

**Stephen Morgan, *John Henry Newman and the Development of Doctrine, Encountering Change, Looking for Continuity* (Washington, DC, CUA Press, 2021) pp. xvi + 315. \$75
by Fr. Juan R. Vélez**

John Henry Newman's *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845) is one of Newman's most influential books, and among the five he counted as his best works. In *John Henry Newman and the Development of Doctrine*, Stephen Morgan carries out an exhaustive analysis of the origin of this work based on the difficulty faced by Newman in encountering change and looking for continuity. The problem of heresy and the fact of heresies in the historical record made evident the problem of the difficulty in distinguishing between true and false developments.

Whereas in *Newman on Doctrinal Corruption* (2022), Matthew Levering contrasts Newman's thinking about history, revelation, dogma, and Tradition with the thought of Edward Gibbon and of some of Newman's contemporaries, Morgan focuses on the genesis of Newman's theory of development. By examining the various hypotheses that he formulated between 1826 and 1842, Morgan concludes that Newman's theory was "fundamentally an ecclesiological hypothesis" rather than a set of rules for authenticating doctrinal developments (202).

The author dedicates a good amount of time in establishing an earlier date than that advanced by others for the beginning of Newman's notion of development of doctrine. Morgan rejects James Pereiro's thesis that Newman did not hold a theory of development before 1840 (69-72, 85-86). In his book *'Ethos' of the Oxford Movement: at the Heart of Tractarianism*, Pereiro, however, has the merit of showing the importance for Newman's thought the discussions with his student and friend, Samuel F. Wood. In 1835, Wood wrote a paper on development which he discussed the following year with Newman and Edward Manning.

Morgan also dismisses the thesis by Owen Chadwick, and later Stephen Thomas, who argue that Newman's recollections about his theory were unreliable (22, 13), and who together with Frank Turner (14, 179) attribute to Newman psychological motives of self-justification to explain his religious opinions in the *Essay* and in the *Apologia*. Morgan maintains that Chadwick, Pereiro, and Thomas are "committed to *a priori* to the thesis that Newman did not come to recognize the idea of development of doctrine (as opposed to the development of heresy) until a period later than the period under consideration" [1833-1838] (105).

Morgan first traces the influence exerted on Newman by Edward Hawkins' book *Unauthoritative Tradition* (31-35) on the relationship between Scripture and Tradition, and finds support in a letter of 1826 of Newman to his friend Samuel Rickards of his desire to treat the sixteenth and seventeenth century Anglican Divines as a "band of witnesses for the truth" (37).

Morgan's book is structured in four parts which corresponds to the various hypotheses that Newman postulated in successive periods to account for the difficulty of encountering change in doctrine with continuity, that is, a fixed deposit of faith. The author refers to and cites abundantly from other Newman scholars with whom he engages critically.

The first chapter deals with the period up to 1833 in which Newman encountered change and continuity in doctrine. In writing *The Arians of the Fourth Century* published in 1833, Newman

had encountered change in the early Church and many instances of heresy. He tried to establish as a criteria of true doctrine the testimony of Antiquity as expressed in the Vincentian canon. However, he came to realize that recourse to this testimony was insufficient, even with the disputed notion of *disciplina arcani* with which he tried to explain the existence of accepted doctrines which could not be ascertained by written records. The great difficulty, according to Rowan William, lay in that accepting such a *disciplina arcani* implied an authoritative body such as that claimed by Rome to act as arbiter on the unveiled doctrine.

In chapter two Morgan continues by explaining how during 1833-1838, Newman became aware of the limitations of the *disciplina arcani* and gave a growing importance to the role of Antiquity in ascertaining the connection of doctrines with the Apostolical faith. Newman held the sufficiency of Scripture (Article VI of the *Thirty Nine Articles*) yet acknowledged that there were doctrines that depended on the testimony of Antiquity to Apostolical origins.

Between 1835-1836, Newman and Jean-Nicolas Jager, a French priest, carried out an important debate over doctrines necessary for salvation and the meaning and content of Tradition. Morgan notes that this debate was decisive for Newman's understanding of development. Newman tried to distinguish between an Apostolical Tradition and a later Prophetical Tradition, by the latter meaning that which followed the teaching of the Apostles, and which served to interpret the Scriptures. During this period Newman sought to present the Anglican Church as a *via media*, a church that was between the excesses of Protestantism and the supposed additions (corruptions) of Roman Catholicism. Morgan notes that this required seeking a "Catholicism of the Word" in which Tradition was necessary to safeguard the Word.

