

Development of Doctrine and the Sacramental Principle according to John Henry Newman

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Summary: The article defends the thesis that at the center of Newman’s vision of the development of doctrine lies the sacramental principle of Christianity. This principle, which runs throughout history and whose highest expression is the doctrine of the Incarnation, tells us that the divine manifests itself in the visible and tangible aspects of human life. Precisely for this reason, the sacramental principle implies the notion of development, since we live and mature in time. The article explores, then, how development applies, firstly, to the growth in faith of each believer and, secondly, to the growth of the whole Church. The ground is thus prepared to address, thirdly, the seven notes elaborated by Newman to describe the development of doctrine, and to see how the sacramental principle gives unity to these notes.

Keywords: John Henry Newman, Development of Doctrine, Sacrament, Ecclesiology, Tradition, Dogma.

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If St. Athanasius or St. Ambrose were suddenly to come to life again... This is what John Henry Newman asks himself in a famous passage of his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*. And he adds that

it cannot be doubted what communion he would take to be his own. All surely will agree that these Fathers, with whatever opinions of their own, whatever protests, if we will, would find themselves more at home with such men as St. Bernard or St. Ignatius Loyola, or with the lonely priest in his lodging, or the holy sisterhood of mercy, or the unlettered crowd before the altar, than with the teachers or with the members of any other creed.¹

¹ Cf. J. H. Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (Notre Dame University Press, Notre Dame 1989) (= *Essay*) 97-98.

We see how Newman always sought in ancient history a light for his own time. Let us recall another passage of his, now from the *Apologia*: “In the middle of the fifth century, I found, as it seemed to me, Christendom of the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries reflected. I saw my face in that mirror, and I was a Monophysite. The Church of the *Via Media* was in the position of the Oriental communion, Rome was, where she now is; and the Protestants were the Eutychians.”²

These reflections do not imply anachronism on Newman’s part. For his entire essay on development seeks to prove that such an actualization of history is possible; that is, that it is possible to find a law that moves the times, for only thus can different moments be compared with one another and the living forms that animate them—and their eventual corruptions—be identified.

And if Newman were suddenly to come to life again?

The hypothesis of a Newman who has come to life again is pertinent because his recent canonization and proclamation as a Doctor of the Church has coincided with greater interest in his writings, and in particular in his vision of the development of dogma. Newman’s acute sense of history resonates with our weary modernity; with faith in progress exhausted, the question of the march of time confronts us anew. The crisis of rationalism rekindles the search for other models of development which, like Newman’s, take into account the concrete and incarnate fabric of time, and are not based on the triumphal march of reason.³ When Newman addresses the question of historical progress, he does so not from the perspective of autonomous reason that dominates the world, but based on a receptive reason that matures within the world. Where faith in progress has failed, Newman may present himself as an option.

Furthermore, there is talk today within the Church and in theological debates not merely of an era of change but the change of an era. While Newman wrote his *Essay* to illuminate the conflict between different Christian confessions, today it serves to illuminate discussions within those same confessions, particularly within the Catholic Church. These discussions are no longer limited to debates between schools of thought; rather, they are disagreements regarding what each party considers indispensable elements of the faith. Consider such disputed topics as the ordination of women, the indissolubility of sacramental marriage, or the difference between man and woman as the key to human sexuality.⁴

All parties to the debate on these and similar issues could turn to Newman today.⁵ But would Newman be on our side? The answer is not obvious, for Newman defended both

² J. H. Newman, *Apologia pro vita sua. Being a History of His Religious Opinions* (Penguin, London 2004) (= *Apologia*) 114.

³ Cf. A. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN 1988) 353-354, where MacIntyre acknowledges his “enormous debt” to Newman when it comes to thinking about a historical development that takes into account, together with the reason or idea, its practical forms of realization in different communities.

⁴ For an example of how the question of women’s ordination is raised again despite clear magisterial statements, cf. J. Rahner, “Wie definitiv ist das Verbot der Frauenordination? Eine Frage der Theologie,” in *Herder Korrespondenz* 71 (2017) 47-51.

⁵ Cf. T. Merrigan, “Newman and Theological Liberalism,” in *Theological Studies* 66 (2019) 605-621.

continuity and change, and one can appeal to either aspect to support opposing positions.

However, Newman did not limit himself to merely affirming the existence of continuity and change; he was more precise. He held a theory regarding change itself—a theory which, in his view, belongs to the principles of the Christian faith, principles which do not evolve.⁶ That is to say, the doctrine of development does not itself develop; rather, it establishes the law of time that allows one to determine if a specific development is legitimate. From this vantage point, it becomes possible to clarify whether we stand with or against Newman. Rather than looking at the changes proposed by a theory, one must study the explanatory law that governs those changes. If, as Newman affirms, development can be compared to a curve defined by a mathematical formula,⁷ do we agree with that formula? And does that formula shed light on today's debates?

To grasp the full scope of Newman's vision, I propose three steps. *First*, we will observe that Newman, while writing on the development of doctrine, pays attention to his own personal development—a journey that eventually led him to the Catholic Church. In this way, his theory acquires vital characteristics, for it contains within itself the contours and rhythm of a spiritual trajectory applicable to the biography of every person. This constitutes the *anthropological key to doctrinal development*. From there, in a *second step*, we see that the theory of development takes shape in the passage from the personal subject and his or her path in time to the corporate subject that is the Church herself: this is the *communitarian key to development*. This personal and communitarian development allows us, in a *third step*, to investigate the *formula of development* itself, examining it, so to speak, from its firm points, whereby the laws or principles of such development can be studied.⁸

From these analyses, a conclusion emerges: *the form of doctrinal development follows the sacramental principle*, the culminating doctrine of which is the Incarnation. This sacramental principle implies that the divine gift is conveyed to us “in a material and visible medium,” thereby uniting heaven and earth.⁹ According to Newman, the Catholic Church is distinguished from other confessions by the fact that she adopts the sacramental form of living time—a form present from creation, yet brought to a new depth in the body of Christ.

