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NEWMAN ON THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY: IN SEARCH OF CHRISTIAN UNITY

Roderick Strange

I

In March 1966 an historic meeting took place in Rome in the basilica of St. Paul's outside the Walls between Pope Paul VI and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Michael Ramsey. They prayed together and signed a document in which they pledged themselves to look for ways which would lead to the reunion of the Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion. The document is realistic, because they knew that the obstacles in their path were serious, but this realism only enhanced the optimism of those memorable days.

During his visit to Rome, Dr. Ramsey stayed at the English College and one evening agreed generously to come upstairs to the students' common room to discuss our questions. I was a student there myself at the time. Two of his remarks have stuck in my memory. The first prefaced his response to a question about that radical Anglican theology which was then known generally as South Bank theology. "I like to remind people who speak about South Bank theology," he told us in that distinctive, gentle, hesitant voice, "that I live on the south bank myself." Lambeth Palace is indeed on the south bank of the river Thames. The other was his perception of the major obstacle to reunion. It was not, in his view, papal infallibility or the nature of authority in the Church, but mariology. And, if my memory is correct so many years later, the clear impression of the difficulty from the contrast he made was not so much of mariological doctrines as examples of the way ecclesiastical authority was exercised, but rather the mariological issues in themselves.

By coincidence, one hundred years earlier—in January 1866, to be exact—John Henry Newman, recently restored to respect in the eyes of his fellow countrymen, both Catholic and Anglican, through his controversy with Charles Kingsley and the publication of his *Apologia pro Vita Sua*, addressed a public *Letter* to his friend, Edward Pusey, on this very subject.¹ I welcome and am honoured by your invitation to mark the centenary of Newman's death by examining this *Letter* and by considering what lessons it might still contain for us. Let me remind you briefly of the background.

II

Pusey had become embroiled in a controversy with Henry Manning, the newly appointed Archbishop of Westminster, after Manning had himself written him a public *Letter*, called *The Workings of the Holy Spirit in the Church of England*. Manning was reacting to a popular view which identified him as one of those Roman Catholics who were, in a phrase of Pusey's, "in an ecstasy of triumph" over certain troubles within the Anglican Church. He wanted to set the record straight.² Pusey, challenged, felt called to answer Manning's charges, but he also saw the exchange as an opportunity to promote the reunion of the Christian Church. He named his reply, *An Eirenicon*.³ This dispute in general need not concern us, except in one particular.⁴

One aspect of Pusey's approach was to draw up a list of

¹J. H. Newman, *A Letter addressed to the Reverend E. B. Pusey, D.D., on occasion of his Eirenicon of 1864*, in *Certain Difficulties Felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching*, uniform edition (2 vols.; Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, 1969), 2: 1-170.

²H. E. Manning, *The Workings of the Holy Spirit in the Church of England: a Letter to the Reverend E.B. Pusey, D.D.*, (London: Longman, Green, 1864), 6-7.

³E. B. Pusey, *An Eirenicon in a Letter to the Author of "The Christian Year,"* (Oxford: Parker, 1865).

⁴For a fuller treatment of the dispute, see Roderick Strange, "Reflections on a Controversy: Newman and Pusey's 'Eirenicon,'" in *Pusey Rediscovered*, ed. Perry Butler (London: SPCK, 1983), 332-48.

Roman excesses in devotion to Mary, such as the views that, while Jesus in fact gained us our salvation out of obedience to his Father, he could have won it out of deference to his Mother,⁵ and that, as well as the Christ, it is Mary who is present and received in the eucharist.⁶ Reviewers were appalled. R. W. Church, the future Dean of St. Paul's and a friend of both Pusey and Newman, expressed his revulsion in *The Times*: "... there is something absolutely bewildering, like the imaginations of a sick dream, in this audacious extravagance of dogmatism, unfolding itself inexhaustibly into ever stranger and more startling conclusions."⁷ This revulsion, of course, was the very reaction which Pusey wished to arouse among Catholics, in the hope that they would dismiss the extravagance and thereby make reconciliation more likely. Newman had no doubt that his plan had misfired: "... he calls his book *Eirenicon*," he remarked to his friend, Thomas Allies, "whereas if any book could irritate, it is such a one as it";⁸ and he told Pusey privately: "An *Eirenicon* smooths difficulties; I am sure people will think that you increase them."⁹ In his published letter he penned their controversy's best known saying: "There was one of old who wreathed his sword in myrtle; excuse me—you discharge your olive branch as if from a catapult."¹⁰

This sense of unfair treatment, which was more likely to obscure the issue than to clarify it, was one of the reasons why Newman himself eventually became involved in the dispute, but not the only one. He had been saddened by the harshness of Rome's dealings with Catholic members of the Association for the Promotion of the Unity of Christen-

⁵Pusey, *Eirenicon*, 158-9.

