

Newman: The Dialectic of "Liberalism" and "Conservatism"

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One of John Henry Newman's preferred habits of investigation was the exploration of opposing views, with the aim of discovering what might be true in each view, no matter how partial the truth or how encrusted in error. This method is not that of Hegelian dialectic moving inexorably toward historical synthesis; nor is it the whitewashing way of religious "comprehensiveness," whereby all views are amalgamated without regard to their conflicting tenets.

Instead, more like the ancient Greeks and Romans in their exercise of the classical art of rhetoric, Newman preserves the antagonist principles precisely in their tensile relationship, clarifying their variations of meaning as they present themselves in practice, and enlarging upon the strengths, subtleties, and limits of each position. He thereby opens a clearing where the nub of the issue at hand may show itself as a kind of delicate equilibrium between extremes -- falsities exposed and truths disclosed to be lived. This is what Ian Ker, throughout his many authoritative writings on Newman, calls the extraordinary "balance" of Newman's mentality; and this is what Terrence Merrigan advances, in his book *Clear Heads and Holy Hearts*, as the key to understanding the complexity of Newman's religious and theological thought, namely, the "hermeneutic tool" of polarity, of unity-in-tension.⁽¹⁾

Looking at the terms "liberal" and "conservative" in their troublesome usage in modern church-related language, this essay examines Newman's helpful inquiries into their disparities, polarities, interrelationships, and even, sometimes, their compatibilities. The conclusion here suggested is not only that each of these categories taken singly, "liberal" and "conservative," proves inadequate as a tag for Newman's own thought, but also that both categories, perhaps in unexpected ways, are unsuitable as facile labels for presumed divisions within what Newman understood to be Church, namely, "the whole people of God as a body."⁽²⁾

Newman's Dialectical Methodology

There is no single volume to which one can go to find Newman's complete and final view on a given subject, or pair or triplet of subjects, or to find a single, necessary, and sufficient methodological approach to any one subject. According to his view of how the human mind works, this is indeed exactly as it should be. View the subject from as many angles and aspects, in as many contours, colors, and contexts as possible; and use all of the diverse energies and methods of which the mind is capable. Each and every view, no matter how narrow, distant, or even undermining, can contribute to the understanding of that which is "in view."

The intellect in its present state ... does not discern truth intuitively, or as a whole. We know, not by a direct and simple vision, not at a glance, but as it were, by piecemeal and accumulation, by a mental process, by going round an object, by the comparison, the combination, the mutual correction, the continual adaptation of many partial notions, by the employment, concentration, and joint action of many faculties and exercises of mind.(3)

Sometimes the various perspectives by and through which Newman's views accumulate are indeed shown to circle around their object, as in his brilliant Idea of university education. The object of knowledge is the whole of creation as it comes forth from the hand of the Creator; but because we cannot, with any single look, know that "well rounded truth," as Parmenides termed the whole of being, each university discipline or science abstracts for intellectual consideration an aspect of that whole from a particular point of view and with a particular methodology. By studying expansively, that is, liberally, one enters into what the classical Western tradition called "the complete circle of knowledge [enkyklios paideia]," each discipline balancing, continually adapting to, mutually correcting, the others. The outcome is what Newman calls an enlarged vision of the bearings and relations of things to one another and to the whole—a "philosophical habit of mind," he named it(4) - what today might be called a "well-rounded education."

Again, Newman would often view his subject in one way, and at other times in quite other ways, in accord with his principle that the more ways one views an object, the richer the understanding of that object: for example, the idea of Church, noted above as consisting in the unity of the whole people of God as a single body. In his 1859 essay, *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine*, Newman emphasizes an important duality within the unity, namely, that of the *Church teaching* and the *Church taught*.(5) The entire essay consists of Newman's working back and forth historically, from the past to the present, and dialectically, from the teachers to those who receive and echo the teachings, in order to disengage the unique gifts of each, and then to draw both together again in their close yet tensile bonds—these two indispensable elements of the Church one and infallible.

