

## THE PRESENT IMPORTANCE OF NEWMAN'S VIEW OF ANGLICANISM

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On my 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, friends gave me a spiritual bouquet and, as there are a variety of spirits, they included a bottle of 1945 Armagnac. When I open that bottle I shall be able to smell the liberation of Paris, but the question is: when should I open such a valuable thing? James Anthony Froude recalled that “though (Newman) rarely drank wine, he was trusted to choose the vintages for the college cellar.” While good souls have been sipping the wine of Newman all these years like sommeliers arguing over the taste, it is now time to drink it full. For when Pope Benedict beatifies the great man, Deo volente, this year, he will be telling the world that the vintage pressed long ago is full ready for general consumption. Newman has been remaindered too often to the pantheon of beloved intellects whose poetic charm overcame the distractions of their religion, the same way temperamentally fragile revisionists played down Francis of Assisi as a mystical stigmatist, and turned him into an ecological birdbath ornament. .

Newman was born in his day for today. The Established Church of his youth, which seemed like a flagship of empire is now breaking on the shoals of reality, and what Newman proposed as a challenge to something mighty is now a call to rescue survivors. Yet in any such calamity there are both flotsam and jetsam. Pope Benedict's decision on November 4 of 2009 to receive Anglicans in a canonical personal ordinariate, was a response to an appeal. He is not rummaging for flotsam, those floating logs who will drift to any safe shore. The Pope welcomes a full profession of faith in the Catholic creeds and a rejection of all that the sectaries have said in their contradiction. The jetsam are those who have been propelled by circumstance into a positive recognition that their old craft was not the Barque of Peter. In the opening paragraph of the apostolic constitution “*Anglicanorum coetibus*,” the Holy Father says, “The Apostolic See has responded favorably to such petitions. Indeed, the successor of Peter, mandated by the Lord Jesus to guarantee the unity of the episcopate and to preside over and safeguard the universal communion of all the Churches, could not fail to make available the means necessary to bring this holy desire to realization.”

I may stand accused of mixing metaphors of wines and ships but sailors have never thought the two incompatible. If it is time to break open the wine of Newman, it is not like drinking the last dregs on a sinking ship, for it is very like uncorking a noble vintage that has been waiting for a special celebration. What Newman preached in his “Parting of Friends” at the time of his conversion, and what he wrote heart to heart in his “Apologia” and what he summed up in his “Biglietto Address” have all found their moment now.

It is important to remember that Newman was classically trained. It is difficult for us to recreate a semblance of what that means in our coarsened culture, whose leaders are so bereft of those articles of civility and wisdom which were the common language of types diverse as Cicero and Lord Chesterton and Harry Truman. Newman's classical

acuteness enabled him to tell the real thing from a sham. The logician Richard Whately said he had never known such a clear thinker. The Established Church of his youth was a mixture of spiritual aridity and institutional confidence, well expressed by Mr. Thwackum in Henry Fielding's "Tom Jones" who says: "When I mention religion, I mean the Christian religion; and not only the Christian religion, but the Protestant religion; and not only the Protestant religion, but the Church of England." We can go back earlier. One of the most splendid, if also most obtuse, lines ever uttered about churchmanship, was that of the seventeenth century Anglican Bishop of Ely, Simon Patrick, who praised "that virtuous mediocrity which our Church observes between the meretricious gaudiness of the Church of Rome and the squalid sluttishness of fanatic conventicles." Newman, though, knew that classical mediocrity is not what fuzzy thinkers today think it to mean when they address the religious controversies of our time in the turgid diction of Delphic oracles. Horace praised the man who loved well the Golden Mean, "*Auream quisquis mediocritatem diligit.*" It was golden, not because it was a compromise between truth and falsehood, but because it was like a laser beam pointing the way between every mistake. Anglicanism, by force of political circumstance and religious confusion, had settled on a wrong idea of the Golden Mean as a "via media" of a bit of this and a bit of that, reducing the apophatic spirituality of Byzantium to polite ambiguity. Newman gave a series of lectures between 1830 and 1841 in defense of Anglicanism's via media as spiritually prudent and the work of divine grace, but the scandal of the Jerusalem bishopric in 1841, which laid aside religious differences between Anglicans and Lutherans for the sake of practicality, would open Newman's eyes to the fact that the true "via media" is a declaration of precision and not vagueness. So he says, "Take England, with many high virtues, and yet a low Catholicism. It seems to me that John Bull is a spirit neither of heaven nor hell . . . Has not the Christian Church, in its parts, surrendered itself to one or other of these simulations of the truth? . . . How are we to avoid Scylla and Charybdis and go straight on to the very image of Christ?"