⁶Pusey, *Eirenicon*, 169-72.

⁷R. W. Church, "An *Eirenicon*," in his *Occasional Papers* (2 vols.; London: Macmillan, 1897), 1: 354.

⁸J. H. Newman, *Letters and Diaries*, ed. C. S. Dessain et al. (vols. 11-22; London: Nelson, 1961-73), (vols. 1-6, 23-31; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973-); quotation at 22: 72.

⁹Newman, *Letters and Diaries*, 22: 90.

¹⁰Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 7.

dom. Membership had been prohibited the previous year and an appeal by one hundred and eighty-seven Anglicans had led only to a condemnation of the branch theory of the Church. Such events created the impression that all Catholics were extremists like W. G. Ward and Frederick Faber. Newman wished to qualify that impression by his own moderate treatment of the subject. He wanted to answer Pusey, but he hoped also, by confining his remarks to the mariological section, to supply an alternative to the mariological excesses common among some Catholics in England, which created such an obstacle for Anglicans. He wanted others to know, "did they come to stand where I stand, what they would, and what they would not, be bound to hold concerning [the Blessed Virgin]!"¹¹ By helping them look towards Rome with more sympathy, he was addressing the very need to which Archbishop Ramsey was to draw attention a hundred years later in the English College in Rome.

The *Letter* began by welcoming Pusey's initiative, criticizing his strategy, as we have noted, and making some preliminary observations. It then turned to the serious business, the origin of Marian doctrine.

III

The key to Newman's approach was the distinction between faith and devotion. He felt it would remove a "good part of the difficulty" of his task. He went on: "I fully grant that *devotion* towards the blessed Virgin has increased among Catholics with the progress of centuries; I do not allow that the *doctrine* concerning her has undergone a growth, for I believe that it has been in substance one and the same from the beginning."¹² He offered an analogy. As the sun shines constantly, but has its effect on the earth in springtime gradually, so the Church's faith in the Virgin Mother is constant, while "devotion to her may be scanty in

¹¹Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 25.

¹²Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 26.

one time and place, and overflowing in another."¹³ Then, with this distinction established, he turned from the question of devotion for the moment in order to investigate the faith of the Church. To do so, he sought out common ground; he appealed to the evidence which he and Pusey both prized, the Fathers. "The Fathers," he declared, "made me a Catholic, and I am not going to kick down the ladder by which I ascended into the Church."¹⁴ And the patristic teaching he examined first was the belief that Mary was the second Eve.

In an Anglican essay, many years earlier, he had argued against the idea of the Apostles holding any Marian doctrine on account of its absence in the immediately succeeding generations, but in a note for the later editions he added:

The age following the Apostles did hold, in various parts of Christendom, one doctrine in particular about the Blessed Virgin, which, because of its proximity to the Apostles, and of its reception in such various parts, must reasonably be referred to their teaching,—which has been taught continuously from that time to this,—and which contains in it all that Catholics hold concerning her intrinsic gifts and powers, viz., "she is the Second Eve."¹⁵

And he referred to his fuller teaching in his *Letter to Pusey*.

There he described this view of Mary as "the rudimental teaching" in the writings of the Fathers. Eve was seen to hold a "definite, essential position in the First Covenant." Although Adam was the head of the race, Eve was named as "the Mother of all the Living," which, in Newman's opinion, was a title that betokened a dignity as well as a fact. She had a purpose to fulfil, but she became implicated in the trial and fall of the human race, listening to the evil angel

¹³Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 28.

¹⁴Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 24.

¹⁵J. H. Newman, "The Catholicity of the Anglican Church," in *Essays Critical and Historical*, uniform edition (2 vols.; London: Longmans, Green, 1897), 2: 15, n.

and offering Adam the fruit. "She co-operated," Newman remarked, "not as an irresponsible instrument, but intimately and personally in the sin: she brought it about."¹⁶ And, according to the Book of Genesis, that terrible meeting was to be repeated, but with a new Adam and a new Eve, and the new Eve was to be the mother of the new Adam: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed" (Gen. 3:15). "The Seed of the woman," Newman went on, "is the Word Incarnate, and the Woman, whose seed or son He is, is His mother Mary." That certainly was Newman's own declared interpretation. Then he added with characteristic diffidence: "at all events . . . the parallelism is the doctrine of the Fathers, from the earliest times." That point was the one he was most keen to establish. Patristic support was all the guarantee he needed to determine the "position and office of Mary in our restoration" by comparison with the "position and office of Eve in our fall."¹⁷

Next, therefore, he quoted the main early patristic texts from St. Justin Martyr (*Trypho* 100), Tertullian (*de Carne Christi* 17), and St. Irenaeus (*Adversus Haereses* 2:22,34; 5:19). He drew attention to the formal antithetical style in each writer, reminiscent of "St. Paul's sentences in tracing the analogy between Adam's work and our Lord's work."¹⁸ Thus Justin taught: "For Eve, being a Virgin and undefiled, conceiving the word that was from the serpent, brought forth disobedience and death; but the Virgin Mary, taking faith and joy, when the Angel told her the good tidings, . . . answered, 'Be it to me according to thy word.'" And Tertullian: "Eve had believed the serpent; Mary believed Gabriel; the fault which the one committed by believing, the other by believing has blotted out." And Irenaeus: "For what Eve, a virgin, bound by incredulity, that Mary, a virgin, unloosed by faith."¹⁹ From such evidence Newman drew his conclusions.

