

possible principle can be the Spirit of God who baffles all our experience. No bodily life lived according to the flesh could claim such power'. No wonder, then, that Fr Durrwell's pages on this matter (and on others) have their occasional obscurities. And yet not every obscurity need remain so; and, as I have already said, Fr Durrwell's book, luminous and learned as it is, cannot stand on its own. It is a milestone in Catholic theology; and as such it can and surely will serve as a starting point for further explorations. For the theology of our time is likely to be more and more a theology of the Resurrection in all its implications.

## Newman: Theologian of the Word in Christian Life

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Theology in its normal sense is the science of God's word. God's word may be considered in the abstract as the revealed truth about God, in so far as this is expressible in human language. Alternatively it may be considered in the concrete as it lives and grows in individual human minds and hearts. Until the nineteenth century little attempt had been made to describe and reflect upon the word of God in this latter sense. It would have been dismissed as unscientific. But scientific theology in its normal sense had existed for many centuries. The technical terms used in scientific theology were not, of course, revealed to us from heaven. Part of the achievement of the Christian theologian was to invent technical symbols to express what had been given to the Church untechnically in the inspired literature of the Scriptures and in the living tradition of the Church. Man's capacity for scientific thought is one of his greatest gifts, and it was inevitable that he should apply it to the study of the greatest of all subjects, the revealed word of God. Christian man's first attempts at theology came in the very beginnings of the patristic age. The need for clear-cut terms and arguments as a safeguard against heresy led to a great increase of theology during the golden age of patristics, the fourth and fifth centuries. But, contrasted with later theology, all this early

period was a period of the literary expression of Christian life and tradition rather than of its systematic exposition and defence. For this reason, patristics are commonly coupled with Scripture as part of the source-material for theology rather than classed as scientific theology alongside that of medieval and modern times. Scripture is looked upon as God's inspired account of himself, while patristics are looked upon as the Church's living account of the faith, which had been handed down, and by which it lived.

During the Middle Ages the main doctrines of the faith as found in Scripture and Tradition were expressed in scientific terminology, and they were synthesized into a great body of thought, well furnished with clear scientifically expressed arguments, showing their reasonableness and their dependence on Scripture and Fathers. Succeeding centuries developed this theology. There were periods of genuine advance, and there were retrograde periods, according as theology was characterized by depth and fruitfulness or got lost in superficiality and technical verbiage. The latter faults are a liability in all human science; but it would be perverse to deny the real achievements of science, in the province of theology as in all else.

Yet, with its undoubted value, scientific theology did not succeed up to the time of Newman in taking full account of the complexity of the situation in which God's word was active. God did not reveal his word primarily to enable Christians to build up the science of theology. It was given first to be the life of men. It was Christ within us. As soon as a truth about Christ came to be enclosed in a technical term, it became, of course, Christ outside of us and beyond us. Not that theology failed to take account of the fact of the word of God in human hearts; but that it is of the nature of science to be detached, and to apply its terms to truths as detached from the thinker who uses the science.

There would at first sight appear to be a kind of vicious circle. Science must be detached. Yet, as soon as any truth involving human life becomes detached, it ceases fully to represent that life. A great deal has been written in modern philosophies about this problem. Most modern philosophies have been concerned, whether we think perversely or soundly, with the difficulty in all epistemological and psychological sciences that involves the thinker's whole personality in the object of his study. Subject gets inextricably bound up with object.

The great significance of Newman is that he made an astoundingly successful and constructive attempt to surmount this difficulty in the realm of theology. The title of an important book by Fr J. H. Walgrave

which has just appeared<sup>1</sup> is *Newman the Theologian*. Some 'theologians' of the old school will be tempted to protest against this title. Newman, they will say, whatever he is, is certainly no theologian. It is possible that he himself would have readily accepted the protest. He did not think of himself as a theologian. Yet the protest will not be justified. In his own way, Newman is a theologian, and a very important one. But he certainly is not one in quite the same sense as St Thomas or Billot, nor even as Karl Adam or Michael Schmauss. It is most encouraging to find a faithful and experienced Thomist like Father Walgrave recognizing the appropriateness of the title.

Having said that Newman is in his own way a theologian, and we must say an extremely important one, one might attempt to specify the term by calling his theology a theology of Christian life, as contrasted with scientific or technical theology. Perhaps one should say rather, it is a theology of God's word in Christian life. Such distinctions are, of course, open to criticism, since even a 'theology of the Word in Christian life' must be scientific. True as this undoubtedly is, it is not technical in the usual sense. Newman attempted a theology of the word of God as it exists non-theologically, or if you like pre-theologically and post-theologically, in Christ's members.

