

# ‘OUR PATTERN OF FAITH’

## *The Virgin Mary in John Henry Newman’s Theory of Religious Development*

ROBERT ANDREWS

JOHN HENRY NEWMAN’S (1801-1890) conversion to Catholicism in 1845 was much more than the adoption of the Catholic faith by one of the Church of England’s most influential theologians; rather, Newman’s journey into full-communion with the See of Rome was accompanied by a depth of theological reflection and argument that remains part of Newman’s immense contribution to nineteenth-century Catholic theology. His theory of religious development—begun whilst he was an Anglican clergyman and completed just prior to his conversion—not only convinced Newman of the theological and historic truth of Catholicism, the theory bequeathed to Catholicism an argument about the development of Catholic doctrine that remains one of the most significant apologetic statements about the historic origins and evolution of Catholicism as a religious system. This paper takes one important aspect of Newman’s theory of development—the role of the Virgin Mary and the rise of the Marian cult—and discusses how Newman came to accept Catholic Mariology, so often a stumbling block to non-Catholics—as it was initially for Newman. Already seen by recent scholarship as having been an influential Marian theologian in his own right, Newman is shown in this article to have added his own unique contribution to how Catholics understand the prominent place of the Virgin Mary in the historic development of the faith that Catholics profess.

### *1. Anglican Background*

In 1828 the young and talented Anglican clergyman, John Henry Newman—aged twenty-seven—became the Vicar of the University Church of St Mary the Virgin, Oxford. Though by the late 1820s Newman had turned from his earlier Evangelicalism to a more High Church form of

Anglicanism, he nonetheless continued to harbour some strong anti-Catholic positions. This was not at all untypical of traditional Anglican High Churchmanship—which, despite its catholic and sacramental leanings, was still a broadly Protestant tradition (see Nockles 1994). Newman’s early anti-Catholicism was especially evident in his theology of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Thus on the one hand there was a typical Protestant fear of idolatry. For instance, in one section of the *Apologia pro Vita Sua*, Newman observed that he ‘could not go to Rome, while she suffered honours to be paid to the Virgin Mary and the Saints which I thought incompatible with the Supreme, Incommunicable Glory of the One Infinite and Eternal’ (Newman 1913, 246). Elsewhere in the *Apologia* Newman described his aversion to the ‘devotional manifestations’ made by Catholics towards the Virgin Mary as his ‘great *crux* as regards Catholicism’ (Newman 1913, 287). Such reactions were typical of a traditionally Protestant attitude to the cult of the Virgin Mary, which believed that the Catholic Church idolatrously worshipped ‘the Virgin as a Goddess’ (Newman 1881, 176)—a claim that Newman would have to counter in later life as a Catholic.

Yet despite this, Newman was already showing remarkable and articulate signs of being the Catholic—and Marian—theologian he is now venerated as (see Friedel 1928; Boyce 2001; Gregoris 2003). The most striking example can be seen in a sermon preached on the Feast of the Annunciation (25 March) in 1832, where Newman made what can only be described as a reference to the Immaculate Conception (Govaert 1991, 23).

Who can estimate the holiness and perfection of her, who was chosen to be the Mother of Christ[.] ...[W]hat must have been the transcendent purity of her, whom the Creator Spirit condescended

to overshadow with His miraculous presence? ... This contemplation runs to a higher subject, did we dare follow it; for what, think you, was the sanctified state of that human nature, of which God formed His sinless Son; knowing as we do, 'that which is born of the flesh is flesh,' and that 'none can bring forth a clean thing out of an unclean?' (Newman 1839, 131-132)

Elsewhere in the sermon Newman would make an allusion to the Virgin Mary as 'the Second Eve', a comparison that represents one of the earliest Patristic reflections regarding the Virgin Mary and one that would remain central to Newman's Mariology throughout his life.

## 2. *The Theory of Religious Development*

Newman's time at St Mary's would see him become one of the most famous and influential Anglican churchmen of the nineteenth century, his role as a leader of the Oxford Movement adding to his fame as a preacher and theologian. However, as history has shown, Newman's days as an Anglican were numbered. By the early 1840s, particularly following the release of the controversial *Tract 90* in 1841, Newman's confidence in Anglicanism as a viable ecclesiological system (something Newman had attempted to champion through his theory of the *Via Media*) began to steadily decline. Thus on 7 September 1843 Newman was forced by his conscience to resign as Vicar of St Mary's, retiring to Littlemore, just outside of Oxford, to pray and contemplate his future. Not yet ready to leave the Church of his baptism (Gilley 1991, 220), Newman still possessed intellectual difficulties that—in his mind—needed resolution, one of which the role the Blessed Virgin Mary played in the theological and devotional life of the Catholic Church. It thus is not surprising that Marian themes feature prominently in Newman's classic treatise, *The Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845). Written at Littlemore from March 1844 to September 1845 and revised in 1878 with relatively few changes (Chadwick 1987, 160), *The Essay on Development* was a work that helped to finally convince Newman to become a Catholic.