¹⁶Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 31-2.

¹⁷Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 32.

¹⁸Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 36.

¹⁹See Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 33-5.

First, he argued, as Eve had co-operated in a personal and intimate way in the fall of the human race, so Mary was seen as much more than the mere "physical instrument of our Lord's taking flesh"; she was "an intelligent, responsible cause of it; her faith and obedience being accessories to the Incarnation, and gaining it as her reward."²⁰ Then, without straying beyond the doctrine of Justin, Tertullian, and Irenaeus, he set out the contrast between the two women. Those Fathers, he wrote, declare unanimously that Mary

... was *not* a mere instrument in the Incarnation, such as David, or Judah, may be considered; they declare she co-operated in our salvation not merely by the descent of the Holy Ghost upon her body, but by specific holy acts, the effect of the Holy Ghost within her soul; that, as Eve forfeited privileges by sin, so Mary earned privileges by the fruits of grace; that, as Eve was disobedient and unbelieving, Mary was obedient and believing; that, as Eve was a cause of ruin to all, Mary was a cause of salvation to all; that, as Eve made room for Adam's fall, so Mary made room for our Lord's reparation of it; and thus, whereas the free gift was not as the offence, but much greater, it follows that, as Eve co-operated in effecting a great evil, Mary co-operated in effecting a much greater good.²¹

There is more, but this should be enough to illustrate the force and direction of Newman's argument. As to its worth, Newman observed that writers are "witnesses of facts and beliefs" and that this doctrine about the Blessed Virgin was the received doctrine of Justin in the East and Tertullian in the West, as well as Irenaeus, who spoke for Asia Minor and Gaul, besides (in Newman's view) representing that tradition which went back through Polycarp to St. John the Evangelist. Such authorities should not be dismissed out of hand. We are no doubt wise today to be suspicious of loose connotative reasoning, but it is difficult to resist the conclusion that these three authorities, concurring in subject and

²⁰Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 35.

²¹Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 36.

style, bear witness to a teaching more primitive than their own. As Newman remarked wryly: "Only suppose there was so early and so broad a testimony, to the effect that our Lord was a mere man, the son of Joseph; should we be able to insist upon the faith of the Holy Trinity as necessary to salvation?"²² He then illustrated this teaching from seven more sources in the fourth and fifth centuries.

This tradition, then, may be unassailable, but, at the same time, to lay such stress on it may cause puzzlement. Is it not more a relic of times past than a teaching with significance for the present? Newman moved on from it boldly to concentrate "upon two inferences, which it is obvious to draw from the rudimental teaching itself," Mary's sanctity and her dignity,²³ or, in other words, her immaculate conception and her assumption into heaven.

IV

1. *Her sanctity.*

The doctrine of the immaculate conception was not new ground for Newman. In a sermon for the feast of the Annunciation in 1832, he had asked: "What, think you, was the sanctity and grace of that human nature of which God formed His sinless Son; knowing, as we do, 'that what is born of the flesh is flesh,' and that 'none can bring a clean thing out of an unclean'?"²⁴ These words, he told a correspondent, Arthur Osborne Alleyne, in 1860, had brought on him accusations of "holding the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, for," he explained, "it was clear that I connected 'grace' with the Blessed Virgin's *humanity*—as if grace and

²²Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 38.

²³Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 44.

²⁴J. H. Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, 1st edition (8 vols.; London: Rivingtons, 1835), 2: 146. Later Anglican editions and the uniform edition were altered to read, "What, think you, was the sanctified state of that human nature etc.?" See, for example, the fourth edition (1843) 2: 148, and the uniform edition, (Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, 1966), 2: 132.

nature in her case never had been separated."²⁵ And he justified his view by referring to the same three Fathers, Justin, Tertullian, and Irenaeus, and commenting: "What to me is, and ever has been, most striking, is the series of passages from the earliest Fathers in which Mary is contrasted to Eve, as typical contrasts."²⁶ Two and a half weeks later he wrote Alleyne an extremely long letter on the subject of the immaculate conception and made use of it when he was expounding the doctrine in his *Letter to Pusey*. There he stated plainly that "it really does seem to me bound up in the doctrine of the Fathers, that Mary is the second Eve."²⁷

