

"THE WHOLE WORLD SERENELY JUDGES AGAINST YOU"

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ON THE ninth of October, 1845, John Henry Newman left the Anglican Church and was received into the Catholic Church. The reception itself occurred quietly at a private villa and was made into the hands of an obscure Italian priest. But the repercussions were such that Benjamin Disraeli, several times Prime Minister of England, could later assert that "the secession of Mr. Newman dealt a blow to the Anglican Church under which it still reels."¹ For John Henry Newman had been the principal power in a movement within the Anglican Church which "had resuscitated the Fathers, brought into relief the sacramental system, paved the way for an astonishing revival of long forgotten ritual and given the clergy a hold upon thousands at the moment when Erastian principles were on the eve of triumph."²

Newman was admired by all those within the Church of England who longed for a vigorous and independent clergy, a resolute body of doctrine and a flourishing sacramental system within the Church of England. By sermon and tract, he had led in achieving a complete theology of Anglicanism: the "Via Media" of the Oxford Movement. But that Via Media, which for his Anglican admirers was a complete theological success, was for Newman himself only a half way mark on the road to the Catholic Church. What led Newman beyond the Anglican Church and into the Catholic Church? Years after, writing in retrospect, the Cardinal said:

This is the great, manifest, historical phenomenon which converted me,—to which all particular inquiries converged. Christianity is not a matter of opinion, but an external fact, entering into, carried out in, indivisible from, the history of the world. It has a bodily occupation of the world; it is one continuous fact or thing, the same from first to last, distinct from everything else: to be a Christian is to partake of, to submit to, this thing; and the simple question was, Where, what is this thing in this age, which in the first age was the Catholic Church?

¹ Oldcastle, John, *Catholic Life and Letters of Cardinal Newman*, New York, p. 4.

² Barry, William, "Newman," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York, 1910, X, p. 796.

The answer was undeniable; the Church called Catholic now, is the very same thing in hereditary descent, in organization, in principles, in position, in external relations, which was called the Catholic Church then; name and thing have ever gone together, by an uninterrupted connection and succession from then till now.³

Here Newman sums up a whole book of apologetics by explaining that the revelation brought by Christ—the doctrine and mysteries of Christianity—was established by Him in His Church. This Church, moreover, is a visible society which men are able to recognize and to enter, in order to be saved. It is a real community, not simply a name for a vague, merely interior religion. Finally, the Cardinal poses the question of where this true Church is to be found. He answers that it is the Roman Catholic Church.

Thus Cardinal Newman gives a summary of his conversion but within this brief paragraph a great number of steps lie hidden. The two principal steps to be noted, however, are first, the affirmation of a true and visible Christian Church and secondly, the quest and discovery of that Church in the Catholic Church. To trace fully both points in Newman's life, one would have to begin with his early youth, as he himself does in the story of his conversion, the *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*. Here we are concerned with the second point, Newman's identification of the true Church with the Church of Rome.

With his acceptance of Anglicanism, there went a belief in the existence of a true Church founded by Christ. But for a long time Newman identified the Established Church of England as a part of the true Church of Christ. To understand this conviction and the events which changed it, Newman's original idea of the Anglican Church must be seen. First, Newman had become more and more imbued with a very traditional idea of the Established Church during his years as a tutor and curate at Oxford. He viewed the Established Church as a perfect society, hierarchically constituted and with real apostolic succession. He held, moreover, for the life of grace, based on a real regeneration at baptism and increased by an efficacious sacramental system. Newman, indeed, had arrived at a position which held that although there was a deep chasm between the "Church of Rome" and the Anglican Church, the two were closely united in doctrine and tradition because both had sprung from the one, primitive Church founded by Christ which since the sixteenth century existed in three branches. The

³ Newman, John Henry Cardinal, *Difficulties of Anglicans*, New York, 1908, I, p. 368.

original unity of the Church of Christ had been replaced by a three-fold division into Roman, Greek, and Established Churches. The other churches founded by "reformers"—the "protestant" churches—to Newman's mind were false and heretical. Thus Newman considered the Established Church of England as an integral part of the true, primitive Church founded by Christ which no longer existed as a unified whole.

It is important to remember this theory of Newman because it indicates his appreciation that in the beginning at least, the Church of Christ was one and unified. This was the hinge on which his conversion later would turn. He regretted the later divisions within the Church and always hearkened back with great devotion to the ideal in his mind, the early Church. Newman recalls that this devotion dated back even to his youth.

. . . when I was fifteen years old I read Joseph Milner's *Church History* and was nothing short of enamoured of the long extracts from St. Augustine, St. Ambrose and the other Fathers I found there. I read them as being the religion of the primitive Christians. . . .⁴

During his years as a curate at Oxford this attachment expressed itself in the project of reading all the Fathers chronologically, beginning with St. Ignatius and St. Justin. Newman asserts that it was this sort of study which confirmed him in the opinion that any modern church which would claim to be the true Church must represent the Church of the early Christians.