*Robert Andrews has completed his Ph.D. in Church History at the Murdoch University. His research interests relate to Anglicanism and Catholicism in the 18th and 19th centuries. He is Sessional Lecturer and Tutor in Theology at Notre Dame's Freemantle campus.*

One commentator has gone so far as to say that *The Essay on Development* 'stands or falls' on Newman's ability to justify the place of the Virgin Mary in Catholicism (see Perrott 1997, 9). Though this may be a slight exaggeration (Newman's treatment of Marian themes is only one amongst many that *The Essay on Development* deals with), it nonetheless is true by default, for Catholic Mariology must have, as Newman's thesis demanded, fitted the criteria of what constituted a legitimate doctrinal development, otherwise his thesis would have failed to establish as apostolic what was seen by non-Catholics as one of Catholicism's most distinctive and troublesome features. There is no question that for Newman the place of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Catholicism, as well as her general theological significance to Christianity, plays an important role in the theory he devised to account for the historical development of Catholic theology.

This is seen in one of Newman's earliest expressions of the theory of development—a sermon preached on the Feast of the Purification on 2 February 1843, entitled: 'The Theory of Developments in Religious Doctrine'. Later published, the sermon was an exposition of the theory that creeds or doctrines within Christianity were the expression of ideas or impressions that had long been present in the hearts and minds of Christians, even if there had been no formal expression of those ideas at the time (Gilley 1991, 214). Newman took as his text the words found in the second chapter of the Gospel of Luke, where the Virgin Mary, after having given birth to Christ, 'kept all these things, and pondered

them in her heart’ (Luke 2:19). Because of this, the Virgin Mary, according to Newman,

...is our pattern of Faith, both in the reception and in the study of Divine Truth. She does not think it enough to accept, she dwells upon it; not enough to possess, she uses it; not enough to assent, she develops it... And thus she symbolizes to us, not only the faith of the unlearned, but of the doctors of the Church also, who have to investigate, and weigh, and define, as well as to profess the Gospel; to draw the line between truth and heresy; to anticipate or remedy the various aberrations of wrong reason. (Newman 1880, 313-314)

The process of investigating, weighing and defining, first displayed by Our Lady, was the process of the development of doctrine. When the Virgin Mary ‘pondered’ and ‘developed’ her impressions of what had occurred in bearing and giving birth to the incarnate Christ, she was exhibiting the same process the Church goes through in formulating its doctrines. Thus, though ‘the Virgin Mary herself may not have been able to pass a test on the Christological decrees of the fifth-century Council of Chalcedon’ (Gilley 1991, 214) this does not mean that the development of Chalcedonian orthodoxy was not a part of the original deposit of divine truth (which was the whole mystery of the Incarnation) that God had given to her. The Church, through reason, contemplation and deliberation, had explained in a more defined and detailed way, the same idea that had been initially impressed upon the mind of a young Jewish woman named Mary. The process was the same with the Apostles and with the whole development of Catholic orthodoxy. Christianity in the nineteenth century was, for Newman, nothing but the development or expansion ‘of a few words, uttered, as if casually, by the fishermen of Galilee’ (Newman 1880, 317). The original deposit of faith that was given to the Apostles and that they, in turn, preached to the ends of the earth, was not in any way a complete and exhaustive summary of the faith, yet it nonetheless contained the seeds of further development within it—as the subsequent centuries of the Christian era would demonstrate (Newman 1880, 317-318).

*The Essay on Development* took as its main thesis the theory that Newman had put forward

in his 1843 sermon: that the development of ideas over time is a real and legitimate process in life (Chadwick 1987, 149-153). Christianity, for Newman, is a real and living idea (Dulles 2002, 70) and though as an idea it encompasses many aspects, it can be said to have one ‘central aspect’, that being the Incarnation (Newman 1890, 36). Everything else in Christianity can be said to be nothing more than an addition to this one monumental event in human history. The growth and development of Christianity over time is thus the development of an idea, the process whereby over time such an idea is ‘brought into consistency and form’ (Newman 1890, 38). This meant ideas also become subject to change, at least in their outer manifestations. In *The Essay on Development*, Newman was opposed to the idea that Christianity was an unchanging religion (*semper eadem*). Such a position Newman believed to be unhistorical, despite the fact that it had been common amongst Catholic apologists for centuries (Chadwick 1987, 140-141). For Newman, however, change did not equal imperfection or the possibility of corruption (a typical knee-jerk objection); instead the opposite was the case: change was the means of growth, expansion, perfection and supremacy. As Newman famously observed, ‘to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often’ (Newman 1890, 40).