It is not surprising, therefore, that when Newman wrote about the immaculate conception, he stressed the ease of accepting such a teaching, once due attention had been paid to the condition of Eve. He pointed to a common view, Anglican as well as Catholic, that Eve's state was not of nature alone, but also of grace. This grace he understood to be not merely external, a favour, but a supernatural inward gift, given to Eve from the first moment of her personal existence; and he asked: "Is it possible to deny that Mary too had this gift from the very first moment of her personal existence?" That was what he understood the doctrine of the immaculate conception to imply, namely Mary's possession of the inward gift of grace which gave her from the first that relationship with God which Eve had enjoyed at the first.²⁸ He found it unavoidable that Mary must have been as fully endowed with grace as Eve. Had there been no fall, Newman observed, all Eve's children "would have been conceived in grace, as in fact they are conceived in sin." So Mary, he concluded, "may be called, as it were, a daughter of Eve unfallen."²⁹

One difficulty with this approach may well revolve

²⁵Newman, *Letters and Diaries*, 19: 346-7.

²⁶Newman, *Letters and Diaries*, 19: 347.

²⁷Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 46.

²⁸Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 45-6.

²⁹Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 47.

around the legitimacy of contrasting the legendary Eve with the historical Mary, but it may be that this problem is not as intractable as it seems. We should remember that this contrast was never understood by Newman as something primarily historical. It was a contrast of type. Beyond a view of what might be thought actually to have happened, Eve was seen as a symbol of responsible co-operation in the fall of the human race and Mary symbolized responsible co-operation in its restoration. So for us it is not really a question of accepting Eve as symbolic so much as coming to terms with the symbolic character of Mary's role. And in fact as scholars have come to realize how little they know about the historical Mary, so they have become more and more aware of her symbolic power as our pattern and example. In his final University sermon, in which Newman sketched his theory of developments in religious doctrine, inspired by the Lucan text which speaks of Mary pondering things in her heart (Lk. 2:19), he stated that Mary "symbolizes to us, not only the faith of the unlearned, but of the doctors of the Church also." She stands as a model for all, the "pattern of Faith, both in the reception and in the study of Divine Truth."³⁰ She is seen as the one who has accomplished what each of us hopes to achieve. To say all this is obviously not to deny a historical basis for our understanding of Mary; what actually happened supplies the ground for the symbolism; to go no further, her title as the second Eve bears eloquent testimony to her reputation for holiness in the early Church. She was, to return to Newman's phrase, "a daughter of Eve unfallen." But that expression itself gives rise at once to a further question. Did Newman mean that she was untouched by the fall, that she had no need of a saviour? The question turns on what is meant by original sin.

Some have understood original sin as not merely the occasion when human beings fell from grace and the source of the dire consequences of their fall, but as an actual infec-

³⁰J. H. Newman, *Fifteen Sermons preached before the University of Oxford*, uniform edition (Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, 1966), 313.

tion of human nature which thereafter cannot itself avoid sinning. According to this interpretation, anyone who is dubbed unfallen, must be quite distinct from common humanity. Such a person, unfallen, sinless, must be different in kind from those who, left to themselves, can do nothing but sin. Furthermore, he or she has no need of a saviour. But Newman held the Catholic view. He explained that original sin does not permeate human nature in that positive manner, making all human acts sinful; rather it is negative, it deprives men and women of the unmerited grace which was given to Adam and Eve at the first; it enfeebles, but without contaminating. Thus it is possible to be without sin and in that sense unfallen, and to remain at the same time a member of the fallen human race. That, Newman taught, was Mary's position. He told Pusey:

Protestants . . . fancy that we ascribe a different nature from ours to the Blessed Virgin, different from that of her parents, and from that of fallen Adam. We hold nothing of the kind; we consider that in Adam she died, as others; that she was included together with the whole human race in Adam's sentence; that she incurred his debt, as we do; . . .

Her freedom from original sin did not set her apart in a different kind of human nature, because original sin has not become essential to being human in some positive manner. Moreover, her freedom from the debt of original sin she enjoyed because of her Saviour, not in spite of him. Newman observed that, "for the sake of Him who was to redeem her and us upon the Cross, to her the debt was remitted by anticipation, on her the sentence was not carried out, except indeed as regards her natural death, for she died when her time came, as others."³¹ It was "in order to fit her to become the Mother of her and our Redeemer, to fit her mentally, spiritually for it," that she received this "special privilege."³²

³¹Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 48.

³²Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 49.

The very notion of privilege implies her share in our common, fallen nature. She *ought* to have been flawed as well. How else is her sinlessness privileged? On account of her role, Mary was preserved from original sin, while we are released from it, but the preserving and the releasing are no more than two expressions of the same redeeming work. She has had need of the Saviour as much as anyone.

