

colonization as a right for overpopulated nations (*Utopia*, pt. 2), an idea which became stronger and stronger in England, whereas in Spain it gradually lost ground. If we go back to the two critiques and the aims behind them, we can see that for Las Casas there were only very meagre practical results. For Purchas on the other hand, they were crowned with success. Yet in the old Spanish colonies, the Indians can be counted in millions. In the English colonies, they can be found not at all, except in the reservations.

In conclusion, I would like to quote from the article on Las Casas in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (13th Edit.), which is a typical example of the way that the colonial policies of England justified itself (later editions have been more cautious):

‘. . . Las Casas is still a figure of controversy: his colonisation attempt was a humiliating failure; his experiments to test the capacity of the natives found only a few capable of living alone as free subjects of the king; the attempt to introduce the Faith by peaceful means led to bloodshed in Guatemala and Florida; the radical decrees of the New Laws led to near revolt in Mexico, open rebellion in Peru and grave unrest throughout the empire. None of his plans succeeded. Yet by his monolithic stubbornness, Las Casas dramatized the plight of the Indian and made progress for their betterment possible for more reasonable men.’

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Cardinal Newman’s Social Philosophy

by David G. Hawkins

The most extreme advocates amongst those who favoured ‘sacerdotalism’ if not theocracy, John Henry Newman was ‘deeply introspective, constantly self-concerned, tirelessly self-recording’.¹ Subsequently he

¹Sean O’Faolain quoted by Giovanni Costigan, *Makers of Modern Britain* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), pp. x-xi.

possessed a weak social conscience. In later life, Newman acknowledged that 'he had never considered social questions in their relation to faith, and had always looked upon the poor as objects for compassion and benevolence'.² On this indifference, E. B. Burgum comments that 'there was no writer of the period, who wrote with a more complete unconsciousness of their existence in state or church'.³

Parliamentary reform, educational changes, local government development, the Factory Acts, democracy's progress, industrialism's and technology's dubious side-effects left Newman unstirred. Writes H. L. Stewart: 'The famine in Ireland, the vast selfishness of the Corn Laws, Chartism, the opium war in China—how a Hebrew prophet would have dealt with them! But one would gather from Newman's sermons that the social passion of an Isaiah or a Jeremiah had no place in Christianity'.⁴ Newman was as unconscious as Darwin upon the *Beagle* of great movements outside the Church. C. F. Harrold comments:

This was the epoch—the age of the historical method boldly applied to all fields of experience, the age of full-grown Romanticism, of dazzling and disturbing advances in physical science, of world creating German idealism, of world-shattering Biblical criticism, of political revolution and democracy, of passionate faith in 'progress' in economic and social life—this was the epoch in which a little group of Oxford poets, tutors and preachers hoped to bring about a return to primitive, dogmatic, ascetic Christianity.⁵

In a tone of almost disbelief, S. L. Ollard comments on this outlook that 'no story is more resplendent in audacity, magnanimity and faith'.⁶ And Newman's brother writes of John Henry's thought: 'I distinctively felt his arguments were too finely drawn and subtle, often elaborately missing the moral points and the main points, to rest on some ecclesiastical fiction'.⁷

Newman was engrossed in the intellectual problems of recommending Christianity to an increasingly irreligious and scientific age. He was more concerned with intellectual than with social problems. He erected this disparagement of the social at the expense of the intellectual into a general principle. He wrote to Thomas Allies that 'the noblest aspect of man is not the social, but the intellectual'.⁸ To the end of his days, Newman was convinced that contemporary problems were intellectual. For unless the intellectual adequacy of Christianity's defence was vastly improved, great harm would result.

²Charles Marson, *God's Co-operative Society* (London: Longmans, 1914), p. 71. In a private letter to Marson.

³E. B. Burgum, 'Cardinal Newman and the Complexity of Truth', *Sewanee Review*, XXXVIII (1930), 320.

⁴H. L. Stewart, *A Century of Anglo-Catholicism* (London: Dent, 1929), p. 122.

⁵C. F. Harrold, *J. H. Newman* (London: Longmans, 1945, p. 28).

⁶S. L. Ollard, *A Short History of the Oxford Movement* (London: Mowbray, 1915), p. 1.

⁷Francis W. Newman, *Phases of Faith*, (1850), p. 8.