For Newman the *conspiratio*, the breathing together, of the Church teaching and the Church taught provides "one twofold testimony, illustrating each other, and never to be divided." Still, he argues, "there is something in the *conspiratio* which is not in the pastors alone.... A person may *consult* his glass, and in that way may know things about himself which he can learn in no other way." Newman writes specifically against the view that the infallibility of the Church resides exclusively in the teaching Church. The body of the faithful is one of the witnesses to the fact of the tradition of revealed doctrine, and "their *consensus* through Christendom is the voice of the infallible Church." At the same time, Newman states clearly that "the power and prerogative of definition" belong exclusively to the teaching Church alone. "A physician consults the pulse of his patient; but not in the same sense in which a patient consults *him*." Revealed doctrine resides in a unified manner in both, as in the bosom of Mary, mother of Christ, pattern of the Church, and patron of the great doctors of the Church as well as of the unlearned -- or "as a figure is contained both on the seal and on the wax, and primarily in the mind of the engraver."(6)

Then again, almost two decades after this *Rambler* article appeared, it is, rather, the Church in its

tripartite offices that is Newman's focal point. In the 1877 preface to the *Via Media of the Anglican Church*, Newman develops an important and original ecclesiology patterned after Christ as priest, prophet, and king. Holy Church, too, has a triple office, Newman reflects. Rather than the polarities of "Church teaching" and "Church taught" that were center stage in the 1859 *Rambler* article, Newman now views teaching as the *prophetic* function of the Church, accomplished through its theologians. The *priestly* function of sacred ministry and worship is carried out through the Church's pastors and flock; and the kingly or *regal* function of government and rule is exercised by the papacy and Curia.⁽⁷⁾

Each of the three offices of the Church, distinct in interest, scope, and direction, "has to find room for the claims of the other two; and each will find its own line of action influenced and modified by the others."⁽⁸⁾ Each office is based on a different principle, has a different instrument of operation, and is accordingly liable to a different corruption. For the prophetic office: Truth is the guiding principle of theology, reasoning its instrument, and rationalism its corruption. For the priestly office: Devotion and edification are the principles of worship; our emotional nature is its instrument; and superstition and enthusiasm are its corruptions. For the regal office: Expedience directs government, which uses rule, command, and coercion, and it is corrupted by ambition, tyranny, and the abuse of power.

Newman observes that the prophetic office, theology, is in his own day eclipsed by the other two offices, and yet, he emphasizes, it is the fundamental and regulatory principle of the whole Church system, for it is commensurate with Revelation. As such, theology created the sacerdotal and regal offices over which it has a jurisdiction to keep them within bounds. At the same time, says Newman, always balancing, moderating, trimming: "[T]heology cannot always have its own way; it is too hard, too intellectual, too exact, to be always equitable, or to be always compassionate."⁽⁹⁾ Sometimes theology moves too quickly, without due regard for the slower processes of imagination in the devotional and popular mind to which "what is new and strange is as repulsive, often as dangerous, as falsehood is to the scientific."⁽¹⁰⁾ Boldness and thoroughness in inquiry must be balanced by the fear of error and "tenderness to souls," as Newman would say. Abstract standards are but one element of the mystical body of Christ, in which instincts, ideas, and interests always exist together in balanced tension and delicate equilibrium. Through collision and compromise, each of the three offices guides, limits, and regulates the others; and only all together -- as one body with Christ as head -- do theologians, pastors, and people, papacy and Curia, constitute the one, indivisible Church.