2. Her dignity.

The arguments Newman used for Mary's assumption are much less likely to appeal today. They draw upon an older style of exegesis. For scriptural support he turned to the vision of the Woman and the Child in the Apocalypse, and acknowledged two difficulties at once: the lack of patristic support for the interpretation and the anachronism of ascribing the image of Madonna and Child to the Apostolic Age. He responded to the first, however, by noting that, as the Church turned to scripture under pressure of controversy, so the Fathers' silence was evidence that her dignity went unchallenged, and to the second by pointing to the paintings of the Virgin and Child in the Roman catacombs which, even supposing the apostolic date which had been attributed to them to be too ambitious, indicated nevertheless their composition in the mid-second century.³³

As to the vision itself, its Johannine authorship commended it to him. After quoting the passage, he went on immediately:

Now I do not deny of course, that under the image of the Woman, the Church is signified; but what I would maintain is this, that the Holy Apostle would not have spoken of the Church under this particular image *unless* there had existed a blessed Virgin Mary, who was exalted on high, and the object of veneration to all the faithful.³⁴

³³Newman referred to the work of Cavaliere de Rossi, *Imagini Scelte* (1863); see *Letter to Pusey*, 56.

³⁴Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 58.

This line of approach may lack force today, although those who have closed their minds to the possibility of detecting clues to Mary's dignity here, may find in Newman's handling of the issue encouragement to greater sensitivity. He acknowledged, for example, that according to the real or direct sense the Woman represents the Church and the Child the children of the Church, but, he asked, "What is the sense of the symbol under which that real sense is conveyed? *who* are the Woman and the Child?"³⁵ Who, indeed, is the serpent, who, he observed, "has not been found in Scripture, since the beginning of Scripture?" He noted too that the general usage of the Bible is not allegorical. While there are exceptions, it is not common to find abstractions personified: "Scripture deals with types rather than personifications. Israel stands for the chosen people, David for Christ, Jerusalem for heaven."³⁶ Returning to the vision, he asked: "If the Woman ought to be some real person, who can it be" but Mary, "represented under the character of the Second Eve?"³⁷

Three years later, as the First Vatican Council was beginning, the question came up again in a private letter. Newman wrote:

If the Assumption of our Blessed Lady were now defined at the Vatican Council, I should say that plainly it, as the Immaculate Conception, is contained in the dogma "Mary the Second Eve—" I have drawn out this argument as regards the latter doctrine in my letter to Dr. Pusey—as to the Assumption, if Mary is like Eve but greater, then, as Eve would not have seen death or corruption, so, while Mary underwent death because she was a child of fallen Adam and sinned in Adam, she did not see corruption because she had more than the prerogatives of Eve.³⁸

None of this may appeal greatly to us; the explanations may

³⁵Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 58.

³⁶Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 59-60.

³⁷Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 60-1.

³⁸Newman, *Letters and Diaries*, 24: 330.

seem too strained. Is there anything further to be added? I think there is.

In the long letter he wrote to Alleyne in 1860, which he used when preparing his *Letter to Pusey*, Newman early on made a remark which is germane here. He was referring to the immaculate conception, but the point touches the doctrine of the assumption as well. He was explaining the difference of view taken by Catholics and Protestants in these matters. He remarked:

Catholics do not view it as a substantive and independent doctrine, so much as one of a family of doctrines which are intimately united together, whereas Protestants consider it as separate from every other, and as requiring a proof of its own as fully as if it were the only thing that we knew of the Blessed Virgin.³⁹

In other words, these doctrines are not to be assessed singly, but need to be seen in their relationship to others. Both the immaculate conception and the assumption are declarations of Mary's radical holiness in a very exact sense, a holiness, namely, which goes to the very roots of her existence. They reveal, moreover, what our own redemption will be, when our sins have not only been forgiven, but destroyed. In the words of the English Dominican, Herbert McCabe, it shall be "as though sin had never been. Redemption for us will involve a rebirth from an immaculate conception." That radical holiness, which Mary's existence proclaims, is the destiny in which we hope to share: "Her Assumption is the beginning of the resurrection of all who are taken up into Christ's resurrection."⁴⁰ By drawing out the inferences from her office as the second Eve, Newman himself becomes a witness to that belief in Mary's holiness which has been passed down, century after century. "What height of glory may we not attribute to her?" he asked in his *Letter to Pusey*,

³⁹Newman, *Letters and Diaries*, 19: 362.

⁴⁰Herbert McCabe, "The Immaculate Conception," in *God Matters* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1987), 214, 213.

just as, more than thirty years earlier, he had asked in a sermon: "Who can estimate the holiness and perfection of her, who was chosen to be the Mother of Christ?"⁴¹

V

If anxiety about the doctrines of the immaculate conception and the assumption is one source of mariological controversy, a second is the suspicion that praise offered to Mary distracts from the honour due to her Son. This problem surfaced in the *Letter to Pusey* when Newman examined her title as Mother of God, as Theotokos, *Deipara*.