I do not know when I first learnt to consider that Antiquity was the true exponent of the doctrines of Christianity and the basis of the Church of England; but I take it for granted that the works . . . which at this time I read were my chief introduction to the principle.⁵

This quotation also shows that to Newman's way of thinking at that time, the Anglican Church did represent the early Christian Church, if not in its pristine state of unity, at least in its latter day threefold division. A few years later also, in his dismay at a liberalizing tendency within the Established Church, Newman found his

⁴ Newman, John Henry Cardinal, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, New York, 1905, p. 26.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

guiding light in the principle that his Church was a present day expression of the early Church.

I ever kept before me that there was something greater than the Established Church, and that was the Church Catholic and Apostolic, set up from the beginning, of which she was but the local presence and organ. She was nothing unless she was this.⁶

It must be noted that Newman's convictions were not those of every thinker within the Church of England. In fact, he was in one of two traditions within that Church. Newman represented the conservative tradition which considered the Church of England as part of the early Christian Church. The Anglican Church, therefore, should follow the whole of early Christian dogma and teaching. The other and opposite tradition was liberal and avowedly "Protestant," disdaining any suspicion of "Romanism." Partaking more of the Puritan school, it belittled dogma, the Sacraments and the hierarchical constitution of the Church. It insisted more upon the Bible than doctrine, upon religious feeling rather than theological opinion.

This latter tradition exercised a considerable influence in the Anglican Church. To Newman, this group was wrong and its doctrines pernicious. Its liberalism was a force corruptive of the ancient Christian faith. It could not be permitted to destroy the Established Church. Newman's ideals were shared by a number of his friends and associates at Oxford and together they decided to ride into combat against these liberalizing tendencies. Their activity—known as the "Oxford Movement"—intended to vindicate the Church of England as a true successor of the one, primitive Church. Newman explains that this was the conviction which spurred him on at the time.

I had supreme confidence in our cause ; we were upholding that primitive Christianity which was delivered for all time by the early teachers of the Church, and which . . . had well-nigh faded away out of the land . . . it must be restored.⁷

All unknown to himself, however, Newman was approaching a crisis in his religious life and his affiliation with the Church of England. This major development was accelerated by the publication of Newman's "Tract 90," one of a number of pamphlets that Newman had written for the Oxford Movement. The burden of "Tract 90" was

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

an explication of the Thirty Nine Articles of the Established Church. These Articles were the statement of the particular points of doctrine maintained by the Anglican Church and had been formulated in the sixteenth century. The gist of "Tract 90" was that these Articles are to be interpreted in a "Catholic" though not in a "Roman" sense. That is, because the Anglican Church was part of the one, primitive Church until the sixteenth century, its doctrine is that of the original and ancient "Catholic" faith. It was not till after the Council of Trent that the "Roman" Church introduced false teachings, thus causing the Church in England to establish itself independently. To Newman, this position was no novelty but merely an affirmation of the identity of the Established Church with the ancient Church. This Tract, however, caused a storm of indignation within the Anglican Church which took Newman entirely by surprise and precipitated his break with the Church of England. Why was the interpretation of the Thirty Nine Articles as exposed in his "Tract 90" of such critical significance to Newman?

For several years past an underground river had been coursing through Newman's mind and its torrent gradually increased until it at last burst to the surface at the rejection of "Tract 90." This current thought began when Newman formulated his division of the three branches of the one, ancient Church. For Newman, this primitive Church of Christ had split up into three parts, Greek, Anglican, and Roman, of which the last two were alone pertinent to his investigations. The "Church of Rome" had added to the deposit of faith and therefore was no longer the same as the primitive Church whereas the Church of England had maintained the deposit of faith intact. She was thus assured of the note of Apostolicity. On the other side of the scale, however, the Church of England had separated from Rome. She did not have the note of Unity which Rome so gloriously proclaimed for herself. Newman posited the dichotomy thus:

The Anglican disputant took his stand upon antiquity or Apostolicity, the Roman upon Catholicity. The Anglican said: "There is but one faith, the ancient, and you have not kept to it." The Roman retorted: "There is but one Church, the Catholic, and you are out of it". . . The true Church as defined in the Creeds was both Catholic and Apostolic; now as I viewed this controversy in which I was engaged, England and Rome had divided these notes and prerogatives between them; the cause lay thus: Apostolicity versus Catholicity.⁸

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

This was the state of Newman's mind for several years, from approximately 1836 to 1839, while he was vicar of St. Mary the Virgin at Oxford and was zealously writing and preaching according to the principles of the Oxford Movement. During the long scholastic vacation of 1839, however, Newman took up again his reading of the Fathers. Without any deliberate intention and quite normally, Newman began to study and master the history of the Monophysites, heretics who had been condemned in the fifth century by the Council of Chalcedon. Here Newman's very first doubt arose.

