

- 5 'Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation,' VI, 4 and X, 6.
- 6 See 'Founding the Supernatural: Political and Liberation Theology in the Context of Modern Catholic Thought' in John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1990), pp. 206–255.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 76.
- 8 Thomas Aquinas, *Q.D. De Verit.* 6.1 ad 8: 'Ad octavum dicendum quod praeparatio importat, proprie dispositionem.'
- 9 Thomas Aquinas, *Q.D. De Pot.* 3.4 ad 7: '. . . aliqua forma naturalis est quae per creationem in esse producitur, scilicet anima rationalis, cujus materiam natura disponit.'
- 10 For a more detailed argument see M.F. Sparrow, 'The Proofs of Natural Theology and the Unbeliever,' *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 65, no. 2 (Spring, 1991): pp. 129–141.
- 11 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I–II, q. 113, a. 10: '. . . naturaliter anima est gratiae capax.'
- 12 De Lubac comments on this danger in his *Catholicism: A Study of Dogma in Relation to the Corporate Destiny of Mankind* (London: Burns & Oates, 1950), p. 166.
- 13 See, for example, de Lubac, pp. 166–167 and Joseph Komonchak's discussion of this theme in de Lubac, 'Theology and Culture at Mid-Century: The Example of Henri De Lubac,' *Theological Studies* 51 (1990), pp. 579–602.
- 14 On de Lubac's failure to realize the full implications of his work see Milbank, pp. 206–209 and p. 226.

## Newman on *doing* theology

### Thomas O'Loughlin

Newman's writings on the nature of theology, the role of the theologian in the Church, and the nature of personal faith and assent, all receive a great deal of scholarly attention. However, one text where he characterises the nature of the work of a theologian as a continuing activity has been passed over in studies of his writings on theology and seems only to be known in studies of his marian doctrine.

The text is from the Sermon 15 of his *University Sermons*<sup>1</sup> which was preached on the feast of the Purification, 2 February, 1843 upon the text: 'But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart' (Lk 2:19). The sermon begins by introducing the notion of Mary as a pattern of faith (paragraph 1) and then develops the theme by reflection on the significance of Mary "pondering" what was said to her (paragraph 2).

Then he continues:

Thus St. Mary is our pattern of Faith, both in the reception and 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; not enough to submit the Reason, she reasons upon it; not indeed reasoning first, and believing afterwards, with Zacharias, yet first believing without reasoning, next from love and reverence, reasoning after believing. 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; to combat pride and recklessness with their own arms; and thus to triumph over the sophist and the innovator.

This text deserves close examination as it contrasts with the way most Catholic or Anglican writers would have seen their role as theologians in the period. In the first two paragraphs of the sermon Newman had presented Mary's involvement with the revelation of her role in the Incarnation as a movement growing within her life which could only come to completeness in external and practical action.<sup>2</sup> He argues thus: 'Mary's faith did not end in a mere acquiescence in Divine providences and revelations: as the text informs us, she "pondered" them.' The first steps are (1) hearing and an acceptance that seems characterised by passivity in that she hears and acknowledges a 'fact' and its content; and (2) she becomes active in response to this 'fact' in that she ponders it and what it involves. Newman then outlines the different times that 'pondering' is mentioned in Luke and sees this as a difficult and deliberate activity engaged in by Mary over many years. Then he says: 'And accordingly, at the marriage-feast in Cana, her faith anticipated His first miracle, and she said to the servants. "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it."' This is the third step in the crescendo: having engaged in the internal activity of pondering, she is seen to engage in the further activity that is consequent upon pondering ('And accordingly,') which is activity external to herself. This is activity in the concrete world where she is concerned over the practical issue of embarrassment at a wedding and it is a direct consequence of faith and reflection. It is this presentation of Mary that he then examines, in paragraph 3, as a guide to the life of the theologian.

The structure of paragraph 3 is a connected series of hypothetical propositions which form a single sorites. The literary form this takes is a repetition with growing emphasis of a sequence of binary statements using the classical form of *non solum . . . sed etiam*.<sup>3</sup> The effect of this

usage is that the affirmation of the second element is strengthened by the apparent negation of the first element. Let us look at the structure of these propositions.

1. The theologian does not consider it enough [*non solum*] to accept revelation; but must also [*sed etiam*] dwell upon it.  
The shift to the mode of necessity is itself a necessary consequence of the strengthened second affirmation. Within traditional logic 'this shift to 'must' is demonstrated, by a contraposition and an application of the *modus tollens*, thus:  
[premise 1] if you do not have to dwell upon it, then it is sufficient to accept it;  
[premise 2] but, it was not sufficient merely to accept it;  
[conclusion] hence, it is necessary to dwell upon it.

