great', in *Pro Ecclesia* 10 (2001), 213–226 and 'Allegory and the Interpretation of the Old Testament in the 21st Century', in *Letter and Spirit* 1 (2005), 11–21; also R. R. Reno, 'A Richer Bible', in *First Things* 205 (August/September 2010), pp 41–44.

¹⁷ Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum* (18 November 1965), no. 12: 'But, since Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted in the sacred spirit in which it was written, no less serious attention must be given to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly worked out. The living tradition of the whole Church must be taken into account along with the harmony which exists between elements of the faith'.

The Crisis of the *Via Media*

The controversial reception of the Oxford Movement in the Church of England at large, as well as a series of events at Oxford itself, made the theory of the Anglican *Via Media* or 'middle way' between the doctrinal errors and apostasy of Protestantism and the corruptions and abuses of the Church of Rome (at least on the popular level) to appear a fragile one. An event in the summer of 1839 threw Newman into intellectual turmoil and started a process of reflection that would eventually bring him to the Roman Catholic Church.

The background to this intellectual crisis was formed by Newman's continued study of the Fathers. His initial research on Dionysius of Alexandria, though never published, led him further into the Christological controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries.¹⁸ In the summers of 1834 and 1835, he carried this research further, and in the fateful vacation of 1839, Newman read extensively on the years leading up to the Council of Chalcedon of 451. In these Christological debates, Newman saw St Leo the Great, Bishop of Rome, as the supreme witness to the confession of the apostolic faith against the Monophysites, whose extreme representative, Eutyches, claimed that the human nature of Christ was completely absorbed in his divine nature:

My stronghold was Antiquity; now here, in the middle of the fifth century, I found, as it seemed to me, Christendom of the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries reflected. I saw my face in that mirror, and I was a Monophysite. The Church of the *Via Media* was in the position of the Oriental communion, Rome was where she now is; and the Protestants were the Eutychians. (p. 114)

The point of comparison between the Monophysites of the fifth-century and the Anglicans of the nineteenth-century was not the contents of their teachings, but the principle according to which controversial points were resolved. Thus, what was at issue was theological methodology and ecclesial authority.

In that same summer of 1839, Newman's friend Robert Williams showed him an article in the *Dublin Review* by Nicholas Wiseman, then still Rector of the English College in Rome, on the 'Anglican Claim'¹⁹. Wiseman compared the Church of England with the schismatic Donatists of North Africa in the time of St Augustine of Hippo. At first, Newman was not at all convinced of Wiseman's argument, but Williams pointed Newman to a phrase of Augustine's that Wiseman quoted to illustrate his main point: '*Securus judicat*

¹⁸ Cf. B. J. King, *Newman and the Alexandrian Fathers*, pp. 127–180.

¹⁹ Cf. J. H. Newman, *Letters and Diaries*, ed. by I. Ker, T. Gornall and G. Tracey, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978, vol. II, p. 256.

orbis terrarum'.²⁰ This phrase was taken from Augustine's lengthy reply to a letter of Parmenianus, the Donatist Bishop of Carthage. Augustine's argument against the Donatists, who claimed to be the true church, indeed the church of the pure and holy, was catholicity: the whole world judges securely that those are not good who separate themselves from the whole world, in whatever part of the world. This is said against the backdrop of Augustine's ecclesiology of the Church as a *corpus permixtum*: it contains wheat and tares, good fish and bad, which will be separated only at the end of times. The supreme principle therefore is catholicity. Wiseman applied this argument to the contemporary situation of Anglicans and his words resonated with Newman not primarily because of the Donatist struggle but because of the Christological controversies he was studying during this summer of 1839.

Newman was able to lay aside the disturbing questions that this summer of study had raised for him. However, as he expressed it with a vivid biblical image: 'I had seen the shadow of a hand upon the wall'. He could no longer forget Augustine's phrase '*Securus judicat orbis terrarum*', that is, in his own paraphrase: 'The universal Church, in her judgments, is sure of the Truth'. Newman pursued his patristic studies and continued to work on the translation of Athanasius. However, the thoughts of the summer of 1839 returned to haunt him. In 1841, he wrote that he had 'received three blows which broke me' (p. 139). Above all, he saw the theological principle, which he noted about the Christological debates of the fifth-century at work in the Arian controversies of the fourth-century and, in fact, 'in a far bolder shape'. Newman admits that he 'had not observed it in 1832'. His reading of the history of Arianism was now thus: '...the pure Arians were the Protestants, the semi-Arians were the Anglicans, and...Rome now was what it was then. The truth lay, not with the *Via Media*, but with what was called "the extreme party"' (p. 139).