I. The Development of Doctrine: The Anthropological Key

Newman examined doctrinal development during his lifetime because he needed to resolve the difficulty that history poses to faith: namely, how do we know that we remain in contact with the original source of revelation? Over time, Newman came to

⁶ Cf. Newman, *Essay*, 326, including note 1, with reference to *Apologia*, 198, where development is counted as one of the principles of Christianity, the continuity of which ensures that the Christian idea remains the same.

⁷ Cf. Newman, *Essay*, 326, nota 1.

⁸ I proceed along the lines of those proposed by J. Guittou, *La philosophie de Newman: essai sur l'idée de développement* (Boivin, Paris 1933) ch. III. Guittou justifies his scheme by analyzing *University Sermon XV* (psychological point of view), the first part of the *Essay* (sociological point of view) and the seven notes (normative point of view).

⁹ Newman, *Essay*, 325.

realize that this development offered not only the solution to a theological problem but also a key to the life of the Church and the personal path of every believer. Newman discovered that a central part of the Christian salvific message is precisely its capacity to mature in time, such that time itself becomes a channel of salvation. What the theory of development seeks, therefore, is the formula of Christian time as salvific time.

To appreciate the significance of time, we can look at how Newman narrates his own life. It is well-known that Newman's turn to Rome coincided with the light he received from his *Essay*, a work he left unfinished, concluding with the words: *Nunc dimittis*. The idea of development assumed a prominent place for him, not only as the development of Christian doctrine but as a vital development and a path toward the Catholic Church. This is equally evident in his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*. There, the account of his life—centered on the development of his religious ideas—amounts to a defense of himself and the faith he professed.

This is how our author explains his decision to write the *Apologia*: An adversary had accused him of having no regard for the truth. Newman realized that this objection, even if unsupported by any concrete text, would be easily believed by readers; it relied on a context of prevailing prejudice, which acted as antecedent probabilities tipping the scales against him. He could have responded to the attacks one by one, but this would not have convinced his readers, for human reason does not operate in a vacuum; it is embodied in an environment that inclines and directs reason toward certain conclusions. Therefore, Newman sought a unifying idea that would neutralize the attack, providing a new narrative context for the public judging him, thereby counteracting the criticisms. Where was he to find such a unifying idea?

That unifying concept proved to be the account of Newman's life itself, viewed as the account of the development of his religious ideas. "I must, I said, give the true key to my whole life; I must show what I am, that it may be seen what I am not.... False ideas may be refuted indeed by argument, but by true ideas alone are they expelled."¹⁰ In his *Apologia*, Newman triumphs because he succeeds in demonstrating the unity of his own life, which, despite its variations, reveals itself as a single idea developed coherently. The coherence of development conveyed in this narrative refutes the misleading view of Newman as someone who is erratic, inconsistent, and interested only in intrigue. It is true that Newman's life involves a conversion, but this conversion is seen as a step taken in fidelity to principles that were planted from the very beginning. Thus, to use the language of his *Grammar of Assent*, Newman manages to communicate not merely a notional and abstract defense, but a real, concrete, living defense of himself.

In this way, not only was Newman's life justified, but also, indirectly, the very Catholic faith he embraced. The reason for this is that Newman's conversion coincided with the illumination he gained regarding the development of Christian doctrine. The defense of the continuity of his religious ideas laid the foundations for a defense of the continuity of the Catholic faith. The parallel between Newman's life and the Catholic Church's journey through time implies a parallel between the *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* and the *Essay on the Development of Doctrine*.¹¹

¹⁰ Cf. Newman, *Apologia*, 15.

¹¹ Cf. B. Conrad, "Ideengeschichte als Biographie – Der Entwicklungsgedanke bei John Henry Newman," in *Journal for the History of Modern Theology / Zeitschrift für Neuere Theologiegeschichte* 19

We find the personal side of development theorized in the last of the *University Sermons*, number XV. There, the development of doctrine is illustrated by the figure of the Virgin Mary, who pondered in her heart the word she had received.¹² For Newman, Mary symbolizes the labor of reason delving into what is known by faith, for it is the proper function of reason to unfold, over time, the richness of revelation. This is why, in this sermon, Newman accounts for the progressive use of reason by the faithful and by theologians.

The life of Mary and indeed that of every believer appear here as the development of an idea—a development that follows the activity of reason deepening its grasp of revealed faith. This, in turn, has consequences for how we understand reason: it proves to be a *vital reason*, inasmuch as it matures when the whole person matures. This is why Newman could say that “man is not a reasoning animal; he is a seeing, feeling, contemplating, acting animal.”¹³ This intuition can be clarified by the distinction between the implicit and the explicit, which appears in Sermon XV. What does this difference consist of?

The implicit-explicit pair could be described from a purely logical standpoint: certain conclusions are implicit in the premises, and reasoning leads us to make them explicit. But this is not Newman’s vision. He certainly acknowledges mathematical development, but he does not consider it doctrinal development in the true sense, perhaps because it cannot be corrupted, nor can it give birth to something new.¹⁴ Doctrinal development in the proper sense (and therefore also the distinction between implicit and explicit) takes into account the whole person, in body and soul.

A characteristic of the developments Newman describes in the *Essay* is that they are developments of ideas that have taken flesh, and whose flesh participates in the development, conditioning or enriching it.¹⁵ Hence, Newman compares the knowledge of an idea to sensory knowledge, as if the two were in the same realm.¹⁶ This applies to religious ideas, which are born not of abstract reasoning but of the distinct impression that the living God leaves upon us—an impression that gives unity to all our reasoning about him, just as the impression of an object on our senses does. As we see, reason, as Newman understands it, is not a self-contained faculty based on clear and distinct ideas, but a reason receptive to reality, situated in a concrete space and time, and needing that space and time to grow and become clearer. What kind of reason is this, then?