It was one aspect of this Newmanic theology to distrust both technical terms and formal argumentation. He could not escape from the conviction that the latter killed something of the living reality they wished to convey. Human thought and life, and even God's word in human thought and life, is greater and deeper and far more mysterious than can be expressed in any technical terms or formal arguments. God's truth enters into the whole man, the whole personality, the whole believing personality. If it fails to take hold of the believing personality, it becomes purely formal, and begins to lose its aptness to represent God's living word.

Newman was convinced that you cannot be a theologian of any kind, if your faith does not give life to your theology. In this he was Augustinian and Thomist. Newman would not have admitted that an unbeliever could be a theologian. Father Walgrave expresses this well in his book, where he gives as Newman's view 'that the primary necessity for a true theology is a deep and powerful life of faith, a continuous dwelling of the mind on Christ and his way of salvation, and a scrupulous fidelity to the word of God, that it be not lost.' (p. 298). Father Walgrave's enunciation of this truth reminds one of the well-known

<sup>1</sup>J. H. Walgrave, O.P.; translated by A. V. Littledale; Geoffrey Chapman; 35s.

passage of Newman in the *Grammar of Assent*: 'It was fitting that those mixed unlettered multitudes, who for three centuries had suffered and triumphed by virtue of the inward Vision of their Divine Lord, should be selected, as we know they were, in the fourth, to be the special champions of his Divinity and the victorious foes of its impugnors, at a time when the civil power, which had found them too strong for its arms, attempted, by means of a portentous heresy in the high places of the Church, to rob them of that Truth which had all along been the principle of their strength.' (*Grammar of Assent*, 1870, p. 486).

Newman did of course admit the possibility of false 'theologies,' based on heresy rather than on faith; but they were not theology in the Church's recognition of it. To quote again from Father Walgrave's interpretation of Newman, 'the true theologian is somewhat rare. There are many who apply themselves to theology, without having that supernatural reasonableness, that intense contemplative gift, that wide sweep of the mind characteristic of among others, St Augustine.' (p. 192).

Newman's theology of the Word in life was not merely another subject, a subject which had not been tackled before. It was, he was convinced, essential if one were to understand the life of faith in the Church, as well as the life of faith in the individual. It was essential if one were to be able to defend either the reasonableness of the common man's faith, as Newman attempted to do in the *Oxford University Sermons* and the *Grammar of Assent*, or the growth of doctrine in the Church as a whole, as Newman did in his fifteenth University Sermon and his *Essay on Development*.

The difficulties often encountered by formal scientific theology in explaining the evolution of dogma spring from an insufficient recognition of the part played by pre-theology, that is to say by the steady growing grasp of the meaning of the object of faith in the Church as a whole. This growth took place not by any means exclusively or even mainly in the schools. It took place in the prayer-life of the monk and the layman. It took place in the liturgical life and daily instruction of the Church. It took place in sermons, and in meditation and contemplation. It gave support to the Fathers of the Councils. Nothing is harder to analyse. Development of understanding takes place with the help of God's grace enlightening the faith, and with the exercise of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but also with the help of reason. This reason, moreover, was not so much the formal reasoning of the schools as the implicit, informal, spontaneous, personal form of reasoning which is hardly conscious of itself. So little conscious is it that it seems more like a type of

intuition than a type of inference, and Newman, in his untechnical way, occasionally calls it intuition.

Newman's theology of life could also be called a personalist theology. This is one reason why it is popular at the present day, in this age when there is so deep-seated a recognition of the importance of personality. In the ordinary, and even in many of the more important matters of life, we have our own personal ways of reaching the truth, starting from what Newman called 'principles' which are part of our own personal character and education, under the influence, if we have admitted it, of grace. So it is in the life of God's word in our minds and hearts. God's word is sown in our soul and grows there. God's grace strengthens it, and enlightens it, so that we learn to understand it more deeply. Perhaps it is truer to say that this seed in our hearts takes an ever deeper hold on them. But it does so according to the laws, and subject to the readiness and receptiveness of those hearts. It is only after we have reached the deeper understanding of a doctrine 'personally' that we turn to defending it formally. Our hearts are of course so fallible, and so are liable to be led astray by prejudices and passions and other human weaknesses. The word of God would indeed soon become corrupted in the life of the Church, were it not that the Holy Spirit safeguards that life. The Holy Spirit's protection is called infallibility. It is gentle and in harmony with the soul's nature, so that the Church's life takes a course eminently sweet and natural, yet all the time it is protected by the Holy Spirit. Where doctrines are vital, and especial clarity is needed, the Holy Spirit confirms, as it were, his own guidance by giving his protection to the necessary ecclesiastical definitions which on rare occasions are made. But, even outside these definitions, the Holy Spirit is ever at work preserving the true doctrine in the Church, and ready to help the individual.