This subjective substitute for the classical Golden Mean is not modern but post-modern, since the philosophical quality of our culture has tumbled from those parapets upon which wrong but well-trained thinkers could declare that the only certitude is that nothing is certain. Today, what Pope Benedict has tagged "the dictatorship of relativism" is seen in a blithe rejection of Christian essentials by vestigial Anglicanism, not because they are hard to believe but because they were never learned. So let us uncork the wine of Newman, for what he preached while still an Anglican has now found its target:

"Surely, there is at this day a confederacy of evil, marshalling its hosts from all parts of the world, organizing itself, taking its measures, enclosing the Church of Christ as in a net, and preparing the way for a general Apostasy from it. Whether this very Apostasy is to give birth to Antichrist, or whether he is still to be delayed, as he has already been delayed so long, we cannot know; but at any rate this Apostasy, and

all its tokens and instruments, are of the Evil One, and savour of death. Far be it from any of us to be of those simple ones who are taken in that snare which is circling around us! Far be it from us to be seduced with the fair promises in which Satan is sure to hide his poison! Do you think he is so unskillful in his craft, as to ask you openly and plainly to join him in his warfare against the Truth? No; he offers you baits to tempt you. He promises you civil liberty; he promises you equality; he promises you trade and wealth; he promises you a remission of taxes; he promises you reform. This is the way in which he conceals from you the kind of work to which he is putting you; he tempts you to rail against your rulers and superiors; he does so himself, and induces you to imitate him; or he promises you illumination, —he offers you knowledge, science, philosophy, enlargement of mind. He scoffs at times gone by; he scoffs at every institution which reveres them. He prompts you what to say, and then listens to you, and praises you, and encourages you. He bids you mount aloft. He shows you how to become as gods. Then he laughs and jokes with you, and gets intimate with you; he takes your hand, and gets his fingers between yours, and grasps them, and then you are his.”

Pope Benedict XVI has done a stunning thing in providing such an ecclesial structure as described in the Apostolic Constitution “*Anglicanorum coetibus*.” The dilemma of Anglicans maintaining a firm if incomplete belief in the supernatural character of the apostolic Church, when contradicted by post-modern forces who would reduce the creedal formulas to impressions of reality, is a cultural icon of the spiritual combat between virtue and egoism which defines the crisis of our age. While only the Pope knows what he is doing, I suspect that this Constitution is a shot fired over the bow of secular cynicism which is entwining its fingers with those of the men and women of our generation, to make us one with the enemy of our Creator.

Consider many Catholics have reduced sacred worship to a suburban expression of goodwill. It is evidence of the creeping banality by which the Prince of Lies would seduce Holy Church herself, though he is bound to fail, with that same mediocrity which repulsed Newman, for he knew that banality is indeed evil, and possibly crueler than pre-Christian paganism which danced its sensuality in Arcadian groves without feeling a post-Christian need to declare perversity a sacrament.

As late as 1835, ten years before his conversion, Newman associated the Anti-Christ with the Papacy and returned from his first visit to Rome in 1833 calling Catholicism “polytheistic, degrading and idolatrous.” Gradual experience of alternatives to Catholicism, however, especially the skepticism of the Broad Church Anglicanism of his coterie, trimmed his judgment: “We are much disposed to question whether any tests can...prove that the Roman communion is the Synagogue of Satan.” His friendly battles in Oxford with his