There is, without doubt, a great distance between reason and sensory knowledge. However, they share the characteristic of being situated before an object that gives unity

(2012) 1-13; I share the intuition of this essay, because of the parallel it establishes between Newman’s life and the development of doctrine, but I interpret this parallel in a different sense than the author, who is more interested in looking for projections of Newman’s life on his way of understanding the history of the Church.

¹² Cf. J. H. Newman, *Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford Between A.D. 1826 and 1843* (University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana 1997) (= *University Sermons*) 312.

¹³ J. H. Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, IN 2005) 90.

¹⁴ Cf. Newman, *Essay*, 41.

¹⁵ Cf. Newman, *Essay*, 41-54.

¹⁶ Cf. Newman, *University Sermons*, 330; 347-349: “And what is true of reliance on our senses, is true of all the information which it has pleased God to vouchsafe to us, whether in nature or in grace” (349).

to all distinct perceptions of it. In fact, Newman speaks of knowledge as something living, proper to an organic being that feels the world; this life of knowledge consists in grasping God himself as an object—an object we can never know totally, and which we cannot know all at once.

There is certainly a difference between what is grasped by the senses on the one hand and spiritual knowledge on the other. One difference, according to Newman, lies in the fact that the idea impressed upon us requires the mediation of language and its formulas to express itself.¹⁷ Thus, formulas stand in relation to the unitary perception of the object within us as distinct sensory impressions stand to the unitary perception of an object perceived through the senses. Since formulas never manage to exhaust the object, one can always progress in them, refine them further, and include new aspects. Moreover, such formulas will normally be accompanied by other modes of perceiving the object. Newman includes here parables, myths, and stories, which influence the imagination and form part of our way of knowing and growing in knowledge.

All this explains why the reasons that move us somehow escape our direct control, since we are embodied beings who know through our embodied condition. For these reasons proceed from the totality of our bodily perceptions, from the people we trust, from the traditions we have received, and from our customs established over time. This implies that reason can only advance if it relies on the patience of time and on the concrete circumstances in which it operates, including the community that constitutes its environment. Thus, Newman rejects Locke's rationalist vision, where reason controls each of its processes by clearly distinguishing everything known; according to Newman, Locke's model is not the real human reason, situated in the world and needing to mature. Newman calls, we might say, for a *filial reason*, which becomes like "a little child" and allows itself to be guided by faith, for only in faith is reality itself given to it, allowing it to know its object ever better.¹⁸

Looking at how the idea is present in concrete reality, we can illustrate the difference, noted above, between mathematical and logical development, with their two ways of passing from the implicit to the explicit.¹⁹ While mathematical development is pure deduction, logical development is the mode in which an idea is realized amidst the concrete vicissitudes of history. In contrast to mathematical development, in logical development the idea guides a material process that in turn influences the development of the idea. In short, because it is bound to this visible world, reason does not deduce merely mathematically; it is always situated in a given space and time, much like how a friend is recognized by his words and deeds, or how the same author is seen present in his various writings.²⁰

¹⁷ Cf. Newman, *University Sermons*, 333: "This obvious distinction follows between sensible and religious ideas, that we put the latter into language in order to fix, teach, and transmit them, but not the former."

¹⁸ Newman, *University Sermons*, 351: "Reason can but ascertain the profound difficulties of our condition, it cannot remove them; it has no work, it makes no beginning, it does but continually fall back, till it is content to be a little child, and to follow where Faith guides it."

¹⁹ Cf. Newman, *Essay*, 45-46.

²⁰ Cf. J. H. Newman, *Letter to Henry Wilbeforce*, 1848, in W. Ward, "The Life of John Henry Cardinal Newman, Based on His private Journals and correspondence" vol. I, 616-617, where he uses

From this point of view, Newman can be seen as a critic of modern rationalism, and in this sense as akin to the “masters of suspicion” enumerated by Paul Ricoeur (Marx, Nietzsche, Freud), insofar as they regard deductive reason with suspicion and detect other hidden logics.²¹ Yet Newman does not eliminate, as these “masters” do, the primacy of reason, of the idea, or of truth. His logic is never a logic of the will to possess, nor of instinct or power; it continues to be a logic of the true for its own sake. The hidden presuppositions come to reason from the fact that it is a *responsive reason*, which acts starting from what it receives from another, and which receives and acts in a bodily way, situated in the world and in history.

In this appreciation of embodied knowledge, we note the influence of Aristotle on Newman. Aristotle is valued because he takes as his model not an ideal reason but rather the concrete human being, situated among things and in need of time.²² For Newman, as for Aristotle, reason is “practical reason”—reason that knows within the action that involves the person and never outside of action—reason marked by affections and by the moral goodness of the one employing it. In fact, to explain his “illative sense,” with which we obtain the great certainties of life, Newman uses Aristotelian prudence (*phronesis*) as an example.²³ Underlying Newman’s epistemology is the Christian sacramental principle, where the idea is clothed in concrete matter and operates through it. We will return to this point later.

From this perspective, one also understands the distinction between objective and subjective development, a distinction Newman proposes in his private correspondence with Perrone regarding the possibility of doctrinal development.²⁴ There, Newman presents his theory as subjective development, not objective, insofar as revelation itself has been given once and for all and, therefore, admits of no increase. However, Newman clarifies that the objective is in reality subjective, insofar as the objective is God revealing himself—that is, revealing what he knows subjectively (Perrone finds no difficulty with this). Consequently, the relationship between the objective and the subjective is not that of an isolated subject coming to know the impersonal objects of the world, but that of a subject revealing himself to another, *cor ad cor* (heart to heart). Doctrinal development is subjective not because it occurs only in the human being’s

these two comparisons to describe how he came to the conclusion that the Catholic Church was that of the Church Fathers.

²¹ Cf. P. Ricoeur, *De l’interprétation* (Seuil, Paris 1965) cap. II, n. 3.