Towards Rome

The importance of Newman's studies of the Christological controversy of the fourth and fifth centuries for his theological development cannot, in my view, be overestimated. This is all the more remarkable, because Newman's own theological reasoning was closer to the Alexandrian tradition, which is centred on the Divine Word, the Second Person of the Trinity, and on his union with a human nature that he made his own as the instrument of salvation. Even the more 'monophysite' expressions of Cyril of Alexandria would have

²⁰ Augustine of Hippo, *Contra epistolam Parmeniani*, III,4,24: CSEL 51,131.

appealed more to Newman than the ‘symmetrical’ Christology of Pope Leo’s *Tome*, affirming the undiminished reality of divinity and humanity in Christ. There is a debate in patristic scholarship to what extent Chalcedon was actually shaped by Leo’s *Tome*, and some historians argue that the Christology of Cyril was considered the supreme authority and that Leo was seen to agree with it.²¹ In Newman’s reading, however, it was Leo’s *Tome* that settled the controversy. For him it was above all a question of teaching authority, and for this he was ready to relinquish his own theological preferences.²²

Newman’s ever more extensive reading on the doctrinal controversies in the patristic period made him realize that the principle of ‘antiquity’ alone does not hold, because it cannot account for the development of Christian doctrine that took place already in the Apostolic age and continued through the Middle Ages until the present-day. It is interesting to note that he approached the position of the French Jesuit Dionysius Petavius, who in his *De theologicis dogmatibus* (1644–1650) argued that there was indeed a development in the theological understanding of the Trinity that led to the Creed of Nicaea and conceded that many ante-Nicene Fathers held positions that were not so different from that of Arius; in fact, Petavius admitted that, judged by the formulae of later orthodoxy, the language of theologians in the first three centuries would be found lacking. It was against Petavius that Bull wanted to show the agreement of ante-Nicene Trinitarian theology with the Nicene Creed.²³

The Fathers in the Essay on the Development of Doctrine

Newman’s critique of the Anglican divines and their patristic hermeneutics is contained in the introduction to his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*. In his account, the foundation for the Anglican position that distinguishes between ‘a pure Christianity in East and West’ in antiquity and a ‘corrupt’ one in its present Roman form is the famous principle of Vincent of Lerins: Catholic doctrine is distinguished from heresy by having been held at all times, in all places, and by all believers (*quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus*). Vincent formulated this principle in his *Commonitorium* (or ‘aide-memoire’) of 434 in opposition to Augustine’s ‘new’ theology of grace.

The difficulties of this principle are evident and were felt by Newman when, still fully confident of the *Via Media* theory, he delivered

²¹ Cf. the magisterial work of R. Price & M. Gaddis, *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon*, translated with an introduction and notes (Translated texts for historians, 45), Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2nd revised edition 2007.

²² Cf. B. E. Daley, *Newman and the Alexandrian Tradition*, pp. 179–181.

²³ Cf. B. E. Daley, *The Church Fathers*, pp. 32–33 and 35.

in his *Lectures on the Prophetical Office of the Church* of 1837.²⁴ As a student of the early church, Newman was keenly aware of the problems in applying Vincent's criteria even to the most fundamental articles of the Christian faith. On the Trinity, he professes not to see 'in what sense it can be said that there is a *consensus* of primitive divines in its favour, which will not avail also for certain doctrines of the Roman Church which will presently come into mention' (*Development*, p. 13).²⁵ For example, it is questionable whether any ante-Nicene theologian clearly affirms the numerical unity or the coequality of the three divine persons in the way this would be required by post-Nicene orthodoxy, apart perhaps from Tertullian in his important treatise *Adversus Praxean*, which he wrote during his Montanist period. Moreover, the divinity of the Holy Spirit was not distinctly articulated in theology before the momentous contributions of the Cappadocian Fathers in the later part of the fourth-century.