Such a position was crucial for Newman in furnishing an argument on behalf of Catholicism (and by default, Mariology) for the reason that the fact of change, manifesting itself throughout history, had always been felt by Protestant critics to be one of Catholicism’s great defects. Put simply, it was the charge that the evangelical simplicity of early Christianity had been replaced by centuries of corruption and superstition. In the preface to the 1878 edition Newman stated the problem in a way that would have been familiar to his fellow Anglican churchmen.

However beautiful and promising... [Catholicism] ...is in theory, its history, we are told, is its best refutation; the inconsistencies, found age after age in its teaching, being as patent as the simultaneous contrarieties or religious opinion manifest in the High, Low, and Broad branches of the Church of England’ (Newman 1890, vii).

For Newman, the *Essay on Development* thus became ‘an hypothesis to account for a difficulty’ (Newman 1890, 30).

Newman’s argument was not to deny that Catholicism had changed or developed over time, but instead to argue that such changes and developments were natural, orthodox and most importantly, providential (Newman 1890, viii). Yet if this be the case, how is one able to distinguish between legitimate and non-legitimate developments? In the *Essay on Development* Newman proposed seven ‘notes’ (originally ‘tests’ in the first edition) that stood as criteria for distinguishing between true and false developments. They are:

1. *Preservation of Type*. This evokes the analogy of physical growth. To use a common image, used by others: an acorn grows into an oak tree (Ford 1989, 39). The entire oak tree is contained within the acorn, yet an oak tree is vastly different in appearance to an acorn. This is preservation of type, a development that maintains its original identity, despite the fact that the ‘idea does not always bear about it the same external image’ (Newman 1890, 178). Another analogy, more powerful in its symbolic imagery, is the gift of human life itself. A human life, begun at conception, bears no external resemblance to any of its later growth and development—yet as Catholic teaching regarding the sanctity of life insists, a human life has indeed begun at this point.

2. *Continuity of Principles*. Principles in Newman’s mind are permanent. Doctrines, on the other hand, grow and develop. For example, a doctrine derived from a mystical interpretation of Scripture will flow out of the *principle* of mystical interpretation. Similarly, a true development will have been faithful to its permanent and guiding principle.

3. *Power of Assimilation*. Growth is never done in isolation from the external world. So it is with a true development of Christian doctrine: development will take in things external to it, just as a living organism needs to eat food in order to grow and become stronger (Dulles 2002, 75). An example of this would be the Church’s use of Aristotelian philosophy in at-

tempting to explain the Real Presence.

4. *Logical Sequence*. True developments will arise out of the fact that they are logically implied by their source. Baptism, for example, being an unrepeatable Sacrament, implied the necessity for the development of a post-Baptismal rite that was able to forgive post-Baptismal sins—the Sacrament of Confession.

5. *Anticipation of Its Future*. This means that prior to the occurrence of a development certain signs will manifest themselves that suggest such a future development. Thus, the very high moral estimation of martyrdom within the early Church anticipates the future development of the cult of saints and of their invocation (Dulles 2002, 75).

6. *Conservative Action upon Its Past*. In the development of a doctrine its past manifestations will never be contradicted, reversed, or abolished. In Newman’s words a development ‘is an addition which illustrates, not obscures, corroborates, not corrects, the body of thought from which it proceeds’ (Newman 1890, 200).

7. *Chronic Vigour*. True Developments will always possess duration as one of their characteristics. A true development will have a long and vigorous life whilst a false development will have a short life and fall into decay. The early Church, for example, is full of various heresies (e.g. Arianism), yet all eventually passed away into stagnation and decay whilst true developments (e.g. the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity) live on and expand further.

### **3. Theological Controversy and the Rise of Marian Devotion**

Unlike the theological contemplation seen in Newman’s sermon for the Feast of the Purification, in the *Essay on Development* the Virgin Mary of Scripture became the Virgin Mary of Catholic history. Such a change of emphasis corresponded with the main goal of the *Essay on Development*. This was to focus not upon what Scripture said about the faith, but about what history said of it. Yet in contemplating a conversion to Catholicism, a problem for Newman emerged. The problem was that whilst Scripture revealed a silence regarding the fine details of Our Lady’s life, as well as of her theo-

logical significance, the Catholic Church up to the Reformation had said much to fill in the gap. Significant development had clearly taken place. For Newman’s thesis on development to succeed, the place of the Virgin Mary within Catholicism would have to be shown to be a true development and not a corruption.