²² On the influence of Aristotle on Newman’s epistemology, cf. A. Meszaros, “The Influence of Aristotelian Rhetoric on J. H. Newman’s Epistemology,” in *Zeitschrift für Neuere Theologiegeschichte* 20 (2014) 192-225; cf. A. MacIntyre, “The Very Idea of a University: Aristotle, Newman and Us,” in *New Blackfriars* 91 (2010) 4-19. Newman asserts, in *The Idea of a University*, that to think properly is, in many matters, to think like Aristotle: J. H. Newman, *The Idea of a University Defined and Illustrated* (Longmans, London 1907) (= *Idea of a University*) 109-110: “While the world lasts, will Aristotle’s doctrine on these matters last, for he is the oracle of nature and of truth. While we are men, we cannot help, to a great extent, being Aristotelians, for the great Master does but analyze the thoughts, feelings, views, and opinions of human kind. He has told us the meaning of our own words and ideas, before we were born. In many subject-matters, to think correctly, is to think like Aristotle; and we are his disciples whether we will or not, though we may not know it.”

²³ Cf. Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 276-281.

²⁴ Cf. R. T. Lynch, “Textus nunc primo editus: The Newman-Perrone Paper on Development,” in *Gregorianum* 16 (1935) 402-447.

interior or from his point of view, but because it falls to the human being to assimilate the revelation of God in his whole being, welcoming it in the human mode.

According to this, the idea of development goes hand in hand with the intimate presence of God in the life of the believer and, therefore, with providence. Newman establishes a parallel between providence, which sustains the created world, and the development of revealed Christian doctrine. That there is providence in creation inclines one to accept that there exists a development, increasing what Newman calls “antecedent probabilities.” Therefore, just as there is a personal providence, development is not only a general law but applies to each person in his or her concrete path toward the true. This personalization of development becomes more patent starting from Christ, who is for Newman the “sacrament of God’s providence,” the one who convinces us of the concreteness and affective closeness of such providence.²⁵ Analogously, development relies on the sacraments (including here, the exercise of the magisterium as part of the sacrament of orders) to become concrete in the life of the believer.

In this light, we could say that there exists not only a theory of development but a spirituality of development. The poem Newman composed upon his return to England after a long journey through Europe, *Lead, Kindly Light*, is famous.²⁶ Here, the law of time appears as the law of human humility that allows itself to be led by God. In effect, Newman affirms that while he once wanted to see the distant scene, he is now content for the future that God lights one small step at a time. Armed with confidence, Newman can embark on a new venture that overwhelms him with a sense of purpose, even though he knows, as he expressed in the poem *Semita Iustorum*, that this path will be fraught with pain and trials.²⁷

Thus, this first perception of a time of grace opening before him is followed by a second moment when he writes his *Essay on Development*. Then, the key is no longer the light of the single step which God illuminates before us (and which, though small, is divine and illuminates much). Rather, the key lies in the cumulative steps that mature and bear novelty within themselves. It is the law of birth throughout time, the law of memory which, treasuring the past, brings forth something greater than itself. Newman can then identify “development” with “what is spiritual,” as when he affirms that the Lord rebuked the Pharisees for not following the spirit of the letter—that is, for not following the developments of that letter.²⁸

According to Jean Guitton, Newman’s genius lies in this personal perspective on development that expands to cover the entire history of the Church. This distinguishes him from two other authors who were his contemporaries and who also developed a philosophy of history: Spencer and Hegel. According to Guitton, Spencer models his thought on physical development and Hegel on the ideal, while only Newman locates the key in the person’s global working toward the true, which is the highest and most complete key to understanding history. To grasp this point well, it is necessary to pass

²⁵ Cf. J. H. Newman, “A Particular Providence as Revealed in the Gospel”, in: J. H. Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons* (Longmans, London 1907) vol. III, 114-127.

²⁶ Cf. Newman, *Apologia*, 35.

²⁷ Cf. J. H. Newman, “Semita Iustorum”, in: J. H. Newman, *Verses on Various Occasions* (Longmans, London 1903) 187. ²⁸ Cf. Newman, *Essay*, 177.

²⁸ Cf. Newman, *Essay*, 177

from biographical data, which is personal, to the history of the whole Church—a step inherent in Newman’s anthropology of development, insofar as human beings always belong to a community. Therefore, just as in his *Confessions*, St. Augustine framed his life within the global account of the Body of Christ, so Newman situates his personal development within that of the whole Church. For Newman, the idea, like one’s own story, only develops as a corporate idea. What form does this development take?

II. Development in the Subject That Is the Church

Newman combined his generative vision of personal time with the 19th-century conception of the development of a people or nation, whose spirit evolves through the ages. Precisely because of his incarnate vision of reason, Newman understood that reason does not remain enclosed within the individual but lives and matures in interpersonal relationships. This explains why Newman said that it is not so much that individual minds use the doctrine as it is that the doctrine uses the minds.²⁹

This saying does not imply that individual reason lacks value. Newman does not believe that the individual knows only a fragment of a grand design wrought independently of him—a view that would lead to accepting a Hegelian “cunning of reason,” where a universal reason uses the ignorant individual to execute its design. We note, for example, that in *The Idea of a University*, Newman criticizes specialized studies because, even though they advance a specific science, they narrow the mind of the investigator.³⁰ Each individual reason is called to ascend until it embraces the vision of the whole, which is the proper function of the University. The key to Newman’s approach is that it allows for a description of the history of society as a whole, surpassing what any single individual experiences, without negating the participation of each person. In fact, the entire process remains accessible to every member.

From this perspective emerges a view of history that, while overcoming a rationalism that despised history or viewed it merely as the unstoppable march of progress, also rejects the Hegelian reading of history as the logical development of a divine idea indistinguishable from history itself. This is because the subject that knows the idea is not a divine subject constituting itself in history, but the Church: an incarnate subject passing through time, carrying the divine idea within herself and gradually assimilating it.