mentor, Richard Whately, whom I have mentioned, professor of political economy (battles which he said continued when he was starting the Catholic University in Dublin where Whately had become Anglican Archbishop), moved him to reflect more on the Catholic claims. Whately was a fair minded man who advocated civil rights for Catholics and Jews. He had his own sense of humor, which inspired him to satirize the new skeptical Biblical critics by using their critical methods to prove that Napoleon Bonaparte never existed. In this, he was a precursor of Ronald Knox who, a century later, used modern canons of literary criticism to prove that Tennyson's poem "In Memoriam" had in fact been written by Queen Victoria. In treating virtue ethics, and the Greek ideal of happiness as "eudaimonia" it was Dr. Whately who said, "Happiness is no laughing matter." Newman inherited something of this subtlety, and this should help to make sense of what Newman meant later when he said, "...as a Protestant, I felt my religion dreary but not my life – but, as a Catholic, my life dreary, not my religion." Understanding true happiness as the attainment of truth, he was ready to sacrifice lesser consolations to find it, like Augustine exulting in the discovery of "beauty ever ancient, ever new." The recent proposal of a personal ordinariate for Anglicans, is an invitation to such "eudaimonia."

Newman preached big words to a small scene in his day. He was addressing a "national apostasy" which is now universal. If "national apostasy" seemed an inflated term when Keble decried the government's confusion of bishops with state managers, Newman did not see it so and he called it the start of the Oxford Movement. The Oxford Movement has now become a World Movement, sometimes called a "Reform of the Reform," the kind of "aggiornamento" optimistically envisioned but imprecisely achieved in the years after Vatican II. "Anglicanorum coetibus" may well be the ecumenical movement come of age, a correction of the disoriented notion that unity in the Church happens by confederation. While the number of ecclesial communities that will join this new structure for Anglicans may be small, the initiative itself could encourage relations with the separated historic Churches.

More than thirty years ago, John Paul II approved a "Pastoral Provision" to receive Anglicans into the Catholic Church. This followed the 1976 decision of the General Convention of the Episcopal Church to ordain women. Some five years before that, I had written my first, and perforce juvenile, book which was a small study of this question. In it, I maintained that to deny gender as a charism in the sacrament of orders, was a Gnostic heresy, for it dismissed the prophetic significance of sexuality. In phrases subtle because I knew the subject would be scandalous, I contended that such ordinations would irreparably destroy chances for unity with the Catholic Church and that this a Gnostic abuse of anthropology would logically lead to what is now called same-sex marriage. Some reviewers said that was absurd. What I predicted in 1971 has happened. There have been many division since then within the Anglican structure which prided itself on its unity, even in this country through the trials of the Civil War. The original Pastoral Provision provided welcome for over one hundred clergy and several thousand laity, including one religious community of women. These are small numbers, but they have established several flourishing parishes with an approved Anglican Use for worship which is attractive even to cradle Catholics. While the most important aspect of this provision was the clear signal of Rome indicating that the question of women's ordination belongs to the irreformable deposit of sacred tradition, the part of it that got most attention was permission for the ordination of married men, with the understanding that, as in the Eastern rites, there could be no marriage or re-marriage, in the instance of widowhood, after ordination.

It seems logical that this provision, while continuing as an entity, would be subsumed by the new personal ordinariates. The chief difference between the former pastoral provision and the new ordinariates is precisely that, while the former was part of the regular diocesan structure, the new ordinariates would have their own bishops and ecclesiastical superiors similar to military ordinariates. This is something of which Newman, with all his prophetic gifts, could not have anticipated. While he encouraged a scheme of Ambrose Philip de Lisle for a sort of Anglican Uniate Church for converts, he knew that it was impractical. Yet, his comment in a letter to de Lisle in 1876 is significant: "Nothing will rejoice me more than to find that the Holy See considers it safe and promising to sanction some such plan as the Pamphlet suggests. I

give my best prayers, such as they are, that some means of drawing to us so many good people, who are now shivering at our gates, may be discovered.” It is also the case that in his day the invalidity of Anglican orders was not a settled question as it is today. Newman was ordained a priest in 1846 less than a year after he had been received into the Church, and Manning’s ordination in 1851 took only nine weeks, and within fourteen years he became Archbishop of Westminster. That was during the pontificate of Pius IX who was not given to impetuosity or neglect of doctrine.