Compared to the work as a whole, Marian themes occupy only a small part of the *Essay on Development*. There are only three sections that deal specifically with Mariology. The first is found in Chapter 4, ‘Instances in Illustration’, where Newman attempts to justify through historical examples, the basic underlying thesis of the *Essay on Development* (Newman 1890, 122-165). There, Newman devotes fourteen pages to the Virgin Mary in a section entitled, ‘Our Lord’s Incarnation and the Dignity of His Blessed Mother and of All Saints’ (Newman 1890, 135-148). The second section that deals with Marian themes is found in Chapter 10, where Newman applies the fifth note of a development (anticipation of the future) to the Church’s historical development (Newman 1890, 400-418). Thus, in a section entitled, ‘Office of the Blessed Virgin’, Newman devotes four pages to the place of the Virgin Mary (Newman 1890, 415-418). The third and final section is found in Chapter 11 where Newman applies the sixth note of a development (conservative action upon the past) in the same manner as Chapter 10 (Newman 1890, 419-436). Thus, in a section titled: ‘Devotion to the Blessed Virgin’, Newman devotes twelve pages to Marian themes (Newman 1890, 425-436). Of course, there are mentions of the Virgin Mary scattered throughout the *Essay*, but these are usually insignificant, especially when compared to the above-mentioned sections.

In Chapter 4 Newman begins his argument in favour of the development of Mariology within the context of the early Church’s reflections and pronouncements on the heresy of Arianism and the struggle to assert the truth of Christ’s divinity. Newman rightfully recognizes the fact that Mariology, as it developed in the early Church, was always seen as being inseparably linked to Christological developments

(Blancy *et.al.* 2002, 20). Thus, within this context, Newman sees that in the early Church’s condemnation of the heresy of Arianism and its positive affirmation of Christ’s divinity, there was already an implicit acceptance that the Virgin Mary had a venerable and honoured place amongst God’s creatures that did not place her on the same level as God. This was because the Church, in condemning Arius’ denial of Christ’s divinity, was implicitly establishing the theological principle that an exalted creature could never be worshipped or regarded as God.

[T]he Nicene Council recognized the eventful principle, that, while we believe and profess any being to be made of a created nature, such a being is really no God to us, though honoured by us with whatever high titles and with whatever homage. Arius...did all but confess that Christ was the Almighty; they said much more than St. Bernard or St. Alphonso have since said of the Blessed Mary; yet they left Him a creature and were found wanting... The votaries of Mary do not exceed the true faith, unless the blasphemers of her Son came up to it. The Church of Rome is not idolatrous, unless Arianism is orthodoxy. (Newman 1890, 143-144)

What Nicaea had achieved was the implicit premise that allowed the Virgin Mary to be venerated without such veneration being the same as that which is given to God, for ‘to exalt a creature’ could not imply a ‘recognition of its divinity’ (Newman 1890, 144), otherwise the Church’s condemnation of Arius who exalted Christ yet kept him a creature would have made no sense. As Newman put it, ‘The Church of Rome is not idolatrous unless Arianism is orthodoxy’ (Newman 1890, 144).

Newman next considered the development of how the Church considered the Virgin Mary to hold a place within what Newman phrases, ‘the economy of grace’, what may otherwise be described as the Virgin Mary’s role in the salvation of mankind (Newman 1890, 145). Newman makes the observation that it was not until the fifth century that the Church made an official recognition of the Virgin Mary’s place within the economy of grace, an observation that raises the question of why such a move took so long?

Newman's answer is that the Church could make no reference to the Virgin Mary's role in the economy of grace until it had first settled the paramount issue of 'our Lord's proper Divinity' (Newman 1890, 145). If Mariology is, as other historians of Christian theology have noted, nothing more than 'a Christology' (Blancy et.al. 2002, 20), as the early Church seems to have viewed it, then one could not reasonably have expected any official developments in Mariology until there had been ample developments in Christology that would allow Mariological developments to make sense. This echoes a similar comment Newman makes later in the same chapter when he deals with the question of the development of the Petrine Ministry. There, Newman makes the point that when one looks for evidence of a Papal primacy in the early Church, particularly during the sub-Apostolic period of the second century, and seemingly finds none (at least no evidence that corresponds to the actions of the See of Rome in later centuries), one is missing the point that a fully-fledged Petrine Ministry could not have emerged because there did not exist the reasons for such an emergence, just as prior to the fifth century there did not exist a reason for an official pronouncement on the place of the Virgin Mary within the economy of grace (Newman 1890, 149). Newman was aware of the fact that the Church only ever grew and developed, as its needs required it to, and never before. The same was true regarding the place of Our Lady.