Here, the *sacramental principle* is decisive. According to this principle, the visible Church is the chosen locus of God’s revelation: “I was confident in the truth of a certain definite religious teaching, based upon this foundation of dogma; viz. that there was a visible Church, with sacraments and rites which are the channels of invisible grace. ... Here again, I have not changed my opinion.”³¹ The sacramental principle implies that the idea is always found associated with a visible body and with the visible

²⁹ Cf. Newman, *University Sermons*, XV, 317: “... so that the doctrine may rather be said to use the minds of Christians, than to be used by them.”

³⁰ Cf. Newman, *Idea of a University*, Discourse VII, 168: “There can be no doubt that every art is improved by confining the professor of it to that single study. But, *although the art itself is advanced by this concentration of mind in its service, the individual who is confined to it goes back*. The advantage of the community is nearly in an inverse ratio with his own” (Newman cites Copleston here).

³¹ Newman, *Apologia*, 49.

development of this body in history. Outside of this body and time, it is impossible to recognize the idea. Here, Newman's anthropology of development joins hands with his ecclesiology of development, insofar as both account for the incarnate condition of the idea.

Let us give an example of this unity between the idea and the body. For Newman, those who anticipate the development of an idea, but do so out of season, are heretics—even if the Church later accepts what they said.³² Heretics, therefore, cannot be rehabilitated from the perspective of a later time; they can only be judged within their own time. Newman expounds this view in his correspondence with Perrone. He maintains that heresy arises from separating the idea from the body and the time proper to its development. It is as if, in a symphony, one violinist were to anticipate a later movement, justifying him or herself by arguing that the music leads there anyway. By acting in this way, the violinist would ruin the entire symphony. An idea, then, is not the same idea if it is ahead of its time, since the truth of the idea does not lie in the idea alone, but in the way in which the idea animates and enlivens the flesh, or in the conformity of the idea with the flesh that thinks and lives the idea.

An image used by Newman himself clarifies his thought on the Church as the place where the idea is incarnated.³³ It involves contrasting two representations of the life of Jesus: the Virgin with the Child on the one hand, and the Virgin at the foot of the Cross on the other. For Newman, the Virgin represents the Church, who is united with Christ, the revealed Truth. The image of Mary at the foot of the Cross is proper to the Anglican Church. When still an Anglican, Newman believed this was an advantage: the Church is separate from objective truth, so it can transmit it in its apostolic purity without commingling with it. Conversely, in the second case—that of the Virgin with the Child, which represents the Catholic Church—the Truth is “lying hid in the bosom of the Church as if one with her, clinging to and (as it were) lost in her embrace.”³⁴ Newman will be increasingly inclined toward this second position: without eliminating the distinction between the idea and the Church, the Church carries the idea within herself and continues to give birth to it in history.

I believe that Newman's understanding of the fullness of revelation in the Church explains his position on the dogma of infallibility and, therefore, on the figure of the Pope.³⁵ It is well known that, prior to the First Vatican Council, Newman privately

³² Cf. Lynch, “The Newman-Perrone Paper on Development”, 420: “Quam vocem Ecclesiae non expectantes, sed immaturo tempore veritatem in hac vel illa re marte suo praeipere volentes, temerarii homines, non veritatem, quam quaerunt, sed haeresim sibi asciscere solent.”

³³ Cf. Newman, *Apologia*, 112: “The peculiarity of the Anglican theology was this,—that it ‘supposed the Truth to be entirely objective and detached, not’ (as in the theology of Rome) ‘lying hid in the bosom of the Church as if one with her, clinging to and (as it were) lost in her embrace, but as being sole and unapproachable, as on the Cross or at the Resurrection, with the Church close by, but in the background.’” Newman cites here an article that appeared in *British Critic* in October 1838.

³⁴ Cf. Newman, *Apologia*, 112

³⁵ J. R. Page, *What will Dr. Newman do? John Henry Newman and papal infallibility, 1865-1875* (Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minn 1994); D. P. Long, “John Henry Newman, Infallibility, and the Development of Christian Doctrine,” in *Heythrop Journal* 58 (2017) 181-194; L. J. King, “Newman and Gasser on Infallibility: Vatican I and Vatican II,” in *Newman Studies Journal* 8 (2011) 27-39; P. Price, “John Henry Cardinal Newman and Papal Infallibility,” in *Pacifica* 24 (2011) 58-79; D. P. Long, “John Henry Newman, Infallibility, and the Development of Christian Doctrine,” in *Heythrop Journal* 58 (2017) 181-194.

expressed certain reservations about the dogmatic declaration—not regarding the doctrine itself, but regarding the opportuneness of its definition. Newman believed that such a definition would disturb many and that it did not respond to a real, opposing heresy, as had been the case with the conciliar definitions of the ancient Church. He went so far as to say that if the Lord allows this definition, it is because the day of his victory is delayed.³⁶ This can be read as a word of caution about the difficulty that the definition will present for many Anglicans, preventing them from entering the Catholic Church. However, it can also be interpreted in another way. The need for the definition of papal infallibility reveals that significant challenges will subsequently arise within the Church regarding the acceptance of her authority. Therefore, much greater clarity will be needed: that of *ex cathedra* definitions.

Be that as it may, from Newman’s point of view, infallibility resides primarily in the whole Church. It is a matter of the Church not as an interior or spiritual subject, but as a *sacramental* subject, and therefore infallible in her visible teaching, practices, and rites.³⁷ This infallibility provides assurance about the correct development of doctrine, so that this development can be accepted without the need for complex historical analysis that is not accessible to everyone. It is true that there are “notes” that allow one to confirm this development (we will discuss them shortly), but these notes function primarily *a posteriori*, as a confirmation of development already effected. Once this infallibility, which is sacramentally revealed in the visible Church, is accepted, it is easy to move on to papal infallibility, visible within the visible Church.