When used in its approved sense, Newman explained, this word is neither rhetorical nor extravagant; "it has nothing else but a well-weighed, grave, dogmatic sense, which corresponds and is adequate to its sound. It intends to express that God is her Son, as truly as any one of us is the son of his own mother." And shortly afterwards he went on: "It is this awful title, which both illustrates and connects together the two prerogatives of Mary, on which I have been lately enlarging, her sanctity and her greatness. It is the issue of her sanctity; it is the origin of her greatness."⁴² Indeed, a general review of Newman's Marian thought would show that his entire understanding of her is founded firmly on his perception of her dignity as the Mother of her Son.⁴³ None of this, of course, was disputed by Pusey, but, Newman told him, "I might as well not write to you at all, as altogether be silent upon it."⁴⁴

He sketched the history of the title and then observed: "This being the faith of the Fathers about the Blessed Virgin, we need not wonder that it should in no long time be transmuted into devotion."⁴⁵ Here is an indication of that shift

⁴¹Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 61; *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, 2: 131.

⁴²Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 62.

⁴³See Roderick Strange, "The Development of Newman's Marian Thought and Devotion," *One In Christ* 16 (1980): 114-26.

⁴⁴Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 62.

⁴⁵Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 65.

which some have found suspect. It is a common anxiety. Pusey had objected to Faber's words: "Jesus is obscured, because Mary is kept in the background."⁴⁶ Newman was not impressed by the objection:

Now I say plainly, I never will defend or screen any one from your just rebuke, who, through false devotion to Mary, forgets Jesus. But I should like the fact to be proved first; I cannot hastily admit it. There is this broad fact the other way;—that, if we look through Europe, we shall find, on the whole, that just those nations and countries have lost their faith in the divinity of Christ, who have given up devotion to His Mother, and that those on the other hand, who had been foremost in her honour, have retained their orthodoxy.⁴⁷

Devotion to Mary, he was arguing, safeguarded faith in the divinity of Christ.

I was reminded of this argument in 1977, when I found myself reading an article by Canon Donald Nicholson on "Mary: a Living Tradition in Anglicanism." It began:

On 14 August 1927 I was present at an evening service in Wakefield Cathedral (Anglican). The preacher was the Chamberlain of York Minster and his theme was "Mary," the next day being the "illegal" feast of the Assumption. I remember his telling us that diminution in devotion to the Blessed Virgin was invariably followed by decline in belief in the divinity of Our Lord: unexpected and stirring words in those far-off days. . . .⁴⁸

And it drew to a close with words from a lecture by Bishop Eric Kemp of Chichester: "The only reason for devotion to the Mother is that her Son is divine, and Marian devotion is a safeguard for the doctrine of the deity of Christ."⁴⁹ Canon Nicholson commented: "What had been an *outré* remark on

⁴⁶See Pusey, *Eirenicon*, 118; Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 93.

⁴⁷Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 92.

⁴⁸Donald Nicholson, "Mary: a Living Tradition in Anglicanism," *The Clergy Review* 62 (1977): 318.

⁴⁹Eric Kemp, *Mary and Right Belief in Christ* (1975), quoted in Nicholson, "Mary: a Living Tradition in Anglicanism," 322.

the lips of a minor canon fifty years ago becomes a considered judgment by a diocesan bishop of today."⁵⁰ In the circumstances it is difficult not to speculate on the spur for the Chamberlain's daring. Was he influenced by Newman's remark to Pusey? Of course, there may be no connection, but the coincidence is at least noteworthy.

A further occasion when Mary can be suspected of obscuring her Son's honour can occur when people lose sight of the true nature of intercession. It is natural for Christians to pray for one another; it has been their practice from the beginning. Moreover, those who are holy, intercede for the Church. Sanctity is the vital force of intercession.⁵¹

Newman expounded these points at some length and then continued:

I consider it impossible then, for those who believe the Church to be one vast body in heaven and on earth, in which every holy creature of God has his place, and of which prayer is the life, when once they recognize the sanctity and dignity of the Blessed Virgin, not to perceive immediately, that her office above is one of perpetual intercession for the faithful militant, and that our very relation to her must be that of clients to a patron, and that, in the eternal enmity which exists between the woman and the serpent, while the serpent's strength lies in being the Tempter, the weapon of the Second Eve and Mother of God is prayer.

As then these ideas of her sanctity and dignity gradually penetrated the mind of Christendom, so did that of her intercessory power follow close upon them and with them.⁵²

Such is the doctrine of intercession. What Newman protested against to Pusey was his tendency to confuse intercession with invocation, a doctrinal matter with a devotional practice: when Suarez "says that no one is saved without the Blessed Virgin, he is speaking not of devotion to her,

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

⁵¹See Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 71.