It was during this course of reading that for the first time a doubt came upon me of Anglicanism. . . . 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. . . .

It was difficult to make out how the Eutycheans or Monophysites were heretics, unless Protestants and Anglicans were heretics also; difficult to find arguments against the Tridentine Fathers which did not tell against the Fathers of Chalcedon; difficult to condemn the Popes of the sixteenth century without condemning the Popes of the fifth. The drama of religion, and the combat of truth and error were ever the one and the same.⁹

Newman was suddenly transfixed by the acute realization that the condemnation, with which he was in complete accord, of the ancient heretics was executed on the very principle which the Roman Catholic Church was leveling against the Anglican Church. Thus Newman saw the situation.

The principles and proceedings of the Church now, were those of the Church then; the principles and proceedings of heretics then, were those of Protestants now. I found it so,—almost fearfully; there was an awful similtude, more awful, because so silent and unimpassioned, between the dead records of the past and the feverish chronicle of the present.¹⁰

In other words, the doctrine of the Monophysite heresy had been examined by the Fathers of Chalcedon and found to be contrary to the teaching of the Church as a whole. But instead of submitting to the Church, the Monophysites claimed that the Church itself had gone into error and they then withdrew from her. Newman agreed without question to their condemnation as heretics and to all like condemna-

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 114

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

tions of early Christian heretics. Why, then, after acceding to the condemnations of the Church through sixteen centuries, balk at the condemnation, as heretics, of the founders of the Established Church of England? Newman saw this in an abstract way but it was brought home forcefully to his whole being by a poignant phrase which was directed to him by a friend who had found it in a current article written by Cardinal Wiseman in *The Dublin Review*. The phrase was taken from a work of St. Augustine refuting the claims of the Donatist heretics: "the whole world serenely judges against you." St. Augustine meant that the doctrines of the Donatists were false and their position heretical because the whole body of the living Church dispassionately and calmly rejected their validity. Newman saw in this terse phrase a graphic epitome of the argument against the Anglican position.

"Securus judicat orbis terrarum"; they were words which went beyond the occasion of the Donatists. . . . They decided ecclesiastical questions on a simpler rule than that of Antiquity. . . . What light was hereby thrown upon every controversy in the Church! . . . The deliberate judgment, in which the whole Church at length rests and acquiesces, is an infallible prescription and a final sentence against such portions of it as protest and secede.¹¹

In spite of the shock of this historical impugnement of the Established Church, Newman still hesitated to make an absolute judgment against it. He felt no certainty that the argument was conclusive. The foundation of Newman's faith in the Established Church had always been that it was a continuation in England of the one, ancient Church. If this were certain, perhaps the Anglican Church had not truly lost the unity and catholicity of the primitive Church as he had first thought. It was with this conviction in mind that Newman undertook his explication of the Thirty Nine Articles in "Tract 90," referred to above. If the Anglican Church was truly the continuation of the one, primitive Church, "the doctrine of the old Church must live and speak in Anglican formularies in the Thirty Nine Articles. Did it?" Newman believed the answer was yes.

Man had done his worst to disfigure, to mutilate, the old Catholic Truth; but there it was, in spite of them, in the Articles still. It was there,—this must be shown. It was a matter of life and death to us to show it. . . . I recognized that I was engaged in an *experimentum crucis*. I have no doubt

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

that then I acknowledged to myself that it would be a trial of the Anglican Church, which it had never undergone before. . . . Though my Tract was an experiment, it was, as I said at the time, "no feeler"; the event showed this; for, when my principle was not granted, I did not draw back, but gave up. I would not hold office in a Church which would not allow my sense of the Articles.¹²

In the light of the condemnations of ancient heretics, the Anglican Church too appeared as heretical. This was the possibility raised in Newman's mind by his study of the history of the Church. But if the doctrine of the Anglican Church was the same as that of the early Church, why then this doubt would be successfully resolved in favor of the Anglicans. Such was Newman's state of mind when he sat down to examine the Thirty Nine Articles. Yes, the doctrines and traditions of the early Church could be seen in the Thirty Nine Articles. There was nothing contradictory in them. This was the position taken in "Tract 90." If this Tract was accepted without demur, then all was saved.