The sacramental vision of the Church is thus the channel that sustains and ensures the infallibility of the Pope. This is why it has been said that Newman already viewed Vatican I from the perspective of its completion in Vatican II, which situates the Pope’s infallibility within the Church as a whole³⁸. Newman accepts that the Pope can make a dogmatic definition on his own, because he understands that the Pope is not in fact alone, but acts as the head of the Church.

As we can see, just as development is essential to understanding personal history, so too it is essential to understanding the Church. If the former gives us the key to approaching each biography, the latter reveals the meaning of the entire history of salvation. The Catholic Church is, therefore, also a way of living time, a time guided by God’s providence, so that human beings may fully assimilate his word. That is why Newman increasingly comes to terms with the idea of “giving birth” to doctrine like a mother and sees here an image of development. Thus, he tells Perrone that after heretics deny a truth and a discussion takes place in the Church, “a new dogma is born after a difficult birth” (*post difficilem partum dogma novum nascitur*).³⁹ In the university sermons, he speaks of the barrenness of heresies, which give birth to nothing because they are dead.⁴⁰

³⁶ Cf. I. Ker, *John Henry Newman. A Biography* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 1988) 652.

³⁷ Cf. A. Dulles, “Newman on Infallibility,” in *Theological Studies* 51 (1990) 434-449.

³⁸ Cf. I. Ker, *Newman on Vatican II* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014) 77-78.

³⁹ Cf. Lynch, “The Newman-Perrone Paper on Development”, 417. Perrone does not appreciate this comparison and responds: “Non oritur dogma novum – sed vetus veritas nova definitione explicite credenda proponitur.”

⁴⁰ Cf. Newman, *Oxford University Sermons*, 318.

Given the close relationship between personal history and ecclesial history that we see in Newman, the parallel drawn by Jean Guitton between the works of St. Augustine and Newman is worthy of attention. In addition to the already mentioned parallel between the *Confessions* and the *Apologia*, Guitton associates *The City of God* with the *Essay on the Development of Doctrine*. The reason is that in the latter work, the Church appears as a sacramental reality that works in the midst of the world. Just as Augustine contrasts the city of man with the city of God, Newman's Christian idea confronts other ideas and, thanks to its vigor, assimilates them.⁴¹ What is new about Newman's vision is that he articulated how the Christian idea matured over time, showing its progress toward eternity.

To summarize: in his research, Newman discovers that, while the Anglican Church seemed to shine for her fidelity to the past, thus maintaining the note of apostolicity, true fidelity to the past is fidelity to the channel through which doctrine flows. Moreover, this is a *sacramental* channel, for the Christian idea is not abstract; it lives in human hearts and in the communion of the visible Church traversing the ages, like a mother giving birth to the truth. Newman thus understands the universality of the Catholic Church not only as extension across the whole world but also as the capacity to give unity to all times.

From this fullness of the Church in time—analogue to what we would expect in the development of a personal life—several concrete notes emerge which allow us to formulate the curve of development, distinguishing between true development and corruption.

III. Examination of the Seven Notes

The foregoing allows us to interpret Newman's seven notes, which he also calls tests or laws.⁴² We will see that these notes, which serve to confirm the continuity of a doctrine, are in turn based on a specific doctrine of development and the meaning of history.⁴³ Furthermore, given that doctrinal development is analogue to the development of each believer's life and that of the Church, these notes can also be applied to the growth in faith of individual Christians and of the community as a whole, constituting a kind of law of human time in its progression toward God.

I propose ordering the seven notes as follows⁴⁴:

⁴¹ Newman draws a parallel between the words Augustine heard at his conversion, and those he heard from Augustine in the mouth of a friend: *Securus iudical orbis terrarum* (cf. Newman, *Apologia*, 116-117).

⁴² Cf. Lynch, "The Newman-Perrone Paper", 430: "si locus hic esse disputandi, longior esse possem in hac re; cum regulas saltem septem positas vellem, quibus consuli deberet in iis accessionibus ad dogma fidei factis, quae legitimae censendae sunt." Newman speaks of "tests" in the first edition of the *Essay*.

⁴³ G. H. McCarren, "Tests" or "Notes"? *A Critical Evaluation of the Criteria for Genuine Doctrinal Development in John Henry Newman's Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (Thesis – Catholic University of America, Washington, DC 1998).

⁴⁴ The notes are not of a practical nature, but rather of a scientific and argumentative nature (cf. *Essay*, 78). On the applicability of the notes, cf. G. H. McCarren, "Development of Doctrine", in: I. Ker – T. Merrigan (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to John Henry Newman* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2009) 118-136.

- a. The first (*preservation of type*) and second (*continuity of principles*) notes form the substrate of the rest, for they describe the basic form of an idea incarnated in the world and in time.
- b. The third note (*power of assimilation*) places this idea in relation to the external environment that surrounds and accompanies it, describing the dynamics of interaction.
- c. From the fourth note to the seventh note, the focus is on the time the idea takes to develop. First (the fourth note), this process follows a logic—not a deductive logic, but the logic of a living being, known clearly only *a posteriori* (*logical sequence*). Subsequently, the fifth note looks to the future (*anticipation of its future*), while the sixth note (*conservative action upon its past*) contemplates the past, The final note underscores the *chronic vigor* of an idea, that is, the way in which it sustains itself over time.