The other four propositions can be formulated thus:

2. The theologian does not consider it enough to possess fruits of dwelling upon revelation; but must also put it to use.
3. The theologian does not consider it enough [*non solum*] to assent to the truth of formulations of revelation as theology; but must also develop these.
4. The theologian does not consider it enough to submit reason within the structure of theology; but must also engage in rational investigation upon it.
5. The theologian, while recognising that belief is not a result of reasoning, must still ('from love and reverence'<sup>5</sup>) reason after believing. This last proposition is a reformulation of the ancient patristic *dictum*, first found in Cyprian and popularised by Augustine,<sup>6</sup> derived from Isa 7 :9: *nisi credideritis non intelligetis*.<sup>7</sup>

The structure of the whole passage also has to be considered. It begins and concludes<sup>8</sup> with a simple deduction syllogism. Mary is the pattern in her faith of all who study Divine Truth so the qualities of her faith are the characteristics of the class 'theologians'. Hence his first premise: All theologians should have the qualities that follow. His language in listing these qualities suggests that he did not intend them to be seen as discrete qualities (e.g. the car is fast, and red) but rather that they were to be seen as building one upon another as a sorites: so that the first quality leads to the second and so on (e.g. the racing car is fast and has a big engine and good breaks and . . . [noting that is would not be much of a racing car if one of these factors was lacking]). Thus the characteristic faith of the

theologian is one where all these qualities are inter-related. Believing, he ponders, and applies to use, and develops and reasons and cannot forswear any of these activities by mere acceptance or possession or assent or submission.

It is interesting to consider some of the implications of this view of the theologian's life. First, Newman sees theology as characteristically active. The attitude of the theologian is not one of passivity, he must engage with the content of theology. Indeed, there is the definite implication that theology is a form of doing. Theology, therefore is to an extent, unlike other forms of intellectual activity which are primarily forms of knowing and more appropriately characterised as passive. Indeed, it could be argued that the whole tenor of the piece, particularly with its reference to Cana, would support an interpretation of Newman's position as one where if theological reflection is not having a real impact in the external world, then it is denatured; perhaps this is how we should read the phrase: 'not enough to possess, she uses it'. Certainly, any notion of theology as absorbing what is handed to the theologian, and in turn passes it on without any alteration to others, is foreign to this view.

Second, it stands in sharp contrast to the manual tradition of theology in the nineteenth century where the theologian, as distinct from those who functioned within the hierarchical *magisterium*, was praised to the extent that he was as passive as possible with regard to the tradition. The manualists' ideal (whether they succeeded or not is another matter) was to remove themselves from their theology as far as possible. So the ideal theologian was the one who was completely un-involved in his writing's content: the claimed ideal was not to have made a personal contribution but to have transmitted without refraction. Consciously to have one's own theology ("his theology") was virtually equivalent to heresy. The *doing* of theology within this understanding was limited to ingenuity in solving the problems posed by the *data* and excellence was having the energy to labour over as many problems with ingenuity as possible. The theologian in this pattern is the smart teacher, the effective apologist of positions that are given to him, and the docile research assistant to the hierarch. Newman's image is revolutionary in many ways. (i) First, he sees the theologian doing his work as engaged in a human enterprise — indeed, within his view of education, a liberal one in that it is engaged in by free people rather than by servile technicians — rather than as performing some ancillary task within a system, such the view of the Church's doctrine as a formal quantum of proposition presided over by a *magisterium*.

(ii) Second, in keeping with his thinking on faith in other writings, he shifts the focus of debate from the abstract to the personal. He does not

talk of the qualities of 'good theology' — which could be seen as a fixed and passive *depositum* — but of the good person who does a God-given task well: the theologian. The focus is on the person who theologises and their actions which have effects external to them, rather than on a product which might exist in the sound of words or on paper. In the world in which he wrote the only attention that was paid to the person who does theology, as opposed to 'theology', was in so far as they were potentially subjects of ecclesiastical censures. Thus, the 'theologian' was merely a teacher/writer with a given task and was only more personally involved if, as result of a judicial act, his work was declared heretical which carried the possibility that he could be so involved in his work that he could be a heretic. Newman's understanding of the theologian could not be further away from this. He places before us a person who is called to action: thus making the theological enterprise a sacred activity and vocation in its own right — with religious obligations antecedent to, and independent of, any obligations arising from ecclesiastical law. (iii) Third, it is subversive of the dominant image of theology sponsored by Catholic Church in the last century. To appreciate this it is worth noting that it was preached before the zenith of enthusiasm for measures to enforce the passive view of the theologian and of the myth of theology as a formal deduction system from a fixed set of premises whose claim on the individual was that of simple intellectual assent. This sermon was preached eleven years after *Mirari vos arbitramur* and three years before the papacy of Pius IX. (iv) Fourth, it advances a claim that it is those who engage in and do theology, and hence develop it and see new things within revelation, that are those who are best able 'to triumph over the sophist and the innovator.' This was a brave assertion, not without an irony which he reflected on in other writings, in the face of the suspicion of the new as the corrupt which was part of the religious, especially Catholic, reaction to the French Revolution. (v) Fifth, while many writers were advancing theories to account for theological change in the period, usually for the apologetic purpose of showing that the Roman church had not become corrupt, the notion of development here is subtly yet decisively different. Most theories used some sort of deductive model to account for the process: what was implicated in the original moment becoming explicated later. Here, Newman sees theology developing as a result of human thought and the action of those who have experienced the primary revelation. This is important for understanding his later writing where, while he may not adopt this view of the personal role of the theologian as an explicit notion, there is an organic rather than a simply logical model for the process. And perhaps, his notion in *An Essay* that ideas have a 'life' is another form of this: for where can an idea 'live' except in the thinking mind of a person

dwelling with that idea?

