

THOUGHT OF JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

Topic: Newman and Episcopacy
Conveners: Kevin Godfrey, Alvernia College
Moderator: Kevin Godfrey, Alvernia College
Presenters: Brian Hughes, University of St. Mary, Leavenworth
Edward Jeremy Miller, Gwynedd-Mercy College

In the opening presentation, “Newman’s Theology of Bishops,” Brian Hughes contended that although Newman’s writings lack a developed treatise on the theology of the bishop, Newman holds a robust view of how bishops mediate the experience of God to believers with the aim of bringing about church unity. Newman develops key insights into the nature of Christian service and obedience in his theology of the episcopate that are pertinent for contemporary ecclesiology.

Hughes traced three key features in Newman’s writing on bishops: (1) the patristic influence; (2) the bishop’s sacramental charisma; and (3) the theological connection of Episcopal office and church unity. Hughes argued that, for Newman, Episcopal authority is more pronounced and more spiritually important when exercised as personal presence. When bishops model Christ’s service through their presence as sacramentally charismatic, their authority summons hearers to trust Christ through them. In the context of ecclesial unity, obedience is not a matter of submitting to another’s will-to-power as domination. Rather, unity becomes a reciprocal obedience between the laity and the bishop that can allow an experience of self-transcendence in Christ through the Spirit.

In the second presentation, “The Newman-Manning Relationship,” Edward Jeremy Miller reflected on the strained relationship that existed between Cardinal Henry Edward Manning and Cardinal John Henry Newman. As Newman’s cause for beatification moves forward, there is curiosity as to why the relationship between them was characterized by suspicion and tension. Miller detailed the story of their interrelationship and offered reasons for their mutual animosity.

While they were both Anglicans, their relationship was uneventful. In fact, Newman’s conversion did not unsettle Manning, and Manning never bothered to inform Newman when he, six years later, joined the Church of Rome. The 1860s, however, were turbulent years. Newman came to distrust Manning’s motives and felt that Manning was always searching for information he could use to his advantage when he became Archbishop of Westminster. As Manning became more bullish about the Pope’s prerogatives, such as temporal sovereignty, he considered as enemies to the cause anyone not in his camp. Such was Newman.

The main cause of the tension between the two churchmen lay in their differing views of the church and the laity. Manning had a “high ecclesiology,” in which papal prerogative was the cornerstone and laity were expected to be docile. Newman had a more balanced view of the respective roles of laity, theologians, and magisterium. Manning had a view of church-against-world—a perspective in which he regarded the church to be engaged in a mortal struggle against a world that

included anti-Christ features. For Newman, dissimilarly, the secular world made positive contributions to human advancement and the sinfulness of the world invited healing rather than condemnation.

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