The wholeness and holiness of the Body of Christ is essentially made up of every single member in tacit concert, united in its Head, Jesus Christ. In his novel *Loss and Gain*, Newman has the young scholar, Willis, explain to his Anglican friends his great love for the Mass:

Each in his own place with his own heart, with his own wants, with his own thoughts, with his own intentions, with his own prayers, separate but concordant, watching what is going on, watching its progress, uniting in its consummation; -- not painfully and hopelessly following a hard form of prayer from beginning to end, but like a concert of musical instruments, each different, but concurring in a sweet

harmony, we take our part with God's priest, supporting him, yet guided by him. There are little children there, and old men, and simple laborers, and students in seminaries ...; there are innocent maidens and there are penitents; but out of these many minds rises one eucharistic hymn, and the great Action is the measure and scope of it.(11)

Polarities, dualities, tripartite pluralities, multiplicities -- all views within, approaches to, a vibrant, living unity that touches and then overflows our powers in its mystery and majesty. People speak in many figures, images, and stories, and act through many ways of thought and work, prayer and devotion, because they are unique persons with individual histories and because of the strengths and limitations of every view. Even at its best, however, and when meanings are most understood and shared, human language remains tongue-tied in its attempts to express what ultimately transcends thought and speech. We live within mystery.

Neither can man compass, nor can his hundred tongues utter, the mysteries of the spiritual world, and God's appointments in this. This vast and intricate scene of things cannot be generalized or represented through or to the mind of man.... Who shall give method to what is infinitely complex and measure to the unfathomable?... Almighty God has condescended to speak to us so far as human thought and language will admit, by approximations.... And herein consists one great blessing of the Gospel Covenant, that in Christ's death on the Cross, and in other parts of that all-gracious Economy, are concentrated, as it were, and so presented to us those attributes and works which fill eternity.(12)

A question then arises, especially for those who are lovers of wisdom or who reflect upon what transcends the material world: What is it that human thought and speech *can* do if indeed they always fall short of their object and can but approach "by approximations" that which is momentous? In preparatory notes for the *Grammar of Assent*, Newman considers how language and thought can indeed approach, positively, that which they cannot fully understand:

[F]rom the nature of the case, all our language about Almighty God, so far as it is affirmative, is analogical and figurative.... When we reflect on Him and put into words our thoughts ..., we are forced to transfer to a new meaning ready made words, which primarily belong to objects of time and place. We are aware, while we do so, that they are inadequate, but we have the alternative of doing so, or doing nothing at all. We can only remedy their deficiency by confessing it. We can do no more than put ourselves on the guard as to our own proceeding, and protest against it, while we do it. We can only set right one error of expression by another. By this method of antagonism we steady our minds, not so as to reach their object, but to point them in the right direction; as in an algebraical process we might add and subtract [sic] in series, *approximating little by little, by saying and unsaying, to a positive result.*(13)

We find Newman using this dialectical "method of antagonism" not only when attempting to speak of God but also when exploring other difficult issues-almost as if he had learned from the inadequacies of theological language the limitations of all one-dimensional searches for insight and truth. Perhaps, however, he had learned this method of self-correction, of "setting right one error of

expression by another," in his deep studies of Church history, for he had observed that across the oceans of time the Church, like a great sailing vessel, moves slowly through the centuries, tacking to the left and to the right in its great ecumenical councils, each one founding itself upon and building up the former councils, as well as moderating the imbalances of the preceding and preparing the way for the next.⁽¹⁴⁾ "With how many swayings to the right and to the left, with how many reverses, yet with what certainty of advance ... part answering to part, till the whole truth 'self-balanced on its centre hung.'"⁽¹⁵⁾

Thinking, and *all* acting, makes progress, then, by being alive to possibilities and limitations, to indeterminateness and fallibility. Newman shifts from pole to pole and from one register to another, exploring the entire range of possibilities in relentless inquiry. Even heresies bear within them a grain of truth, though that small grain may be wrongly taken and exaggerated as the whole truth or the only truth. "Mistakes carry information," Newman urges, "for they are cognate to the truth."⁽¹⁶⁾

Nay, the doctrines even of the heretical bodies are indices and anticipations of the mind of the Church. As the first step in settling a question of doctrine is to raise and debate it, so heresies in every age may be taken as the measure of the existing state of thought in the Church, and of the movement of her theology; they determine in what way the current is setting, and the rate at which it flows.⁽¹⁷⁾

Perhaps this is why Newman always went out of his way in any argument or disagreement, and in any debate that he undertook, to present first, with absolute precision, and often with far greater clarity, the position of his opponent. Polarity entails precision in defining the antagonism.