Third, it is worth looking at this homily as a moment in Newman's own life. It is the last of the *'University Sermons'* — indeed, he never again set foot in the pulpit of St. Mary's — and took as its theme and title the issue that was uppermost in his mind at the time: the development of doctrine. He had been engaged in doing theology intensely for ten years as the 'leader' of the Oxford Movement. That doing had certainly been a using of theology and a developing of theology: it had spawned a movement, writings, and activity as diverse as a revival of church architecture to a range of activities among the poor. Yet, at the time he preached this sermon he had been denounced as an innovator within Anglicanism and was about to withdraw to Littlemore to consider what action the doing of theology required of him. There is a definite autobiographical element, which his audience could not have known about, in the way he describes Mary as 'pondering' and 'dwelling' with her questions and seeking to know what this called her to do. His labours in the months immediately after the sermon were taken up with researching and writing *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* and within two-and-a-half years he had entered the Roman Church. But, if there is a hint in this sermon that Newman was already a man apart within Anglicanism, we can also see in it the seeds of the many trials he faced within Roman Catholicism: that period, after the Dublin affair, through Vatican I, until being named a cardinal, when he was, to use his own phrase, 'under a cloud.' It seems to have been the frustration of those who opposed him in project after project that they could not "get him", that is, find some proposition or other which he could be construed as having denied. Perhaps in his view of the theologian, and especially his view of the personal involvement of the scholar in his work, lies their problem. His opponents felt uneasy with him and knew there was something which made him "not one of us"; so they searched his theology for the source of their disquiet. But perhaps they searched in vain for they had not noticed an innovation far more basic than some new item in his theology: he had taken the focus of theology away from a code of ideas existing, however perfectly, in a passive state vouched for by authority and located it in the orthopraxis of the loving and reverent believer thinking and doing.

- 1 I am using the 1873 edition (Pickering, London) and have retained in all quotations its orthography and style; the text in question is found on pp. 313–314.
- 2 Newman uses the rhetorical figure of climax which is particularly suited to the notion of a growth in Mary's understanding and action over time.
- 3 A convenient list of the classical paradigms of this trope can be found in Lewis and Short, p. 1215.

- 4 Throughout his life Newman showed incredible skill in using these forms of argument, and indeed used them with such ease that (unlike in the case of most of the text-book theologians of the period) they are hardly visible within his prose. If proof of his familiarity with these precise procedures be needed we need only look at R. Whatley's *Elements of Logic* (London 1831 [I have a preference for the fourth revised ed.]) where Conditionals and Modal Conditionals are treated together in Bk 2, chs 1-3 (pp. 95-101); see p. ix of this work for the famous tribute to Newman's contribution to its production; it should be noted that in these pages, for the first time, we see that language on the illative force of conditionals that is so characteristic of Newman's thought for the rest of his life
- 5 I take this as a hendiadys for the patristic notion of *theosebeia*; cf. T.F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh 1988) pp 17-18 for a convenient description of the notion.
- 6 Cf. A.A. Cayré, *La contemplation augustinienne* (Paris 1954), ch. 8.
- 7 This is the *Vetus latina* reading.
- 8 The repetition of the basic identification of the task; of the theologian with the activity of Mary is found in the phrase: "And thus she symbolizes to us, not only the faith of the unlearned, but of the doctors of the Church also."

## Reviews

**IS CHRISTIANITY TRUE? By Hugo A. Meynell.** London, *Geoffrey Chapman*, 1994. x + 149 pp.

The question which forms the title of this book is one that today we are often told not to ask. The narratives of the Bible and the utterances of Christian teachers from the apostle Paul down to (but not, apparently, including) those who issue these prohibitions are true or false, allegedly, only in the same way as novels and lyric poetry; to ask if they are true in any other way is to miss their point and, indeed, to betray a soul religion has never managed to touch. Not the least merit of Professor Meynell's book is that it calls this view sharply in question. Meynell argues that every religion involves some beliefs about what, as a matter of fact, is, has been or will be the case. Even those doctrinal minimalists the Theravada Buddhists must suppose that individuals really are reincarnated (p. 38). He allows legitimacy to the notion of what he calls 'profound' truth: a statement is profoundly true, in his sense, if it enhances the lives of those who meditate on it and gives them peace and fortitude (pp. 37, 42). But there is another sort of truth that attaches, or fails to attach, to news-reports and the utterances of witnesses in court; and he insists that Christians have always assigned this 'literal' truth (p. 42) at least to the propositions that a personal God exists, that Jesus