As has been seen, however, the Tract caused "a furious and universal agitation . . . Newman was denounced as a traitor, a Guy Fawkes at Oxford."¹³ The excitement caused by the Tract sent the development of Newman's thought into abeyance for the moment. He retired to his retreat, Littlemore, for the summer of 1841, in order to settle his mind while working on a translation of St. Athanasius. But during this summer "three great blows" fell upon him, entirely destroying his faith in the Established Church. The first blow was the reappearance of that ghost which had unsettled Newman upon his study of the history of the Monophysites. This time it was the Arians of the fourth century that he saw condemned by the Council of Nicaea as the Anglicans were being condemned by Rome in the nineteenth century. He could not escape the logical conclusion of the parallel. The second blow fell when the hitherto silent Anglican bishops began to protest the ideas of "Tract 90." Newman realized that his position was rejected not only by the laity but also by the hierarchy. The last blow came when the Archbishop of Canterbury agreed with Prussia to create a bishopric in Jerusalem to be used by the adherents of Calvinism and Lutheranism in that part of Asia. Newman was scandalized.

This was the third blow, which finally shattered my faith in the Anglican Church. That Church was not only forbidding

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 130.

¹³ Barry, *op. cit.*, X, p. 797.

any sympathy or concurrence with the Church in Rome but it actually was courting an inter-communion with Protestant Prussia and the heresy of the Orientals. . . . Such acts as were in progress led me to the gravest suspicion, not that it would cease to be a Church, but that, since the sixteenth century, it had never been a Church all along.¹⁴

Although Newman was not to be received into the Catholic Church for another four years, his faith in Anglicanism was moribund—in fact, dead. During this lacuna between his rejection of Anglicanism and embracing of Catholicism, Newman studied the doctrines of the Catholic Church and came to appreciate the development of dogma. At the same time he overcame his repugnance to what he had formerly considered the superstitions and idolatries of Catholic teaching, especially in regard to the Blessed Virgin and the Saints. And it should be remarked that Newman prayed fervently at this time while pursuing his studies. At length he resolved to put an end to his temporizing and to act as he believed was true. "I must do my best and then leave it to a higher Power to prosper it."¹⁵ Consequently, Newman contacted a simple Italian priest, Father Dominic, a Passionist, and on October 9, 1845, he was received into the Catholic Church.

If Newman's conversion is considered apologetically, it can be explained by saying that he ultimately realized that the true Church founded by Christ is discernible by its qualities. These qualities or properties have been termed the "marks" of the Church—the signs by which it can be recognized by men. While an Anglican, Newman knew speculatively that the true Church is One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic but a number of years passed before he was confronted with the necessity of examining the Anglican Church in the light of these marks. While studying the condemnation of ancient heretics, Newman suddenly remembered that the Church of England had incurred a like condemnation. Could this condemnation be rejected by demonstrating that the Established Church still taught the whole body of traditional Christian doctrine? Newman lived in hope that it could. When his aspirations were rejected by his fellow Anglicans, he was stupefied. When he then reconsidered the ancient condemnations—those of the Monophysites, Donatists—and when he saw the Anglican hierarchy fraternizing with avowed enemies of the ancient faith, the scales dropped from his eyes and Newman saw that his comparison of Anglican teaching and the doctrine of the early Church with uncritical ac-

¹⁴ Newman, *Apologia*, p. 143.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

ceptance of division from this One Church was to strain a gnat while swallowing a camel.

Thus the point at issue was a much more fundamental principle: the unity of the true Church. Newman grasped that no one can separate from the true Church and yet claim to be a member of that Church. Union with the Church is basic. Why? Because the unity of the Church comes from the adherence of its members to one faith. This faith is the essence of the Church militant and can in no way be divided: "one Lord, one faith, one Baptism,"¹⁶ as St. Paul asserts. Thus the unity of the Church is not merely a physical oneness but it is a oneness in "the mind of Christ."¹⁷ Not to submit to the Church is to oppose her, to oppose her is to separate from her, to separate from her is to lose the true faith.

I do not say that in secondary principles it (the Anglican Church) may not agree with the Catholic Church; but its essential idea being that she has gone into error, the Via Media is really nothing else than Protestant. Not to submit to the Church is to oppose her, and to side with the heretical party; for medium there is none.¹⁸

God deigned to prosper Cardinal Newman's devotion to the early Church and to bless his quest for it with the gift of faith. His conversion indicates once again that the roads to Rome are many. He himself realized this and concluded his remarks to his Anglican friends with these words:

I am going into these details, not as if I thought of convincing you on the spot by a view of history which convinced after careful consideration, nor as if I called on you to be convinced by what convinced me at all (for the methods of conviction are numberless and one man approaches the Church by this road, another by that), but merely in order to show you how it was that Antiquity, instead of leading me from the Holy See as it leads many, on the contrary drew me on to submit to its claims.¹⁹

¹⁶ Ephesians, iv, 5.

¹⁷ I Cor., ii, 16.

¹⁸ Newman, *Difficulties of Anglicans*, I, p. 377.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 393.