Newman does not mean to say that there was no such thing as pre-Nicene orthodoxy; on the contrary, he sees the early Fathers as important witnesses for the Apostolic faith. His point is rather that the principle *quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus* requires what he calls a 'fair' interpretation, as opposed to 'that *unfair* interpretation of Vincentius, which is necessary in order to make him available against the Church of Rome' (*Development*, p. 19). In other words, it is not possible to draw a clear line between a 'pure' antiquity that would fulfil the Vincentian criteria, and a later period of corruption.

Newman's sober judgment of Vincent's principle is this: 'The solution it offers is as difficult as the original problem' (*Development*, p. 27). This leads him to consider a second hypothesis, which he presented already in his *Arians of the Fourth Century*, that of the *disciplina arcani*: 'It is maintained that doctrines which are associated with the later ages of the Church were really in the Church from the first, but not publicly taught, and that for various reasons' (*Development*, p. 27).

The concept of a *disciplina arcani* has come under criticism in recent patristic scholarship, because it suggests that Christians were obliged to keep strict silence especially about the baptismal and eucharistic liturgy in a way parallel to the pagan mystery cults, where the sacred rites were only known to the initiates. The Christian sacraments were certainly never '*arcana*' in that sense; however, it would

²⁴ J. H. Newman, *Lectures on the Prophetical Office of the Church*, in *The Via Media of the Anglican Church*, vol. I, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., new impression 1901, pp. 55–56.

²⁵ Page numbers in brackets refer to *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., fourteenth impression 1909.

mean going too far if one rejects the idea of secrecy altogether.²⁶ In its embryonic form, this idea can already be found in the Synoptic Gospels: 'Do not give what is holy to the dogs, or throw your pearls before swine' (Mt. 7:6).

By the fourth-century, it was an established discipline that the unbaptised had to leave the congregation before the eucharistic liturgy began. It is obvious from the catechetical homilies of Cyril of Jerusalem and Ambrose of Milan that there was considerable reticence with regard to the rites of Baptism and the Eucharist, and this secretive attitude also extended to the texts of the Creed, which the catechumens in Jerusalem were taught only a few days before their Baptism, and the Lord's Prayer, which they would pray for the first time with the liturgical assembly at the Easter Eucharist.²⁷ The case of Ambrose is instructive. In his *De mysteriis*, which bears the characteristics of catechetical homilies but is a literary work intended for publication, he explains the meaning of the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist, but he does not cite any of the liturgical texts on which he draws extensively in his *De sacramentis*, an extant text that is based on unrevised notes taken directly from Ambrose's mystagogical homilies in Milan.²⁸ In these instructions for the newly baptised the bishop quotes large parts of the formula of renunciation, the formula of Baptism and substantial parts of the Eucharistic Prayer. He also speaks about Christian prayer and gives a commentary on the Our Father, which is omitted in *De mysteriis*.

Thus it would be reasonable to conclude with Newman that 'the fact of this concealment can hardly be denied' (*Development*, p. 27). However, Newman himself admits that this theory of *disciplina arcani*, while going 'some way to account for that apparent variation and growth of doctrine... is no key to the whole difficulty' (*Development*, p. 29). In other words, appeal to the *disciplina arcani* to account for the gaps between ante-Nicene and post-Nicene orthodoxy is largely wishful thinking. At this point Newman introduces his theory of the development of Christian doctrine. The concept was not an entirely new one; as we have seen, Petavius in the seventeenth-century identified a development in the understanding of the Trinity in the centuries before Nicaea. However, it required the historical

²⁶ For a critical synopsis of this 'discipline of secrecy', see D. Powell, 'Arkandisziplin', in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 4 (1979), 1–8; also E. J. Yarnold, *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: The Origins of the R.C.I.A.*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994, 55–56, and *Cyril of Jerusalem* (The Early Church Fathers), London: Routledge, 2000, 49–50.

²⁷ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Procatechesis*, 12: PG 33,352C–353B; see also *Myst. Cat.* V, 12: SC 126,160; Ambrose, *De mysteriis*, 52–55: CSEL 73, 111–113; *De Cain et Abel*, 1, 35 and 1, 37; CSEL 32/1,369 and 370.

²⁸ See J. Schmitz, *Gottesdienst im altchristlichen Mailand: eine liturgiewissenschaftliche Untersuchung über Initiation und Meßfeier während des Jahres zur Zeit des Bischofs Ambrosius* († 397) (Theophaneia, 25), Köln: Hanstein, 1975.

consciousness of the nineteenth-century to make this principle a cornerstone of Catholic theology.