⁸M. H. Allies, *Thomas William Allies* (London: Burns 1907), p. 113.

Terence Kenny writes: 'The decline of religious belief was a social problem of the first order, and there is a sense in which all religious people must hold it as more important than any other social problem'.⁹ Georgiana McEntee says of Newman's social conscience: 'Neither inclination nor the exigencies of his position compelled him to take part in the public life of his time though, had he been so inclined, his duties as a parish priest in the great commercial centre where he lived for a time would have drawn him into it . . . as far as any effect which it might have had on his own life and work was concerned, the Industrial Revolution with the radical changes which it brought about in the external life of man, and indirectly in his intellectual outlook and spiritual condition, need not have taken place'.¹⁰

We can identify four reasons that contributed perhaps towards Newman's stance upon public affairs:

1. As an Anglican don, when he 'loved the snapdragon that grew on the walls of Trinity and saw it as an emblem of his own life, rooted always in Oxford',¹¹ Newman's concern with the Tractarian controversy gave him little time for social concerns. In any case, he feared popular agitations, desired to retain the *status quo* and considered rebellion a sin.¹²

2. As an Oratorian priest in Birmingham, Newman believed that the hierarchy desired him to minister to the upper classes. He wrote that 'our great benefactor thirty years ago, Pope Pius IX . . . with that insight which a pope has into the future, and of what is necessary for the Church . . . sent the Oratory, and the Fathers of the Oratory especially to the educated classes, and what would be called the class of gentlemen'.¹³ Newman's concern with the rich was because they were educated. He looked upon his ministry as one to the 'educated rich'. It never occurred to him that the poor were capable of intellectual advancement. Their education at his own Oratory School was 'to help solve those intellectual problems he found so pressing'.¹⁴

3. Newman's theology was dualistic and quite Augustinian. The world was fallen, dark and corrupt, a vale of tears filled with evil. He

⁹Terence Kenny, *Political Thought of J. H. Newman* (London: Longmans, 1957), p. 168.

¹⁰Georgiana McEntee, *Social Catholic Movement in Great Britain* (New York: Macmillan, 1927), p. 15.

Unlike Newman, Cardinal Manning stood upon a cart as occasion served to mediate in a strike or cooperate with Protestants in their war against intemperance.

¹¹Costigan, 52.

¹²*British Critic* XXI (1837), 274.

¹³W. P. Neville (ed) *Addresses to Cardinal Newman with his Replies* (1905), p. 126.

¹⁴Kenny, 170. This author continues: 'It was not that he felt any hatred, dislike or contempt for the poor, but he seemed to look on them as inevitably fixed in their state. He did not assume any responsibility for attempting to alter what seemed to be unalterable, but, in a country where the executive was subordinate to class interests, as he himself observed, he was content to look upon the poor as an object of charity rather than a challenge to social thinking and purpose'. 171.

once preached a sermon entitled 'The World our Enemy' based upon the words "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness".¹⁵ He wrote: 'The sight of the world is nothing less than the prophet's scroll, full of "lamentations, and mourning and woe"'.¹⁶ He recoiled from 'the multitudinous blasphemy of the day—its newspapers, its reviews, its magazines, its novels, its controversial pamphlets, its Parliamentary debates, its law proceedings, its platform speeches, its songs, its drama, its theatre, its enveloping, stifling atmosphere of death'.¹⁷ He said: 'All our daily pursuits and doings need not be proved evil, but are certainly evil without proof, unless they can be proved to be good'.¹⁸ History moved in a cycle and man's sin brought on the same sad round. Lord Acton considered that Newman's awareness of evil in the world made him divorce morality from politics.¹⁹ He also divorced morality from social reform, since the latter could be of small value to a fallen world.

4. Newman believed that liberalism was the contemporary Christian's major enemy. It was 'the anti-dogmatic principle and its developments'.²⁰ Its spirit was 'characteristic of the Antichrist. . . . The spirit of lawlessness came in with the Reformation, and Liberalism was its offspring'.²¹ Liberalism was 'Satan's chief instrument for deluding the nations', Newman wrote in his book on the Ariens.²² Liberalism struck at the spiritual life and the unseen world with the tools of enquiry, change and reform. Newman summoned the Church to be dogmatic and authoritative, to reassert its divine commission, to demonstrate the secular world's error and to delimit the State's functions. Above all else, the Church was the source of spiritual authority in a darkening world. It should be respected in the same manner as the Roman magistrates had reckoned with the Church in another age: 'a dangerous enemy to any power not built upon itself'.²³ Giovanni Costigan comments:

¹⁵J. H. Newman, *Sermons on Subjects of the Day* (London: Rivington, 1843), pp. 263-264.