Most of what Newman wrote concerns one or other aspect of this delicate and highly complex 'theology of the Word in Christian life.' There are philosophical and psychological aspects, and there are purely theological ones. Fr Walgrave has produced what must, I am sure, be called the finest work so far on Newman as a theologian of the word of God in Christian life. Since it is becoming increasingly recognized that the development of dogmas owes a great deal to the life of God's word in the faithful, Newman remains to this day the most important theologian of doctrinal development. No other theologian has gone deeply into the question from this vital standpoint. There have been plenty of books in recent years on the theological principles governing the con-

scious scientific possibilities of theological development. Such books discuss the definability of theological conclusions, the kinds of implicitness of a later statement in an earlier one, and so forth. But none of these have been able to explain, for instance, the manner in which the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption came to be seen by the faithful of the Church as an integral and essential part of the revelation concerning Mary contained in the Scriptures. The conviction that these truths were contained in that original deposit came slowly in the prayers and preachings and contemplations and personal reasonings of millions of Catholics, inspired by the spirit of faith and the gift of understanding.

Father Walgrave touches upon most of Newman's distinctive doctrines with all the sureness of the disciple of St Thomas, and with the sympathy and discernment of a disciple of Newman. A valuable part of his book is the way in which he confronts Newman's most characteristic positions with those of various modern philosophies and theologies. Father Walgrave shows us that Newman has indeed something in common with many modern tendencies of thought. Yet he discovers that Newman is deeper, more traditional, and more realistically moderate than many modern existentialists or personalists.

There is one matter that I would like to query in Father Walgrave's excellent survey. When he is describing the nature and importance of Newman's celebrated distinction between the notional and the real, he seems to give this distinction a deeper metaphysical significance than does Newman. In one part of his book at least, when treating of 'The General Psychology of Development,' Father Walgrave interprets Newman's 'real apprehension' as a 'faculty of knowing the concrete.' This interpretation leads him into difficulties. For he discovers that Newman uses the term to cover a great variety of acts. He can only assume that Newman uses it in a rather vague general way to cover a whole series of analogical acts. There is not time to treat of the matter at great length here. But a re-reading of the relevant texts in the *Grammar of Assent* convinces me that Newman is not, in spite of his terms, treating of an epistemological, but purely of a psychological, distinction. A real assent does not differ from a notional assent as one distinct act of knowledge from another. It is not a distinction between a faculty for knowing the concrete, and a faculty for knowing ideas. It is rather a distinction in our psychological attitudes towards what we know. When we give something a real assent, it means that we recognize it as a concrete reality. When we only give it a notional assent, we still treat it as an abstract idea. It follows, of course, that many acts of knowledge

tend naturally to give rise to one kind of assent, whereas others tend naturally to give rise to the other. The imagination is introduced not as itself a special faculty of knowledge, but as the normal natural means for giving us the sense of reality or concreteness. Father Walgrave is quite right, of course, in saying that real assents give rise to a process of development. But this is again a psychological truth. Real assents are assents which mean a great deal to us, which involve our whole personality, which seem so important that we *have* to contemplate them and develop them. It was because Christians gave a real assent to Mary's motherhood that they thought about her, and eventually grew in their understanding of her divine motherhood.

A most important aspect of the book, and therefore of Newman's theology of the Christian life, is his analysis of Newman's doctrines of conscience and providence. An intense belief in Providence, coupled with a recognition of God in the conscience, leads the Christian to trust God. This trust extends not only to his conviction of God's watchful care of his life, but also to his acceptance of the faculties God has given each one, and the circumstances in which each one is placed. The Christian accepts the limitations of his mind as God's will in his regard. He is not then surprised that he encounters difficulties in his faith. Difficulties belong to man here below in regard to all the more important and intimate matters of his life. But ten thousand difficulties do not make a doubt. His faith remains unshakable, because of his firm conviction of God's loving providence. The latter ordained that, in the affairs of history and morality, man should be guided by different kinds of demonstration than in matters of mathematics and metaphysics. It is part of the virtue of trust to accept the kinds of proof that come natural to us in each subject-matter, and to believe that by those proofs we can still reach truth. We reach truth in matters historical by arguments which would not be accepted in arithmetic or Euclid. So likewise there is a special kind of proof which belongs properly to moral matters and religious matters. We use the faculties God has given to us, as we have no others to use. It is not difficult for us to learn to appreciate that God had his good reasons for making it so. In matters moral the argument from converging probabilities is more personal than the pure syllogism, but it is also more closely related to the way of acting of God's providence.

It will be seen that Father Walgrave's book is indispensable for Catholic thought about Newman as also about apologetics and doctrinal development. It is well translated, has all the footnotes and an up-to-date bibliography, but, like the French edition, lacks an index.