Liberalism and Conservatism

As Newman uses the word "liberalism," and as it is used in this essay, it is meant primarily with reference to religion, and in this regard it can fairly well be used interchangeably with "rationalism" in religion, that is, as the complete subjection of religious matters to the judgment of human reason. Examples used here, however, will also illustrate in a few instances how Newman uses the terms "liberal" and "conservative" with respect to education and to politics.

In his Biglietto speech of 1879, that is, in the short talk he gave when he was made a cardinal, Newman said: "For 30, 40, 50 years I have resisted to the best of my powers the spirit of liberalism in religion.... It is an error overspreading, as a snare, the whole earth."⁽¹⁸⁾ Fifty years earlier, however, he had viewed liberalism on a much smaller scale, and as "too cold a principle to prevail with the multitude."⁽¹⁹⁾ That was in his youth, however, at the beginning of the Tractarian or Oxford Movement for reform in the Church of England, and at that time he saw liberalism's antagonist to be the enthusiastic movements of popular evangelicalism.

By the time he wrote the *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* in 1864, Newman had come to realize fully that the bewildering progress in modern knowledge raised the critical issue of just how "the respective claims of revelation and of natural science [were] to be adjusted," particularly "out of tenderness for those

many souls who, in consequence of the confident tone of the schools of secular knowledge, are in danger of being led away into a bottomless liberalism of thought." This "deep, plausible scepticism," as he called it, which is "the development of human reason, as practically exercised by the natural man," is no longer confined to that theological party he had once known at Oxford, but now embraced simply and entirely "the educated lay world."⁽²⁰⁾ He had come to view liberalism as the "great apostasia" of modernity.⁽²¹⁾

In the Biglietto speech of 1879, Newman may well be indicting not only the *educated* lay world of his own day, to which he had referred in the *Apologia* fifteen years earlier, but also perhaps and prophetically the *entire* lay world of our own time as well.

Liberalism in religion is the doctrine that there is no positive truth in religion, but that one creed is as good as another, and this is the teaching which is gaining substance and force daily. It is inconsistent with any recognition of any religion, *as true*. It teaches that all are to be tolerated, but all are matters of opinion. Revealed religion is not a truth, ... and it is the right of each individual to make it say just what strikes his fancy. Devotion is not necessarily founded on faith. Men may go to Protestant Churches and to Catholic, may get good from both and belong to neither. They may fraternize together in spiritual thoughts and feelings, without having any views at all of doctrine in common, or seeing the need of them.⁽²²⁾

Then, remarkably, and true to his habitual method, Newman does not hesitate to add what he sees as *positive* aspects of liberalism. "There is much in the liberalistic theory which is good and true: for example, not to say more, the precepts of justice, truthfulness, sobriety, self-command, benevolence, which ... are among its avowed principles, and the natural laws of society." It is precisely because of these positive attributes, he notes, that liberalism has "such promise of success." It is only "when we find that this array of principles is intended to supersede, to block out, religion, that we pronounce it to be evil."⁽²³⁾

Newman closed his cardinalate speech optimistically, with a statement of absolute trust in the Providence of God. The Church constantly dies, confronted as it always is with overwhelming odds, and yet it rises ever again. The only surprise -- did he say it with a smile? -- is how it will do it this time. His time -- ours? -- seemed to him, he concluded, to be especially a time in which Christians have a call to be patient.