Newman thus notes that in the fifth century the Church defined the Virgin Mary as being *Theotokos* or 'Mother of God' (Newman 1890, 145). The reason for such a definition had been the Nestorian Controversy. Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople from 428 to 431, responded negatively to a sermon in honour of the Virgin Mary preached by the famous Constantinopolitan preacher, Proclus. Proclus' sermon, preached probably on 23 December 428, was a masterful homily in which the Virgin Mary's role within the mystery of the Incarnation was lauded and the Virgin Mary was proclaimed Mother of God, for it was in Mary that Christ, true God and true

Man, had entered, as well as received, His humanity (Graef 1985, 101-103). Nestorius' response was based on a view of Christ that distinguished between his divinity and his manhood, to the point of seemingly making Christ a divided being. Nestorius reasoned that the Virgin Mary could not be the Mother of God, for a created human can only give birth to created humanity, not uncreated divinity. The result was the Nestorian Controversy, the heresy that was condemned in 431 at the Council of Ephesus.

Echoing again a comment Newman would make at the end of Chapter 4 in relation to Papal primacy—that 'No doctrine is defined till it is [first] violated' (Newman 1890, 151), Newman regarded the Nestorian controversy as the primary reason for the Church's decision to grant the Virgin Mary the title of *Theotokos* (Newman 1890, 145). However, though heresy had been the primary cause for the formal definition, this did not mean that the Virgin Mary had not previously been regarded and venerated as the Mother of the Incarnate God, Jesus Christ. Newman is quick to point out that preceding the Nestorian controversy,

Christians had in great measure anticipated the formal ecclesiastical decision. Thus the title *Theotocos* [*sic*], or Mother of God, was familiar to Christians from primitive times, and had been used, among other writers, by Origen, Eusebius, St. Alexander, St. Athanasius, St. Ambrose, St. Gregory Nazianzen, St. Gregory Nyssen, and St. Nilus' (Newman 1890, 145).

The doctrine, in other words, was not new, for many of the early Fathers had anticipated it, in correspondence with the fifth note of a true development (anticipation of the future). Indeed, the Nestorian controversy had started when Proclus preached on this very topic, perhaps—as was likely—drawing upon a previous tradition of Marian piety and developing theology. His words certainly indicate the presence of distinct tradition of Marian veneration.

The reason we have gathered here today is the holy *Theotokos* Virgin Mary, immaculate treasure of virginity, spiritual paradise of the second Adam, workshop of the union of natures, mar-

ketplace of the saving exchange, bridal chamber in which the Word was wedded to the flesh, living bush that was not burned by the fire of the divine birth, the true light cloud that bore the One who, in his body, stands above the cherubim, fleece moistened by celestial dew, with which the Shepherd clothes his sheep. (As quoted in Gambero 1999, 235)

Historian of Mariology, Hilda Graef, regards Proclus’ homily as being typical of Byzantine preaching concerning the Virgin Mary (Graef 1985, 102). The strong reaction of the Church in Alexandria and the Church in Rome to Nestorius’ protests against Proclus’ teaching is also evidence that the Church’s definition of 431 was unlikely to have been a new teaching, but a true development, preceded and anticipated by the Church (Chadwick 1993, 196-200). Historian of theology, Jaroslav Pelikan, felt that Newman may have been slightly overconfident in his claim that: ‘the title *Theotocos* [*sic*]... was familiar to Christians from primitive times’ (Pelikan 1996, 57), but even this writer admits that prior to Ephesus (at least from the fourth century onwards) ‘it seems reasonable to conclude that the title (*Theotokos*) already enjoyed widespread acceptance in the piety of the faithful at Alexandria and beyond’ (Pelikan 1996, 57).

The remainder of the Marian themes found in Chapter 4 are devoted to strengthening Newman’s claim that the title *Theotokos* had been anticipated by many Fathers of the preceding centuries. Here, Newman’s point was not to see in the centuries preceding Ephesus exact articulations of the title *Theotokos*, but instead to see whether the doctrine was anticipated through phrases and quotations that indicate a similar or related idea. Thus, for example, Newman quotes Epiphanius’ statement that the Virgin Mary was ‘the Mother of living things’ and sees this—and other statements like it—as anticipating Ephesus’ pronouncement (Newman 1890, 146).

#### 4. *The Church Fathers*

The second major section where Newman deals specifically with Marian themes in the *Essay on Development* is found within Chap-

ter 10 where Newman applies the fifth note of development (anticipation of the future) to the Church’s historical development. The section that deals with the Virgin Mary in this chapter is relatively short (only four pages). This, however, fits in with the chapter as a whole, which is also relatively short (eighteen pages). Yet despite this brevity, Newman’s dealings here with the development of Mariology are not insignificant, for they provide an important illustration of how what the early Church had to say about the Virgin Mary anticipated future developments (Newman 1890, 415).