The new apostolic constitution expectedly has had its doubters. The Holy Father made this a personal initiative to the surprise of some ecumenicists whose more relaxed instincts had not encouraged traditionalist Anglicans in their petitions. I do not make an exact parallel with the present situation, but in a letter of 1859 to Lord Acton, Newman wrote: “There will necessarily always be round the Pope second-rate people, who are not subjects of that supernatural guidance which is his prerogative.” Newman was certain that the Catholic Church in England could not flourish if it remained under the jurisdiction of the Propaganda Fidei, but he was often stymied in getting his message through bureaucratic tangles to the Pope. He said, “...the Rock of St. Peter on its summit enjoys a pure and serene atmosphere, but there is a great deal of Roman malaria at the foot of it.”

The uniqueness of “Anglicanorum coetibus” naturally begs questions. Not least of these is the “patrimony” of Anglicanism which the apostolic constitution seeks to safeguard, not temporarily but as a permanent ornament of the richness of the Latin Church. But this patrimony is not defined. Anglicanism has gone through transformations since the Elizabethan Settlement, and the engine of its motion, which is now proving itself to be not perpetual, has been its effort to define itself in various moods, Catholic, Calvinist, Laudian, Erastian, Deist, Evangelical, Tractarian, Ritualist, Liberal, and Post-Christian, all bobbing on the surface of the endemic Anglo-Saxon bias of Pelagianism. The “patrimony,” however re-imagined from time to time, would have been more Protestant from the start, were it not for the theological conservatism of Elizabeth I. Surely there were clerics, especially of the Laudian period, who were “stupor mundi” in their Patristic erudition, but often what claimed to be a return to sources, was a sort of theological bottom-feeding made palatable by a knowledge of Greek. To speak in generalities of a patrimony risks becoming nostalgic, bearing in mind that nostalgia is history after a few drinks. John Jewell and Richard Hooker in the seventeenth century had a romantic notion of the sub-apostolic church which easily accommodated what their king decreed. Even Jewell had a functional but not sacramental concept of episcopacy and his confidence was in Sola Scriptura. Anglicanism was not originally confessional but statist, and what is of the state dies with the neglect of the state. As Caesar’s eye grows cold, so does what glimmered in his glance.

As far as aesthetic patrimony goes, the typical Anglican forms of worship are no more elevated than the ordinary Catholic liturgy of our day, now happily under revision. Newman was sensitive to signs; he remembered wearing black gloves in Trinity College Chapel when mourning the daughter of King George IV, the Princess Charlotte; and everyone knew he had abandoned Anglican orders when he appeared one day in grey trousers. If he who blushed at the most innocent pun had seen some of the liturgical aberrations of our generation, he would have lapsed into a coma. There is a cottage industry of polemicists who claim that the Catholic Newman used to haunt old Anglican churches to hear the voices of distant choirs gilding the rafters. There is no evidence for that. His frequent discouragements were not from a loss of what he had sternly rejected. He writes of those who claimed that the convert keep looking back over his shoulder; “This is said of every one in turn – and in every case which I am acquainted with most falsely – There is but one feeling of joy and happiness among those persons with whom I am acquainted who have become Catholics.”

Newman was actually repulsed by much of what passed for prayer in the churches of his early years and said that the thought of the Anglican service made him “shiver.”” The services in his own university church of St. Mary in Oxford were “intensely dreary.” The Tractarians spent little time on the liturgical romanticism of the ritual movement which was to follow. But that movement was a recovery of a patrimony not unique to the English church. Perhaps in recognition of this, it has been suggested that the new personal ordinariates should revive the Sarum Rite to be distinct. In my Anglican days, I knew no one who had ever seen the Sarum Rite. That would just be a homemade historicism, which in part is why a proposed revival of the Sarum Rite for the new Westminster Cathedral was rejected in the nineteenth century. The personal ordinariates will fail if their concept of preserving a cultural patrimony is the creation of an Anglo-Saxon Theme Park, or an ecclesiastical Williamsburg. It would lack the spiritual dynamic the Church needs for revitalizing a dispirited segment of our anemic culture. Pope Benedict’s focus has always been on Newman rather than on Anglicanism, but in the foreword to a book “Turning Towards the Lord” by the Oratorian priest, Father Lang, he commended the “ad orientem” position of the celebrant at the altar and described “the contribution made by the Church of England to this question and in giving, also, due consideration to the part played by the Oxford movement in the nineteenth century...” Many of the present Anglican clergy were not reared in the Anglican tradition themselves, and this adds a difficulty if the “patrimony” which the Constitution seeks to encourage is in no small part an “ethos” which comes by a long lived experience of a cultural heritage.