At the root of Newman's lifelong battle with liberalism was his early critique of the Protestant ethos of "private judgement." He saw the antecedent probability of an infallible teaching authority in the Church as a counterbalance to the erroneous opinion of modern secular culture that truth resides in individual judgment, that reason triumphs over all, and that belief belongs to the intellect alone. For Newman, the very essence of religion lay in authority and obedience.

In his 1845 *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, Newman calls liberalism "the anti-dogmatic principle,"⁽²⁴⁾ for it holds that truth and falsehood are a matter of opinion, and one doctrine as

good as another. Against belief in dogma, liberalism says that it does not matter what we believe, as long as we are sincere and conscientious. We make ourselves the self-sufficient judges in matters of faith and religion. Plainly, the antagonistic principle here is "the dogmatic principle," which claims: "That there is a truth then; that there is one truth; ... that the mind is below truth, not above it, and is bound, not to descant upon it, but to venerate it; that truth and falsehood are set before us for the trial of our hearts ... this is the dogmatical principle." (25) Thus, in the primary sense of the word, Newman defines "dogmatism," not only for Catholics but for all believers, as "a religion's profession of its own reality as contrasted with other systems." (26)

There is, however, another strong sense of the word "dogmatism," as Newman understands it, one which is antagonistic to "the dogmatic principle." In his Oxford University sermon on "Wisdom as Contrasted with Faith and with Bigotry," Newman speaks of dogmatism as *bigotry*, that is, of dogmatism as the application of inadequate or narrow principles to the state of things as we find them.

Our presumptions ... deserve the name of bigotry and dogmatism [when] ... we make a wrong use of such light as is given us, and mistake what is 'a lantern unto our feet' for the sun in the heavens.... Bigotry professes to understand what it maintains, though it does not; ... it persists, not in abandoning argument, but in arguing only in one way. (27)

Newman sees dogmatists, in this sense, as being narrow-minded and fixed in their views. They expect to be able to argue others into a belief because they themselves see no difficulties with it. They have their own topics and terms, which must not be touched or discussed in a natural, unconstrained way, and so they think their own to be the only rational view. "Narrow minds have no power of throwing themselves into the minds of others. They have stiffened in one position, as limbs of the body subjected to confinement, or as our organs of speech, which after a while cannot learn new tones and inflections." (28)

Here it may well be noted that the stiff-necked, narrow-mindedness of this kind of dogmatism or conservatism is precisely the opposite of the enlargement and flexibility of mind that Newman sees as the aim of truly *liberal* education. The entire meaning of "liberal" as applied to the education of the intellect, according to Newman's classic presentation of it in *The Idea of a University*, is the opening, cultivation, illumination, and enlargement of mind such that it is no longer stuck in, constricted by, and confined to a single, narrow, or ego-centric view of the world.

[The student] apprehends the great outlines of knowledge, the principles on which it rests, the scale of its parts, its lights and its shades, its great points and its little, as he otherwise cannot apprehend them. Hence it is that his education is called 'Liberal.' A habit of mind is formed which lasts through life, of which the attributes are freedom, equitableness, calmness, moderation, and wisdom; or what in a former Discourse I have ventured to call a philosophical habit. This then I would assign as the special fruit of the education furnished at a University. (29)

To this large-minded, liberally educated person, Newman contrasts the pompous bigotry of the narrowly educated, specialized "man of one idea." This is the person of busy mind who cannot do without a view on anything and everything, as that view impatiently bursts forth from "the extravagances of undisciplined talent, and the narrowness of conceited ignorance." Those

whose life lies in the cultivation of one science, or the exercise of one method of thought, have no more right, though they have often more ambition, to generalize upon the basis of their own pursuit but beyond its range, than the schoolboy or the ploughman to judge of a Prime Minister. But they must have something to say on every subject; habit, fashion, the public require it of them: and, if so, they can only give sentence according to their knowledge.(30)

One might think that this sort of person would be modest in making pronouncements in unfamiliar areas, but unfortunately this is not usually the case.