⁵²Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 73.

but of her intercession."⁵³ If it is true, as he remarked to Keble, that to be *the* Intercessor "is her distinct part in the economy of human salvation," it does not follow that everyone must invoke her, for "there is all the difference in the world between saying that 'without her intercession no one is saved—' and 'without her invocation no one is saved—.'"⁵⁴ In his *Letter to Pusey* he drew up an impressive random list of those who, were he mistaken, would not be saved: besides all Protestants, the primitive martyrs, St. John Chrysostom, St. Athanasius, St. Augustine, what evidence exists that any of these ever invoked Mary?⁵⁵ Mary intercedes; we invoke. And the natural style of invocation is moderate. As Newman showed, we pray, trusting in her prayers: "she is nothing more than an Advocate, and not a source of mercy."⁵⁶

VI

This distinction between doctrine and devotion is valuable and significant. Once secured, it acts as a safeguard against excess, restraining a kind of devotional dogmatism which would impose as essential pious practices which are optional; at the same time, once secured, it will release that authentic devotion which is the natural consequence of deep faith. We have noted that the doctrines of Mary's immaculate conception and her assumption testify to her radical holiness, that her title as Mother of God bears witness to her relationship with her Saviour and gives expression to her dignity, and that this well of holiness in her springs up on our behalf as intercession. It is no wonder that this faith in her, as Newman said, "should in no long time be transmuted into devotion."⁵⁷ Devotion is not cold and calculating, but natural, free, and unaffected.

⁵³Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 97; see also *Letters and Diaries*, 22: 90.

⁵⁴Newman, *Letters and Diaries*, 22: 68.

⁵⁵See Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 105.

⁵⁶Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 101.

⁵⁷Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 65.

All the same, there is need for caution. Newman affirmed that he had no taste for expressions which seemed to ascribe to Mary a power which belongs properly to God alone nor for those which trespass upon the incommunicable greatness of Christ's passion and death; he also admitted, however, "the difficulty of determining the exact point where truth passes into error." Some sayings may be allowable in one sense or connection and false in another. He offered as an example the claim that Mary's prayer is omnipotent, which, he observed, "is a harsh expression in everyday prose; but, if it is explained to mean that there is nothing which prayer may not obtain from God, it is nothing else than the very promise made us in Scripture." And again, to return to an earlier issue, "To say, for instance, dogmatically that no one can be saved without personal devotion to the Blessed Virgin, would be an untenable proposition; yet it might be true of this man or that, or of this or that country at this or that date."⁵⁸ He suggested it might be true for Italians. The distinction is important.

In their private correspondence, however, Pusey argued that the distinction should not be used to evade difficulties; it would not do to submit to a faith without accepting its practical system. And he reminded Newman of a lady to whom he had made such a remark almost twenty years earlier; she had replied by confirming that Newman held exactly the same view. He quoted back to Newman his answer to her: "... you said, 'Dr. Pusey is quite right; a person ought not [to join the Church of Rome] unless he can receive the system taught by Liguori.'"⁵⁹ The lady was Catherine Ward who had written to Newman in the autumn of 1848. This was indeed the advice which Newman had given: "I never can think it right, any more than you, to sepa-

⁵⁸See Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 103-5; see also *Letters and Diaries*, 22: 98.

⁵⁹Pusey, letter to Newman, 6 November 1866; quoted in H. P. Liddon, *The Life of Edward Bouverie Pusey*, ed. J. O. Johnston and R. J. Wilson, (4 vols.; London: Longmans, Green, 1893-7), 4: 123.

rate the dry letter of the decrees of the Church from the existing belief of Catholics. The existing belief is the true comment upon the decree." Yet at once he made a distinction: "You must hold *substantially* what St. Alfonso holds; his words are *not* mere figures of rhetoric, though of course the expression of doctrine always does take a colour from nation, language, speaker, etc."⁶⁰ He repeated this position in his reply to Pusey: "It is quite true that I said, and I should say still, that it is a mere doctrinaire view to enter a Church without taking up its practical system—and that, as represented by its popular catechisms and books of devotion." But he insisted upon the distinction between this system and "the additions or colour which it receives in this country or that, in this class, in this school, or that."⁶¹

It seems natural here to pause and ask whether Newman was himself devout towards the Blessed Virgin. It is possible to answer simply and briefly, for his answer to Catherine Ward anticipated and his comment to Pusey echoed the position he ascribed to himself in his *Apologia*. Certain extravagant continental devotions in Mary's honour had been, he confessed, his

... great *crux* as regards Catholicism; I say frankly, I do not fully enter into them now; I trust I do not love her the less, because I cannot enter into them. They may be fully explained and defended; but sentiment and taste do not run with logic: they are suitable for Italy, but they are not suitable for England.⁶²

His own spiritual temperament, he added, shaped his disposition. His intense awareness of the divine presence—of himself and his Creator as the two absolute and luminously

⁶⁰Newman, *Letters and Diaries*, 31: 15*; draft in 12: 291.