The third chapter, "From Catholicism of the Word to a Catholicism of the Church - 1839 to 1842" demonstrates how Nicholas Wiseman, later Archbishop of Westminster, undermined Newman's confidence in the *via media*. In 1839, Wiseman published three articles in the *Dublin Review* to argue from Antiquity - the testimony of the Fathers- that separation from Rome and the major body of the Church constituted heresy, and thus the Anglicans could not claim Apostolical Succession.

Morgan contends that Newman's study of the fifth century Monophysite heresy was very significant for his understanding and formulation of development and corruption. In other words, Wiseman's argument made such an impression on Newman because the study of this heresy had shaken his confidence in the theory of the *via media*.

As noted earlier, Stephen Thomas doubts the reliability of Newman's recollections. Morgan proves him wrong, examining Newman's correspondence with Frederic Rogers, Robert Williams, Henry Wilberforce and William Bowden (152-155). In a September 22, 1839 letter to Rogers, Newman claimed that the study of the Monophysite heresy had been a "a sort of alterative" to which Wiseman's article was the "dose." (155).

The fact that soon after Newman attempted to refute Wiseman with an article "Catholicity of the English Church" in the *British Critic* is considered a lack of reliability or mendacity by Thomas and Turner (161-2). Morgan, instead, gives plausible reasons for Newman's article. Newman argued that at times there was lack of inter-communion in the Church and sustained the notion that the Church of England was the Catholic Church in possession of England (164, 174). Here Newman fell back surprisingly on an Erastian principle: ordination is a bishop's prerogative but everything else is the king's. (170).

With faulty reasoning, Newman used a phrase of St. Augustine that the part must yield to the whole to assert that Rome needed to pay heed to a "council yet to come" (172). Newman observed that a mechanism was lacking to decide when a development departed from antiquity. At various times in history the mechanism had varied: the judgment of a pope, councils against a pope, the decision of the Fathers against either or both pope and councils (173).

Morgan next examines Newman's correspondence in 1840 with his brother Francis, the events in 1841 surrounding *Tract 90* and the affair of the Jerusalem Bishopric, which pulverized the theory of possession and the theory of the *via media* (200).

In the last chapter, Morgan examines how Newman went from a Catholicism of the Church to the Church of Catholicism, from 1842 to 1845. In the Fifteenth University Sermon, "The Theory of Developments in Religious Doctrine," preached on the Feast of the Purification, February 2, 1843, Newman goes through various hypotheses and the objections to them. There, drawing on his earlier correspondence with Francis, he lays out his theory within the context of the faith of the Virgin Mary as described in chapter 2 of St. Luke's Gospel.

This leads to a long discussion of Newman's *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845). In the *Essay* Newman establishes what is understood by an idea and how an idea develops into a mature form. He dedicates a third of the text to describe the identity of type in an idea when there is an authentic development. Newman's mature contention is that there must be a living authority in the Church which serves as the authentic interpreter of dogma and its development. Furthermore, he distinguished seven tests which he later called notes that distinguish an authentic development from a false development or corruption.

Newman left the *Essay* partly uncompleted a few days before he decided to be received into the Catholic Church on October 8, 1845. The *Essay* was actually incomplete because it lacked an exposition on the infallibility of the Church and of the scope and limits of that living voice in the Church. He would attempt this in the 1878 Preface to the *Via Media* and in the *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk*. It seems that Morgan's otherwise excellent volume would have benefited from such a summary of these important texts.

The author has chosen instead to indicate what he labels as "positivism" in recent magisterium: teaching on the death penalty and on communion for the divorced and remarried Catholics, which pays lip service to Newman's theory without trying to establish a continuity in type and principles with earlier settled doctrine. Newman had remarked that tests were insufficient and were theoretical rather than practical. This may have been a manner of speech or an indication of the difficulties in weighing such notes. The application, however, of the notes to these theological developments would actually be a fruitful exercise. Ian Ker, for example, used these notes retrospectively in the analysis of the Roman Catholic doctrine on religious liberty at Vatican II (267).

This scholarly analysis of first editions of Newman's work and his correspondence during the same time period, contrasted with his claims in the *Apologia*, provides us with a well-documented genesis and explanation of Newman's theory and its underlying ecclesiological presuppositions. Stephen Morgan concludes by highlighting the importance of Newman's theory of development for the work of theology today and expresses the hope "that his theory of development becomes better known, more thoroughly understood, and widely adopted as means of answering questions related to change and continuity, authentic development, and corruption of doctrine" (276).