We have, then, the description of an idea as a *living* reality (a), its spatial context in relation to other ideas (b), and the law of its temporal development (c). In this way, the notes reflect the sacramental tenor of development: the fact that the idea is always incarnated in space and time. How can these sacramental features be discovered in each note?

a) The *unity of type* brings us close to living organisms and the way they develop, though Newman also includes other examples, such as the character of a person or a nation. This unitary type is grasped primarily from outside the living being, from its external manifestation. Therefore, when Newman applies the note to the Church, the key is to understand how the Church was perceived by the outside world, how it appeared in the eyes of history to those outside it.⁴⁵ This helps to propose the note on the continuity of type also to non-believers, starting from the verifiable facts of history. We are facing a key feature of the sacramental principle: its external character, recognizable not only from the intimate sphere but from what is in the plain sight of all. Newman's conclusion is well known, and it tells us how he sees the relationship between the Church and the rest of non-believing society and secular power. According to Newman, the Catholic Church has been seen as a well-organized community that claims to have a divine mission and maintains that other religious bodies are heretical or infidel; furthermore, this community is accused by society of being a criminal superstition; it is despised for its ignorance, and considered fearsome, whether in the time of the Fathers or in modern times.⁴⁶

Along with the unity of type, which is the external manifestation, there appears the *continuity of principles*, where life is viewed from within, along its main dimensions. For Newman, principles are the original personal and ethical experience that inspires life and that serves as the basis for the articulation and development of doctrine. It is interesting that Newman comes to assume similar principles in our experience as creatures and in our experience of grace. Newman always keeps in mind this equivalence: the Creator is the same God who has revealed himself. Thus, he says that pagans can hold the same principles as believers, whereas heretics cannot, because a

⁴⁵ Newman, *Essay*, 207: "... as the world now views it", "as the world once viewed it": *Essay*, 208: "prima facie", "in the eyes of witnesses external to it."

⁴⁶ Newman, *Essay*, 208.

continuity of principles exists between creation and redemption, while every heresy denies these principles.⁴⁷

The concrete principles that Newman enumerates confirm his sacramental vision of the Church. He states that the central truth of Christianity, the Incarnation, establishes the sacramental principle, and he insists on the sacramental significance of the word, on the grace transmitted in the sacrament, and on the sanctification of matter. Added to this are the principles of dogma, faith, and theology, which are also consequences of a sacramental logic, because they depend on the appearance of the idea in the flesh and on the human response to it.

b) The third note refers to the relationship of the living idea with the surrounding environment of other ideas. The unity of type already implies a relationship with the environment in terms of how the idea is manifested in it, and in terms of how the idea is viewed from outside. However, the true relationship with the environment cannot be measured only from the outside or in a static mode, given that it arises from within the idea itself, from its vigor to relate to the environment and assimilate it. This is what is illuminated in the third note, *power of assimilation*. It contemplates the idea in its relationships, and since the idea is incarnate or sacramental, its development requires interaction with its surroundings: “Doctrines and views which relate to man are not placed in a void, but in the crowded world, and make way for themselves by interpenetration, and develop by absorption.”⁴⁸

c) The last four notes are also associated with the sacramental principle, specifically regarding its capacity to develop in time. In other words, these four final notes speak of the internal continuity of the time of development.

Newman addresses first the place of logic in history (fourth note: *logical sequence*). History has its logical development, not because it follows a determinism moving from premises to corollaries, but because what evolves is an idea that has taken flesh. We are dealing here with a personal and living logic.⁴⁹ Certainly, being universal, the logical principle lends itself to apologetic use when addressing non-believers, and in this outward visibility it is connected to the first note.⁵⁰ But, on the other hand, it is a logic that can only be discovered after the fact, in an exercise of memory that looks back on the path traveled, detecting its continuity.

An example of logical development (not used by Newman) is the way in which spousal symbolism shaped the Church’s marital practice in the Middle Ages.⁵¹ The idea (spousal symbolism) was not a byproduct of a process moved by alien social interests; rather, the idea was the force shaping the social process. In turn, the development of this idea depended on the structure of the family as rooted in creation, as well as on the concrete ways in which family life was lived in medieval society—hence the obstacles that arose to the implementation of this idea, such as the opposition of kings to indissolubility.

⁴⁷ Newman, *Essay*, 181.

⁴⁸ Newman, *Essay*, 186.

⁴⁹ Newman, *Essay*, 190.

⁵⁰ Newman, *Essay*, 191.

⁵¹ Cf. D. L. D’Avray, *Medieval Marriage: Symbolism and Society* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 2005).

The last three notes provide a clearer picture of how the idea develops over time. It is a vision in which the past anticipates the future, and the future is already hidden in the past. Hence, we have notes on the *anticipation of its future* and *conservative action upon its past*. Newman sees a circularity in this reading of past and future. No document or formula is left behind by a new step. At the same time, each new step must find its premonitions in the past. History is interpreted through the lens of the future, insofar as, in light of the new, our eyes become sharper to discover its seeds already present in the old. At the same time, history is interpreted through the lens of the past, insofar as true development does not eliminate past documents, but rather confers weight and value upon them.

The unity of these notes is consistent with the importance Newman attaches to typology as the key to understanding development and, therefore, history itself.⁵² Typology implies that historical events do not constitute isolated occurrences—atoms of time—but rather contain the seeds of the future within themselves. The entire plan of history can therefore be present in every moment, so that the past anticipates the future and the future corroborates the past and brings it to fulfillment. But to understand the totality of each present moment, it is necessary to consider history as a whole. Note that typology is a way of living time that corresponds to the sacramental experience. This is because the sacrament contains the memory of the past and anticipates the fruits of the future.

In particular, from a Christian perspective, it is essential to bear in mind that the fullness of this history has already been fully manifested in Christ. In the course of his life that is continued in the Apostles, we find the incarnate idea in its fullest form. Newman believed that through their privileged witness of Christ, the Apostles had already known the totality of the idea, although they could not grasp it all at once, since they were still in mortal flesh. This particularity of the Apostles is transmitted to the whole Church only in an implicit way, so that this knowledge needs to be developed over the centuries, until it permeates the whole ecclesial body.