Newman begins with an examination of the second and early third-century writings of the Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus and Tertullian, in which the parallel between Eve’s disobedience in the fall and the Virgin Mary’s obedience in the Incarnation was a prominent theme. The basic teaching of these Fathers was that through the Virgin Mary’s obedience of accepting, through faith, the Angel Gabriel’s announcement that she would bear the Christ child (see Luke 1:38), the disobedience of Eve in the Garden of Eden was reversed (see Palmer 1952, 13). Furthermore, Newman notes that during the second century, the Virgin Mary had come to be seen as indispensable to the process of redemption, to the point that had she not been obedient to the Angel Gabriel, the view of Fathers such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus and Tertullian was that ‘the Divine Economy would have been frustrated’ or, in other words, the Incarnation might not have taken place (Newman 1890, 415). This was the important Patristic teaching on the Virgin Mary as the Second Eve.

What, then, was the significance of this in relation to the claim that the place of the Virgin Mary within Catholicism was a legitimate development within Church history? Newman’s point was to illustrate that from the earliest centuries, the Church was already seeing the Virgin Mary as being active within ‘the Divine Economy’. In other words, Mary had, from the beginning, been seen to possess an ‘office’, as Newman phrases it—in this instance, her central role of having played an indispensable part

‘in the actual process of redemption, as Eve had been instrumental and responsible in Adam’s fall’ (Newman 1890, 415). Indeed, that the Church recognized that the Virgin Mary had been active during the Incarnation could be interpreted as being the foundation, in Newman’s mind, of all later developments in Mariology. This is why Newman records that the Church, during the third century, witnessed to the fact of the Virgin Mary not simply being active in the process of the Incarnation, but also active in the spiritual life of the Church as an intercessor and helper of Christians (Newman 1890, 417–418). One of the first witnesses of this, according to Newman, is a revelation involving the Virgin Mary that was given to Gregory of Nyssa (Newman 1890, 417). Very briefly, the revelation involved an appearance of the Apostle John (by tradition believed to be the Apostle who took care of the Virgin Mary after the death of Christ) and the Virgin Mary to Gregory of Nyssa, where Gregory receives from the Virgin Mary a creed that helps him refute heresy. The exact details of the vision are, in reality, insignificant; what the vision demonstrates, in Newman’s mind, is the fact that the Virgin Mary is active in the spiritual life of the Saints—a fact illustrated in a second example from the third century (this time recorded by Gregory of Nyssa himself), where an unnamed woman is protected from heathen interference by the Virgin Mary (presumably by her prayers, although Newman does not specify) (Newman 1890, 418). ‘In both these instances’, Newman concludes, ‘the Blessed Virgin appears especially in that character of Patroness or Paraclete, which St. Irenæus and other Fathers describe, and which the Medieval Church exhibits,—a loving Mother with clients’ (Newman 1890, 418).

It is important to note again that Newman was not seeking to produce examples from Church history that exactly mirrored later developments. If Newman’s thesis concerning development was correct, however, ‘indications’ of such developments would be discernable (Newman 1890, 400). Thus, when Newman writes that the ‘special prerogatives’ of the Virgin Mary ‘were not a new thing in the Church,

or strange to her earlier teachers’ (e.g. Irenaeus and Gregory of Nyssa), he was not claiming that such prerogatives were recognized in the form that they would later manifest themselves.

### 5. *The Devotional Cult*

Found within Chapter 11 is the section entitled, ‘Devotion to the Blessed Virgin’, which deals with the sixth note of a development (conservative action upon the past) (Newman 1890, 425–436). The sixth note of a development concerned the idea that a development will never contradict, reverse or abolish its past manifestations. To repeat Newman’s words, a development ‘is an addition which illustrates, not obscures, corroborates, not corrects, the body of thought from which it proceeds’ (Newman 1890, 200). Given the context in which Newman was writing, it was essential that he was able to demonstrate such a characteristic. This was principally because one of the main characteristics of anti-Catholic polemics was the accusation that Catholicism was an historically innovative religion.

Recognizing that the place of the Virgin Mary in Catholicism presents a major obstacle to non-Catholics embracing Catholicism (something Newman had himself struggled with), Newman begins his discussion of Marian themes in Chapter 11 with a description of what is perhaps the most important Protestant objection to Mariology: namely, that Mariology takes away from the full honour that should be given only to God. As Newman elucidated:

It has been anxiously asked, whether the honours paid to St. Mary, which have grown out of devotion to her Almighty Lord and Son, do not, in fact, tend to weaken that devotion; and whether, from the nature of the case, it is possible so to exalt a creature without withdrawing the heart from the Creator (Newman 1890, 425).