Too often it happens that, in proportion to the narrowness of his knowledge, is, not his distrust of it, but the deep hold it has upon him, his absolute conviction of his own conclusions, and his positiveness in maintaining them. He has the obstinacy of the bigot, whom he scorns, with the bigot's apology that he has been taught, as he thinks, his doctrine from heaven. Thus he becomes, what is commonly called, a man of one idea; which properly means a man of one science, and of the view, partly true but subordinate, partly false, which is all that can proceed out of any thing so partial.(31)

Single principles are thus made into "keys" and "leading ideas," all of them true, perhaps, to a certain point, "yet all degenerating into error and quackery, because they are carried to excess," without the interpretation and restraint required from other quarters, and "because they are employed to do what is simply too much for them, inasmuch as a little science is not deep philosophy."(32)

This view of dogmatism as a kind of deeply rooted and unbending stubbornness corresponds with a view of "conservatism" that Newman points out in his *Essay on Development*. "One cause of corruption in religion is the refusal to follow the course of doctrine as it moves on, and an obstinacy in the notions of the past."(33) He might relate, as an example of this, his experience at the College of Propaganda in Rome, where he went to study Catholic theology immediately after his reception into the Roman church in 1845. He found the Jesuits there academically bright, hard working, and self sacrificing, but he also thought them to be "plodding, methodical, unromantic," and to be "unthinking *conservatives*." He wrote of his experience at the College: "There is a deep suspicion of *change*, with a perfect incapacity to create any thing *positive* for the wants of the times."(34) Newman was certainly not *conservative* in this sense of the term, suspicious of change, refusing to follow the course of doctrine as it moved on, obstinate in the notions of the past in relation to the needs of the time.

True to his dialectical method of saying and unsaying to a positive result, however, Newman considers yet another view of conservatism, and this in both a positive and negative sense. Ordinarily speaking, he observes, the Roman Pontiffs "have been, and are, of course Conservatives

in the right sense of the word: that is, they cannot bear anarchy, they think revolution an evil, they pray for the peace of the world."

But a Conservative, in the political sense of the word, commonly signifies something else, which the Pope never is, and cannot be. It means a man who is at the top of the tree, and knows it, and means never to come down, whatever it may cost him to keep his place there. It means a man who upholds government and society and the existing state of things ... because he himself is well off in consequence of it, and because to take care of number one is his main political principle. It means a man who defends religion, not for religion's sake, but for the sake of its accidents and externals; and in this sense Conservative a Pope can never be, without a simple betrayal of the dispensation committed to him.(35)

There remains, however, an even more subtle form of Conservatism, "the wrong Conservatism," Newman points out, one by which ecclesiastical persons are much more likely to be tempted and overcome.

This fault is an over-attachment to the ecclesiastical establishment, as such; -- to the seats of its power, to its holy places, its sanctuaries, churches, and palaces; -- to its various national hierarchies, with their several prescriptions, privileges, and possessions; -- to traditional lines of policy, precedent, and discipline; -- to rules and customs of long standing. But a great Pontiff must be detached from everything save the deposit of faith, the tradition of the Apostles, and the vital principles of the divine polity.(36)

Newman was as critical of authoritarianism as he was of liberalism, and he celebrated as much the right use of authority as he did its continual exchange and even clash with right reason. The late Charles Stephen Dessain of the Birmingham Oratory stressed in his biography that Newman felt a strong duty to moderate excesses, both outside and within the Church -- whether it was the disapproval by Pope Pius IX of a meeting of theologians in Munich, which had met without the necessary mandate from the hierarchy, or the introduction into England from Italy of exaggerated devotion to the Blessed Virgin, the magnification of the prerogatives of the papacy, or the ultramontane inclination toward making all official utterances of the pope infallible.

