

THE THOUGHT OF JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

- Topic: Newman's Public Persona
Convener: Edward Jeremy Miller, Gwynedd-Mercy College
Presenters: John R. Connolly, Loyola Marymount University
John T. Ford, Catholic University of America
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Few Catholic figures have played more prominent roles in civic public life than Cardinal Newman. The symposium examined three aspects: John Connolly on the anti-Catholic bigotry of 1850 England, John Ford on Gladstone's 1874 charge of divided loyalties following Vatican I, and Kevin Godfrey on Newman as enhancing pluralistic discourse. Ed Miller reported on his Earhart-funded Newman research that bears upon the *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* discussions today.

When Pio Nono restored to England in 1850 the Roman Catholic hierarchy, it caused a political storm. John Connolly first examined the restoration from the Catholic point of view and then analyzed the Protestant reaction that saw in it an act of papal aggression against the nation. Newman's great public act was his series of lectures at the Birmingham Corn Exchange on the causes and extent of Protestant prejudice against Catholics and soon after in book format as *Present Position of Catholics*. Besides reviewing this brilliant piece of satirical prose, Connolly also examined Newman's "Christ Upon the Waters" sermon and Newman's very candid observations to friends in *Letters and Diaries*. Finally, Newman's attitude toward involvement in public matters, what might be called his "public Catholicism," was depicted in terms of its justification and workable strategies.

John Ford examined the complexities of another notable foray by Newman into the public arena in the 1870s when he took on the prime minister of the nation. William Ewart Gladstone, England's four-time prime minister, published in 1874 *The Vatican Decrees in Their Bearing on Civil Allegiance*. Vatican Council I, a few years earlier, had solemnly taught the doctrines of papal primacy and papal infallibility, and Cardinal Manning's bullish interpretations of the doctrines alarmed English Protestants. Gladstone's pamphlet charged that Roman Catholics could not be considered loyal citizens because the pope could command Catholics to obey his decrees and not the state's. Newman, who during these postconciliar years had become concerned about the implications of the Council's teaching on infallibility, took the opportunity not only to respond publicly to Gladstone's public attack but also finally to speak out against the ultramontane exaggerations of the Manning circle that gave the impression of every papal decision coming under the aegis of infallibility and hence binding in conscience on Catholics. Newman's *A Letter to the Duke of Norfolk* (1875) not only answered Gladstone but also challenged Manning's theological interpretations.

Although Gladstone raised a garden variety of objections to Roman Catholicism, Newman focused his attention on three issues: citizenship, church, and conscience. Newman allowed that collisions between church and state are possible, but only accidentally and indirectly. Church/state collisions tend to occur when one tries to enhance its power at the expense of the other. Second, Newman insisted that neither Caesar nor Pope are *a priori* entitled to absolute obedience. Each conflict must be judged on its own merits. Not only are there times when a Catholic should obey the church and not the state; there are times when a Catholic should obey the state and not the church. In the last analysis, Newman maintained, "I must rule myself by my own judgement and my own conscience." Though the conditions prompting Newman to write *A Letter to the Duke of Norfolk* have long passed, anyone presently seeking to balance the political and the religious would do well to follow Newman's example in sincerely seeking to discover a common ground with others of differing views.

Kevin Godfrey stepped beyond the particular public controversies which Newman entered and instead examined those personal attributes of Newman that serve to encourage others to enter into public debate. Newman's example and his characteristic way of thinking encourage wide-ranging pluralistic discourse and validate its outcomes theoretically, which is especially germane for today when there is focus on the meaning, process, and consequences of pluralistic discourse.

Godfrey considered the theoretical point of departure making plurality of truthful assertions, as well as public discourse about them, possible and respectable. One must recall Newman's reflections on epistemology and especially his notion of "implicit reasoning" as the source of pluralistic discourse. The hallmark of the distinctive mode of reasoning Newman calls *implicit* is the *imagination* by means of which one is able to view reality wholistically. With Gerard Magill, Godfrey sees Newman construing the characteristics of reasonable discourse as an "appeal to the imagination."

Relating Newman's experiences in university education and his writings on freedom of inquiry in Catholic contexts to the *Ex Corde* issues today has been the focus of Edward Jeremy Miller's sabbatical research. Miller reported on his archival research in Dublin and the UK and on the thesis that is shaping up for a proposed book. Newman's writings on education, when he founded the Catholic University in Dublin, are well known. His dealings with Cardinal Cullen and Cullen's views of him are less familiar. Cullen's confidential correspondence with Tobias Kirby (Irish College, Rome), now in the archives at Clonliffe, reveal a preoccupation with ultramontane concerns. Newman's nonbullish attitude toward Rome and his openness to empowering laity in the new university disquieted Cullen. Newman also thought there was too much meddling and micromanagement from the Irish bishops. Much the same describes the Newman/Cardinal Manning relationship. Miller got access to all the Newman/Manning interactions that archivist G. Tracey at the Birmingham Oratory had collated for Newman's beatification cause. Manning clearly agrees with his Roman confidant, George

Talbot, in terms of the ultramontane agenda, that Newman is "the most dangerous man in England."

Newman envisions the relationship between a Catholic university and the local or national hierarchy in terms of polar forces or energies. ("Polarity does not bring with it the suggestion of Hegelian flavoring that "dialectics" might.) Miller concluded his report by showing the subtle interplay of polarities in the famous fifth section of the *Apologia*. What begins as a polarity between the religious experience of God and "wild living [human] intellect" with its bent to skepticism, and which augers for a power or office—infallibility—by which the true knowledge of God can be maintained (a second polarity), leads to the conundrum: the human intellect is held in check and personal insight undone. Here is a third polarity: a necessarily free-ranging intellect and a checking force. But the testimony of ancient Catholicism and God's intention gleaned from the nature of things is that the energy of intellect does but grow from opposition, surprisingly. "It thrives and is joyous, with a tough elastic strength, under the terrible blows of the divinely fashioned weapon." Reason and authority are at once opponents and allies to each other. Thus, what begins in opposition ends in complementarity. Other polarities abound, *passim*.

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