There follows another questions about the expectations of Anglican stalwarts so long to become Catholic, since more than thirty years ago all veneer of Catholic simulation was shattered by the ordination of women. Catholicism is a commitment and not a last resort. Pusey was discomfited when Newman continued to attract converts after his conversion. After an awkward encounter in Prior Park in Oxford, Newman wrote to his friend Dalgairns saying that Pusey had expected the Catholic converts to be nothing more than vinedressers who had simply “transferred to another part of the vineyard.” Newman became aware, and expresses this in multiple ways in his lectures on “Difficulties of Anglicans,” that High Anglicanism is a delusional ecclesiology supported by cultural affinities holding sway over logic. Newman’s dispatches this with curt words in the “Apologia:” when he says, “It is not at all easy (humanly speaking) to wind up an Englishman to a dogmatic level..”

The Prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Levada, said on March 9 of this year that “among the distinctive elements of Anglican heritage should be included the spiritual and intellectual gifts of the Oxford movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the then-Anglican cleric Newman together with his fellow Tractarians have left a legacy that still enriches a common Catholic patrimony.” Thus the Anglican patrimony consists in a style of living the apostolic life. Newman and his fellows gave it new life by opting for the fullness of Catholicism, in an action rooted in an intuition of history ignored in our own day. Newman’s argument for the development of doctrine as an economy requiring what he called “preservation of type” and “chronic vigor” is the antecedent cousin of Pope Benedict’s “Hermeneutic of Continuity.” The Holy Father might paraphrase with benevolent Bavarian courtesy, what Newman said rather curtly: “To be deep in history is to cease to be Protestant.”

After attending one of Newman’s twelve lectures on “Anglican Difficulties” delivered in London in 1850, which provide a guide for wavering Anglicans today, Thackeray rose from his seat, daunted by the Newmanian logic, and cried out: “It is either Rome or Babylon, and for me it is Babylon.” The case is the same today, to a larger audience: It is either Rome or Babylon. These lectures, treated nervously by some who would tone down Newman’s popery, are the beating heart of the exhilarated Catholic Newman. It is noteworthy, but not inexplicable, that perhaps the leading modern Anglican interpreter of Newman, Owen Chadwick, in his book “The Spirit of the Oxford Movement” (1990) does not once refer to the lectures on

“Anglican Difficulties.” In them, Newman said, “All depends on the fact of the supremacy of Rome,” and “One vessel alone can ride those waves; it is the boat of Peter, the ark of God.”

In 1988 I made the longest of all possible trips on this planet, the treacherous and usually fruitless journey from Oxford to Cambridge. I went to hear a lecture by Cardinal Ratzinger. To the dismay of some of the faculty who attributed the vast outpouring of undergraduates to what one professor called the current young people’s fad for mediaevalism, Ratzinger spoke of eternal verities in a way which I imagined might have been composed by Newman. Both are musicians – Newman a violinist and Ratzinger a pianist. And you see that I speak of Newman in the present, because he is being brought back to us by Ratzinger whose own name will never be in the past perfect. The Pope’s overture to Anglicans is not polemical but pastoral. Newman said “Denunciation neither effects subjection in thought nor in conduct.” In the new apostolic constitution, the Holy Father denounces no one, but as the Father of Christian Unity, in the succession of Peter who was commanded by Christ to confirm the brethren in the Faith, he would that none be lost.

In this conference you will hear talks more serviceable than mine, I am only here as the sommelier, to recommend the vintage wine of Newman. He uncorked it in the finale of the “Apologia pro Vita Sua” when he listed his friends who had joined him in the fraternity of converts, and also those who were moved in mind but not enough in will to embrace the ancient beauty. He wrote one last line: “And I earnestly beg for this whole company, with a hope against hope, that all of us, who once were so united, and so happy in our union, may even now be brought at length, by the power of the Divine Will, into one Fold and under One Shepherd.”