The question of whether ‘it is possible so to exalt a creature without withdrawing the heart from the Creator’ was one that Newman had already answered in Chapter 4. There, Newman had been concerned with the question as it had developed out of the context of the Arian crisis of the fourth century. Recognizing that he has

already covered the question from a different angle, Newman states that his task in Chapter 11 was instead to address the question from the perspective of its practical application within Catholic piety (Newman 1890, 425).

Newman’s first resource used to demonstrate that Marian devotion ‘is altogether distinct from that which is paid to her Eternal Son, and to the Holy Trinity’ (Newman 1890, 426) are the Church’s services, which Newman argues clearly show a distinction in tone, language and emphasis between its prayers and hymns in honour of Christ and the Holy Trinity, and those in veneration of the Virgin Mary. Newman elucidates this point further, writing that in Catholic liturgical texts:

The supreme and true worship paid to the Almighty is severe, profound, awful, as well as tender, confiding, and dutiful. Christ is addressed as true God, while He is true Man; as our Creator and Judge, while He is most loving, gentle, and gracious. On the other hand, towards St. Mary the language employed is affectionate and ardent, as towards a mere child of Adam; though subdued, as coming from her sinful kindred. (Newman 1890, 426-427)

Newman’s only sources cited are the prayers, hymns and canticles of the Roman Breviary, a work he had been familiar with from his Anglican days (see Withey 1992). Thus, to substantiate his point, Newman spends a few paragraphs in Chapter 11 briefly comparing the language and tone of God or Christ-directed prayers and hymns with similar Marian examples found within the Breviary (Newman 1890, 427).

In seeing and recognizing such distinctions, Newman had come a long way in his journey towards Catholicism. As a committed Anglican Newman could not recognize that the veneration shown towards the Virgin Mary was not the same as that which was shown towards God. Indeed, as was noted in his *Apologia*, Newman’s failure to see such a distinction had been a great obstacle to his conversion (Newman 1913, 246). However, as Newman progressed through the *Essay on Development*, it became obvious that the Virgin Mary in Catholicism was not, as Newman had described in his fictional work,

*Loss and Gain*, ‘a Goddess’ (Newman 1881, 176). The Catholic Church (along with, for that matter, the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches) had, for most of its history, always taught that there existed a distinction between the veneration given to the Virgin Mary (in Latin: *dulia* or *hyper-dulia*), and the worship given to Christ and the Holy Trinity (in Latin: *latria*). In discovering and accepting the logic of such a distinction, it was no surprise that Newman was beginning to see evidence of it within Catholicism’s liturgical texts such as the Breviary—evidence that Newman had previously, and in some cases deliberately, overlooked (see Withey 1992, 23).

Newman develops an argument in favour of the position that what characterizes Marian devotions within authentic Catholic theology is the characteristic of moderation (Newman 1890, 428). To substantiate this argument, Newman begins with an examination of a work that had personally influenced him greatly in his spiritual journey (Newman 1913, 288), that being the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola, a work which he correctly describes as ‘among the most approved methods of devotion in the modern Catholic Church’ (Newman 1890, 429). For Newman, the *Exercises* were important because they were an example of a Catholic work that outlined a path to God that was direct and without all of the caricatured distractions non-Catholics assume permeate Catholicism—most especially, the ‘distraction’ of the Virgin Mary (Newman 1913, 288). Thus, after describing the nature of the *Exercises* and their importance respectively to Catholic history and spirituality, Newman makes a key point in relation to Catholic devotion to the Virgin Mary: ‘that in a work so highly sanctioned, so widely received, so intimately bearing upon the most sacred points of personal religion, very slight mention occurs of devotion to the Blessed Virgin, Mother of God’ (Newman 1890, 430). Which leads Newman to the broader conclusion:

... that whatever be the influence of the doctrines connected with the Blessed Virgin and the Saints in the Catholic Church, at least they do not impede or obscure the freest exercise and the full-

est manifestation of the devotional feelings towards God and Christ' (Newman 1890, 431).