As the ultraconservative party at the First Vatican Council, the ultramontanes wanted to force a definition of papal infallibility in the broadest sense possible. Newman knew that this could not be reconciled with revelation and tradition, and though he could not do much about it in a public way, for he had turned down the invitation to be a consultor at the Council, he did write to his own Bishop Ullathorne what he later described as "one of the most passionate and confidential letters that I ever wrote in my life."(37) His profound compassion for the lay people he knew, especially for converts, was a key motivation in writing the letter, which was meant to remain private between himself and his bishop but which found its way into the newspapers. In it he said that such a broadly construed declaration instigated by a political party of the bishops (including the pope) was not the proper work of a council and that it would cause difficulty, fear, and dismay among the faithful.

I cannot help suffering with the various souls which are suffering, and I look with anxiety at the prospect of having to defend decisions which may not be difficult to my private judgment, but may be most difficult to maintain logically in the face of historical facts. What have we done to be treated as the Faithful never were treated before? When has definition of doctrine *de fide* been a luxury of devotion and not a stern painful necessity? Why should an aggressive insolent faction be allowed to make the hearts of the just to mourn, whom the Lord hath not made sorrowful?... If it is God's Will that the Pope's Infallibility should be defined, then ... I shall feel I have but to bow my head to His Adorable Inscrutable Providence.(38)

After the definition was declared by the pope, in a narrower sense than first proposed, and was gradually accepted by the bishops over the course of three years, Newman wrote to a friend:

We must have a little faith.... No truth stands by itself -- each is kept in order and harmonized by other truths. The dogmas relative to the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation were not struck off all at once -- but piecemeal -- one Council did one thing, another a second -- and so the whole dogma was built up. And the first portion of it looked extreme -- and controversies rose upon it -- and these controversies led to the second, and third Councils, and they did not *reverse* the first, but *explained* and *completed* what was first done. So it will be now. Future Popes will explain and in one sense limit their own power. This would be unlikely, if they merely acted as men, but God will overrule them. Pius has been overruled -- I believe he wished a much more stringent dogma than he has got. Let us have faith and patience.(39)

As authoritarianism and liberalism are polar opposites coarsely repelling one another in their excesses, so legitimate authority and right reason are polarities magnetically attracted to one another. In the rhetorically magnificent final chapter of the *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, Newman articulates in dramatic detail not only the compatibility but the requirement, each for the integrity of the other, of the eternal antagonism between authority and reason. The Church's infallibility is a divine provision to restrain human reason, one of our greatest natural gifts, "from its own suicidal excesses." Authority's force is meant to counter "the immense energy of the aggressive, capricious, untrustworthy intellect" at the same time that reason must check the excesses and abuses of authority's power.(40)

It is the vast Catholic body itself, and it only, which affords an arena for both combatants in that awful, never-dying duel. It is necessary for the very life of religion ... that the warfare should be incessantly carried on. Every exercise of Infallibility is brought out into act by an intense and varied operation of the Reason, both as its ally and as its opponent, and provokes again, when it has done its work, a re-action of Reason against it; and, as in a civil polity the State exists and endures by means of the rivalry and collision, the encroachments and defeats of its constituent parts, so in like manner Catholic Christendom is no simple exhibition of religious absolutism, but presents a continuous picture of Authority and Private Judgment alternately advancing and retreating as the ebb and flow of the tide.(41)

Conclusion

As made clear by Newman's illustrations throughout this essay, no single fixed pair of antagonistic principles is sufficient in itself to exhaust the meaning of either extreme or to counter the effect of radical polarization. Rather, the continual shared exploration of a variety of vantage points when viewing a given subject in its diverse senses and contexts would seem to be required for the fullest possible illumination and enlargement of mind, personal and communal. The ways of engagement with one another and of approaching the Mystery reside in saying and unsaying toward a positive result, alternately advancing and retreating as the ebb and flow of the tide, for no truth stands by itself -- each is kept in order and harmonized by other truths.