⁶¹Newman, *Letters and Diaries*, 22: 100.

⁶²J. H. Newman, *Apologia pro Vita Sua*, uniform edition (London: Longmans, Green, 1895), 195; ed. Martin J. Svaglic (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1967), 176-7.

self-evident beings⁶³—made any extravagance unthinkable. In the *Letter to Pusey* he made his position eloquently plain:

May God's mercy keep me from the shadow of a thought, dimming the purity or blunting the keenness of that love of Him, which is our sole happiness and our sole salvation! But surely when He became man, He brought home to us His incommunicable attributes with a distinctiveness which precludes the possibility of our lowering Him merely by our exalting a creature. He alone has an entrance into our soul, reads our secret thoughts, speaks to our heart, applies to us pardon and strength. On Him we solely depend. He alone is our inward life; He not only regenerates us, but (to use the words appropriated to a higher mystery) *semper gignit*; He is ever renewing our new birth and our heavenly sonship. In this sense He may be called, as in nature, so in grace, our real Father. Mary is only our Mother by divine appointment, giving us from the Cross; her presence is above, not on earth; her office is external, not within us. Her name is not heard in the administration of the Sacraments. Her work is not one of ministration towards us; her power is indirect. It is her prayers that avail, and her prayers are effectual by the *fiat* of Him who is our all in all.⁶⁴

That was Newman's attitude. It is inevitable therefore that the devotions, mentioned by Pusey, which had appalled reviewers, grieved and almost angered him.⁶⁵ He summarized a whole range of them, similar to those already noted: for example, "that the Blessed Virgin is superior to God,"⁶⁶ and "that Christ fulfilled the office of Saviour by imitating her virtues."⁶⁷ There were many others. He delivered his judgement:

They seem to me like a bad dream . . . They do but scare and confuse me. I should not be holier, more spiritual, more sure

⁶³See Newman, *Apologia*, 195, 4; ed. Svaglic, 177, 18.

⁶⁴Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 83-4.

⁶⁵Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 103.

⁶⁶Pusey, *Eirenicon*, 160.

⁶⁷Pusey, *Eirenicon*, 161.

of perseverance, if I twisted my moral being into the reception of them; . . . I will have nothing to do with statements [about Mary], which can only be explained, by being explained away . . . as spoken by man to man, in England, in the nineteenth century, I consider them calculated to prejudice inquirers, to frighten the unlearned, to unsettle consciences, to provoke blasphemy, and to work the loss of souls.⁶⁸

True devotion is warm, generous, and free; it defies criticism⁶⁹; it must never become the slave of extravagance.

VII

You invited me to show how Newman's *Letter to Pusey* can supply answers to current questions about Mary. I am not sure whether I have fulfilled my brief; certainly I have not been off in search of the latest mariological controversies. I have thought it better to present this material to you as experts and let you discern what might be of value, although I would add that in my view Newman's appeal to the Fathers, the way he brings out the distinction between doctrine and devotion, while showing their relationship, his attention to Mary's holiness, and his hostility to excess are all points of significance for ecumenical dialogue beyond the immediate occasion. And so finally let me return to Archbishop Ramsey.

A week after his meeting with Pope Paul in 1966, Dr. Ramsey visited Newman's Oxford college, Oriel, to open a Symposium in Newman's honour. He suggested that renewal for both Catholics and Anglicans would come from recapturing something of Newman's spirit, which he characterized as the spirit of scriptural holiness. That holiness is the basis of Christian unity.⁷⁰ Moreover, its outstanding model, we may add, is the mother of Jesus. In an early Catholic let-

⁶⁸See Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 113-15.

⁶⁹See Newman, *Letter to Pusey*, 80.

⁷⁰See A. M. Ramsey, "The Significance of Newman Today," in *The Rediscovery of Newman: an Oxford Symposium*, ed. John Coulson and A. M. Allchin (London: Sheed and Ward/SPCK, 1967), 8.

ter, Newman acknowledged his debt: "I have ever been under her shadow, if I may say it. My College was St. Mary's, and my Church; and when I went to Littlemore, there, by my own previous disposition, our Blessed Lady was waiting for me."⁷¹ Shortly afterwards, he named his Oratory Church after her immaculate conception. He remained under her shadow to the end.

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⁷¹Newman, *Letters and Diaries*, 12: 153-4: Oriel is formally St. Mary's College; the University Church is the Church of St. Mary the Virgin; and Newman's Church at Littlemore is dedicated to St. Mary the Virgin and St. Nicholas. See also Bishop Ullathorne's letter to the editor of *The Tablet*, in Newman, *Letters and Diaries*, 22: 341-4, on Newman's devotion to the Blessed Virgin.