Of course, non-Catholic critics would contend that such is not the case within Catholicism: that Marian devotion *does* impede the devotional feelings towards God and Christ. Indeed, even Newman would have admitted whilst writing Chapter 11 that at certain times and in certain places, Marian devotions did—at times—become excessive in their emphasis and nature, although as he clearly implies in Chapter 11, such excesses were not the normal practice within Catholicism and certainly not the official teaching of the Church. Around fifteen years after his conversion, Newman left a number of details in the *Apologia pro Vita Sua* that shed much light upon the intent, as well as the most likely sources, that contributed to the line of reasoning evident in Chapter 11. There, in Part 6 of the *Apologia*, Newman introduces the impact and influence that the Irish priest, Charles Russell (1812-1880), later had upon his conversion (Newman 1913, 287). According to Newman, Russell helped him to see that a healthy devotion to the Virgin Mary existed within Catholicism that was not characterized by what Newman then saw (and twenty years later would continue to see) as the undue excesses of some sections of popular piety—particularly as was evident on the Continent (especially Italy) (Newman 1913, 287). Russell had demonstrated this to Newman through sending him what seems to have been quite a number of important texts that Russell believed were representative of Rome's true theological positions. Influential among these texts was a book of sermons by Alphonsus Liguori, which, though at the time—1842—did not result in any major changes to Newman's position regarding Rome, nonetheless helped soften his hard-line position against the place of the Virgin Mary in Catholicism (Newman 1913, 288).

Equally influential among the many texts Russell sent Newman was a bundle of about forty books of popular devotions from Rome, many of them containing Marian devotions (Newman 1913, 288; Newman 1890, 431). They were significant because they demonstrated to Newman that no matter how objectionable in style and

form popular devotions may be (particularly to reserved Englishmen such as himself), they in no way demonstrated the sorts of caricatures non-Catholics made about Mariology coming between the worship of God (Newman 1913, 287-289; Newman 1890, 434, 436). This was a discovery so important for Newman that these sources were included in Chapter 11 of the *Essay on Development* as the final evidence Newman needed to convince himself that Mariology, as it existed in Catholicism, was a true development. Newman's point regarding these works was brief, but nonetheless profoundly fair: their content demonstrated the same point he made regarding the nature and content of the *Exercises*—that a crucial 'distinction is preserved between the worship of God and the honour of an exalted creature', namely, the Virgin Mary (Newman 1890, 434-435).

### Conclusion

The *Essay on Development* put forward the theory that many of the changes evident in the Catholic Church over the centuries could be explained through a process of development: that such changes were natural, legitimate and providential. Newman's use of Marian themes in the *Essay on Development* was, in its simplest terms, a defense of the Virgin Mary's place within Catholicism against the claim that Mariology was an unscriptural innovation to Christianity. In contrast to this, Newman argues that Mariology is a true and organic development—the historical manifestation, that is, of 'premisses [*sic*]...laid, broad and deep' within the mind of the Church (Newman 1890, 144). The *Essay on Development* had been written so that Newman could overcome his doubts about Catholicism. The *Essay on Development* achieved this aim; indeed, it was never actually completed, as Newman had been so convinced that he simply stopped writing and not long after, convinced in his own mind that the Catholic Church was the true Church founded by Christ, Newman decided to take the action he had been agonizing over for so long.

Littlemore, October 8, 1845. I am this night expecting Father Dominic, the Passionist ... He does not know of my intention; but I mean to

ask of him admission into the one Fold of Christ (Newman 1913, 325).

The *Essay on Development* remains one of the most important theological and apologetic works that Newman ever published. Set at what was arguably the most important crossroad in his life, one in which he stood teetering on the edge of conversion to a religious system he once considered the Antichrist, the *Essay* also typified much of Newman’s later approach to Catholic theology—so much of which drew upon continuities developed whilst Newman was an Anglican. In this sense the *Essay* contained within it theological seeds that would later develop as Newman continued to defend Catholic dogma (as well as his own personal acceptance of it) late into the nineteenth century. Newman’s defence of Catholic Mariology in the *Essay* is, in many ways, illustrative of this future development—with its inseparable continuity to an Anglican past. The Virgin Mary in the *Essay*—who, as has been shown, typified for the Anglican Newman the very reality (in her own person) of institutional, religious

development—was deeply associated with the earliest patristic witness, was an inseparable part of the early Church’s Christological debates and was a creature venerated, not worshipped, by Christ’s Church—especially in the Church’s formal decrees and liturgical texts. This latter point would prove crucial to Newman’s later debates with non-Catholics, especially his former Tractarian ally, Edward Bouverie Pusey (1800-1882), who pointed to many of the extreme—and off-putting—examples of Marian devotional excess as evidence that the Blessed Virgin Mary sometimes seemed to be worshipped in place of the Holy Trinity (cf. Andrews 2007, 36-41). For Newman, the Our Lady of Scripture and Patristic witness was a model of obedience to her Divine and Incarnate Son, not a figure to displace the worship of the one true God. Because of her crucial role in the incarnation—and thus redemption—of humanity, her role in the development of Christian doctrine was an inseparable part of the original deposit of faith given to the Apostles in the first century.

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