From this inquiry into Newman's employment of the method of antagonism, one may readily see why he himself was accused of incongruities by the uncomprehending; yet he remained throughout his life a man of deep and constant principle. In the introduction to his biography of Newman, Ian Ker makes the following just observation: "The mind of Newman is characterized not by contradictions but by complementary strengths, so that he may be called, without inconsistency, both conservative and liberal, progressive and traditional, cautious and radical, dogmatic yet pragmatic, idealistic but realistic."⁽⁴²⁾ •

Notes

1. Terrence Merrigan, *Clear Heads and Holy Hearts: The Religious and Theological Ideal of John Henry Newman* (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1991), 17-18.
2. Newman defined the Church as "the congregation of the faithful who pass on the revealed Word of God which they themselves have received and believed. It is neither the hierarchy alone, but the whole people of God as a body." Newman, "Lecture Notes on the Church," as quoted in Samuel D. Femiano, *Infallibility of the Laity* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), 122. See also Edward Jeremy Miller, *John Henry Newman on the Idea of Church* (Shepherdstown, WV: Patmos Press, 1987), esp. chap. 3.
3. Newman, *The Idea of a University*, ed. Martin J. Svaglic (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), 114.
4. *Ibid.*, 75.
5. Newman, *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine*, ed. John Coulson (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1961); originally published in *The Rambler* 1, part II (July 1859): 198-230.
6. *Ibid.*, 71; 104 & 72; 63; 30; 54; & 30, respectively.
7. See Newman, *The Via Media of the Anglican Church*, ed. H. D. Weidner, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 10-57.
8. *Ibid.*, 26.

9. Ibid., 30.
10. Ibid., 32.
11. Newman, *Loss and Gain: The Story of a Convert*, intro. Meriol Trevor (London: Burns & Oates, 1962), 185-186.
12. Newman, *Fifteen Sermons Preached Before the University of Oxford Between A.D. 1826 and 1843*, ed. Mary Katherine Tillman (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 268-269.
13. Newman, *The Theological Papers of John Henry Newman on Faith and Certainty*, ed. J. Derek Holmes (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), 102 (emphasis added).
14. Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, intro. Ian Ker (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 439-440.
15. Newman, *Fifteen Sermons*, 317.
16. Newman, *Essay on Development*, 224.
17. Ibid., 362.
18. Newman, *Commemorative Essays on the Occasion of the Centenary of his Cardinalate, 1879-May-1979*, ed. M. K. Stolz (Rome: Centre of Newman Friends, n.d.), 100. The speech is also quoted selectively in Ian Ker, *John Henry Newman: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 720-722.
19. Ker, *Biography*, 174; see also 174-176.
20. Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, ed. Martin J. Svaglic (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 233-234. See also Newman's "Note A," entitled "Liberalism," 254-262.
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22. Ibid., 101.
23. Ibid., 104.
24. Newman, *Apologia*, 54; see also *Commemorative Essays*, 357-358.
25. Newman, *Essay on Development*, 357.
26. Ibid., 439.
27. Newman, *Fifteen Sermons*, 299-300.
28. Ibid., 307.

29. Newman, *Idea of a University*, 76-77.
30. Ibid., 57.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid., 58.
33. Newman, *Essay on Development*, 177.
34. Newman, *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, ed. Charles Stephen Dessain et al., vols. 11-22 (London: Nelson, 1961-72); vol. 12, 103-104, as quoted in Ker, *Biography*, 331.
35. Newman, *Rise and Progress of Universities, and Benedictine Essays*, intro. Mary Katherine Tillman (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 131-32.
36. Ibid., 132-133.
37. Ker, *Biography*, 653.
38. Newman, *Letters and Diaries*, vol. 25, 18-19, as quoted in Ker, *Biography*, 651-52.
39. Wilfrid Ward, *The Life of John Henry Cardinal Newman*, vol. 2 (Longmans, Green: 1912), 379.
40. Ker, *Biography*, 220.
41. Ibid., 226.
42. Ker, *Biography*, viii. See also 48-49.

*Biographical information is true at time of publication.