In the *Essay*, Newman does not fully explore his theory of development; this ‘would be the work of a life’, which cannot be undertaken by ‘one who, in the middle of his days, is beginning life again’ (*Development*, p. 31). Instead Newman presents ‘notes’ that help to authenticate genuine development and distinguish it from distortions and corruptions. In fact, the principle of development ensures for Newman that the ‘idea of Christianity’, remains the same.

Newman as a Patristics Scholar

Newman continued his patristic scholarship until the last years of his life. The writings of his Catholic period include technical, scholarly pieces, such as the study ‘On St. Cyril’s Formula of the *mia physis tou theou logou sesarkōmenē*’,²⁹ as well as lively and sympathetic articles of a more biographical character, such as ‘The Last Years of St. Chrysostom’.³⁰

Given the intimate connection of Newman’s studies of the Fathers with his own intellectual and spiritual journey, there has been some controversy about their value as historiography. In the early twentieth-century, W. R. Inge judged Newman’s patristic writings ‘autobiographical’ and saw in him ‘historical falsity’ mixed with ‘philosophical truth’.³¹ Inge has not been the only commentator who has found fault with Newman as a historian.

On the other hand, Benjamin King, who in his recent monograph on *Newman and the Alexandrian Fathers* provides a critical reading of how Roman Catholic theology conditioned Newman’s later interpretation of the Fathers, grants that Newman was ‘a more serious historical scholar than Inge allowed’.³² King shows how Newman’s patristic studies developed in various stage of his life and notes the impact it had on subsequent Anglophone scholarship. However, I am not convinced by King’s claim that by the 1870s Newman ‘was reading the Greek Fathers through the lens of scholasticism’³³, let alone the kind of ‘Neo-Thomism’ that was promoted by Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical *Aeterni Patris* of 1879. It is somewhat ironic to make Newman into a scholastic, since as a Catholic he was criticized by members of the Roman school of theology for precisely *not* being

²⁹ First published in *Atlantis*, July 1858, then in J. H. Newman, *Tracts Theological and Ecclesiastical*, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., new impression 1908, pp. 329–382.

³⁰ First published the *Rambler*, 1859–60, later in J. H. Newman, *Historical Sketches*, vol. II, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., new impression 1906, pp. 217–302.

³¹ See B. J. King, *Newman and the Alexandrian Fathers*, p. 224.

³² B. J. King, *Newman and the Alexandrian Fathers*, p. 224.

³³ B. J. King, *Newman and the Alexandrian Fathers*, p. 19.

scholastic enough. I would rather suggest that the anachronisms in Newman's later, revised translation of Athanasius can be explained more easily by an ill-suited attempt to make fourth-century theology conform to the language of orthodoxy that emerged from later doctrinal struggles.

Newman found in the Fathers a theological method that was congenial to his own, precisely because it was not scholastic. The limitations of his patristic writings from a historian's point of view lie in the fact that he read the Fathers as contemporaries, as participants in the theological conversations and controversies of his own day. Henri Brémond noted that Newman treated the Fathers with great intimacy and conversed them as with friends. This is evident particularly from Newman's biographical sketches, which are written with great warmth and sympathy.³⁴ Newman could not take the role of an impartial, detached historian, he was always too closely involved in the subject matter he was treating. In this sense, he was very similar to the Fathers themselves, whose theological method he once characterised with the following words: 'Instead of writing formal doctrinal treatises, they write controversy; and their controversy, again, is correspondence. They mix up their own persons, natural and supernatural, with the didactic or polemical works which engaged them. Their authoritative declarations are written, not on stone tablets, but on what Scripture calls "the fleshly tables of the heart"'.³⁵ Thus the relationship between Newman and the Fathers provides a vivid illustration of his cardinalitial motto, taken from St Francis de Sales and inspired by St Augustine, "*Cor ad cor loquitur*".

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³⁴ Cf. I. Biffi, *I Profili storici*, pp. 163–165, with reference to H. Brémond, *Newman: Essai de biographie psychologique*, Paris: Bloud et Gay, 1906.

³⁵ J. H. Newman, *The Last Years of St. Chrysostom*, p. 223.