Newman's interest in the typological reading of history becomes patent when he expounds the spiritual principle for reading Scripture.⁵³ This is an extension of the sacramental principle, now applied to biblical interpretation. It means going beyond a merely literal reading and moving on to understanding the mystery that the letter contains, without setting the letter aside in search of a separate spirit. Newman's approach consists of taking as his measure the unity of the history of the Old and New Testaments.⁵⁴

We may add that in Newman the typological reading of history extends to include history's origin in the mystery of creation. This means that history contains within itself the link between creation and redemption. Newman relies here on the concept of *analogy*, taken from Joseph Butler (1692-1752), whom he greatly admired. According to this concept, the laws of the created world follow the same path as the laws of God's

⁵² This is a point that is well made by J. M. Wilson, "Doctrinal Development and the Demons of History: The Historiography of John Henry Newman," in *Religion and the Arts* 10 (2006) 497-523.

⁵³ Cf. Newman, *Essay*, 102-103.

⁵⁴ Cf. in this regard Tract 85: J. H. Newman, "Lectures on the Scripture Proofs of the Doctrines of the Church", in: J. H. Newman, *Discussions and Arguments on Various Subjects* (Longmans, London 1907) 244-249.

revelation in Christ. This does not imply the absence of novelties, given that it is impossible to deduce from creation what revelation will be like, but such novelties will follow the same vital principles established in creation.

IV. Conclusion: Shedding Light on the Church's Present Situation

We do not know what Newman would say about many of the current discussions within the Church, if he were suddenly to come back to life. However, certain insights emerge from our exploration of his vision of doctrinal development.

1. Firstly, Newman would reject the division between “traditionalists” and “progressives” so common today. He would do so not simply to position himself in a moderate middle ground, but because he would adopt a different logic. In other words, he would identify the same deficiency in both: a lack of a unified vision of history as a whole, in which the past already contains the future and the future arises from the past and confirms it. Thus, Newman would reject the notion that everything has already happened and that there is no room for novelty, since a possible corruption of the idea occurs when it remains anchored in the past. Nor would he accept that history is merely an advance of progress that leaves the past behind, for to him, the fullness is found precisely in the past (that of Christ and the Apostles). Therefore, Newman would not invite us only to read the old documents in light of the new ones, or the new ones in light of the old ones, but both, since they cannot contradict each other, but rather confirm each other by coming into harmony. St. Augustine's saying, *securus iudicat orbis terrarum* [the whole world judges securely], with which he argued against the Donatists, and which impressed Newman so much, could be extended to *securus iudicat decursus omnium temporum* [the whole course of time judges securely]. For Newman, the lack of harmony between the old and the new would be a sign that the truth has not yet been fully established and that patience is needed, the same patience he advised in response to some of the turbulent issues of his own time. It is not, then, a matter of choosing one extreme, or the other, or a middle way, but rather of opting decidedly for that formula of time described by Newman's notes—which is, as we said, a sacramental formula. Therefore, respect for the sacraments and their unity with Christian life is necessary to live this formula of ecclesial time.

2. Furthermore, Newman would reject a vision of pastoral practice alien to doctrine, as well as any separation of the two. An essential element of his proposal is that all pastoral practice carries within itself its own implicit doctrine. For Newman, by changing a pastoral practice, one may change doctrine more profoundly than by altering a doctrinal formulation directly, because the very sources from which doctrine flows are being altered. What is said about pastoral care is particularly relevant when it comes to sacramental practices, which are like the substrate and channel where the development of doctrine takes place over time, since they contain the principles of Christianity. The same argument helps to underscore the value of doctrinal formulas, which for Newman are not dry theories, divorced from living experience, but rather safeguards of the truth of that experience and of its pastoral transmission.

3. Thirdly, Newman would have something to say regarding the dialogue between the Church and modernity. To him, it was clear that, from the outside, the Church would always be seen as superstitious and threatening. This is key to understanding the “type” of the Church, which demonstrates her continuity throughout history (first note: preservation of type). For Newman the necessary dialogue with the world would take place through the Christian idea’s capacity to enlighten and empower everything human, assimilating it to the Incarnation (third note: power of assimilation), and not the other way around. The vitality of Christianity is shown in its capacity to assimilate the surrounding environment; corruption, conversely, occurs when the form of the world (modern or postmodern) models Christian experience.

4. Newman would discover true faith wherever the principle of analogy between God’s plan of creation and God’s plan of redemption was preserved. He would thus concur with St. Justin Martyr who said that he would not accept the Lord Jesus Christ if Christ had revealed a God different from the Creator.⁵⁵ The arguments put forward within the Anglican Church for redefining marriage would be alien to Newman, as they clearly contradict this analogy.⁵⁶

If Newman is correct, then the current debates are part of the gradual process of giving birth to truth that is taking place in the Church. This is why they involve a suffering that is also the suffering of each personal history, which goes hand in hand with the history of each moment of the Church. Newman would have been well aware that a debate requires more than simply presenting arguments. It also requires allowing time to pass, so that the hidden life which has guided the Church from century to century can gradually unfold. From this point of view, fidelity to the Christian life—that is, to holiness—is a way of favoring the development of doctrine.⁵⁷ The witness of the saints is decisive in this regard.

We can conclude with an image. The Church, says Newman, like Israel leaving Egypt, went out into the world with dough not yet leavened—that is, without having completely developed doctrines.⁵⁸ What we have explored allows us to extend Newman’s idea and see in that bread the Eucharistic bread that the Church carried with her when she went out on her mission. This body of the Eucharist would then leaven the whole earth, the Eucharistic body passing to the body of believers, and in the process, Christian doctrine would also grow, keeping pace with the growth of the Body of Christ, which is the place of union between Bridegroom and Bride.

⁵⁵ Cf. St. Justin Martyr as cited by St. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* IV 6,2 (*Sources Chrétiennes*, 100, 27).

⁵⁶ For this Anglican view, so alien to Newman, cf. L. W. Countryman – M. D. Kirby – N. Wright, *Five Uneasy Pieces: Essays on Scripture and Sexuality* (Adelaide: ATF Theology, 2012).

⁵⁷ The insistence on the note of holiness appears in Newman shortly before his conversion: cf. Newman, *Apologia*, 151-152.

⁵⁸ Cf. Newman, *Essay*, 68.