From this volume, we read: 'The world may be in one age better somewhat or somewhat worse than in another, but is in substance always the same. I mean the whole visible course of things, nations, empires, states, politics, professions, trade, society, pursuits of all kinds are, I do not say directly and formally sinful (of course not) but they come of evil, and they are the instruments of evil; they have in them the nature of evil . . . everything in the world is in itself alien from God, and at first sight must be regarded and treated as being so . . . Satan is the god of this world'. 119.

¹⁶*Apologia*. Costigan, 74.

¹⁷Costigan, 74.

¹⁸*Sermons on Subjects of the Day*, 123.

¹⁹H. Paul (ed), *Letters of Lord Acton to Mary Gladstone* (1913), p. 181.

Newman's view of history was apocalyptic, rather than linear, progressive and towards light and truth. 'Where others saw, and rejoiced in, a progress along the ringing grooves of change, he saw simply light amid the encircling gloom'. Basil Willey, *Nineteenth Century Studies* (London: Chatto, 1949), 86. Willey writes that Newman saw his age 'blighted by the upas-trees of worldliness'. 77.

²⁰J. H. Newman, *Apologia* (London: Longmans, 1864), p. 132.

²¹*Apologia*. Costigan, 72.

²²Costigan, 72.

²³J. H. Newman, *Development on Christian Doctrine* (London: Toovey, 1878), p. 232.

Newman did his best to arrest or avert the emergence in England of a modern democratic industrial society. He alone was totally out of sympathy with the aims of the contemporary world. He alone looked back nostalgically to the imagined charm of former ages and deplored their passing.²⁴

Little as Newman writes on social problems, we must nevertheless maintain that he was not totally unaware of them. His sermons at St. Mary's frequently castigated those sins characterized as 'avarice, fortune-getting, amassing capital and so on'.²⁵ Newman was not unmindful of injustice and the Church's responsibility to deal with contemporary affairs. He wrote: 'In truth, the Church was framed for the express purpose of interfering or (as irreligious men would say) meddling with the world'.²⁶ That he was not entirely blind to both economic and political progress is shown by this passage in the *Rise and Progress of Universities*:

What largeness of view, what intrepidity, vigour, and resolution are implied in the Reform Bill, in the Emancipation of the Blacks, in the finance changes, in the Useful Knowledge movements, in the organization of the Free Kirk, in the introduction of the penny postage, and in the railroads! This is an age, if not of great men, at least of great works.²⁷

There are similar, if occasional, eruptions of social concern in his work. Indeed 'it would be possible to make a list of similar references in his work, or to take into account the newspaper cuttings which he saved, displaying an interest in subjects as diverse as the conditions in Winson Green prison and the argument against vivisection'.²⁸ Yet having shown that Newman was not entirely oblivious to his contemporary world, it seems to us that his essential intransigence stands in need of further examination.

(a) It is necessary to state that Newman's conception of and attitude towards democracy was neither particularly unintelligent nor hostile. He saw its inevitable triumph and strove to come to terms with it. Readers of Ward's *Life of Newman* are given the impression that Newman was always in absolute opposition to the democratic ideal. But Ward did not publish and in some cases he did not know of the existence of letters that would have given a different impression. Furthermore, Ward was not in sympathy with democracy and was incapable of a really dispassionate view of Newman.²⁹ Certainly we

²⁴Costigan, pp. x-xi.

²⁵R. W. Church, *The Oxford Movement* (London: Macmillan, 1891), pp. 121-122.

²⁶J. H. Newman, *Arians of the Fourth Century* (London: Rivington, 1873), ch. III, sec. 2.

²⁷J. H. Newman, *Historical Sketches III* (London: Pickering, 1876), p. 59.

²⁸Kenny, 167.

²⁹Maisie Ward, his daughter, perpetuates this view of Newman and assumes an identity of political views between Newman and the two Wards, W. G. and Wilfrid. *The Wilfrid Wards and the Transition*, II (London: Sheed and Ward, 1934), pp. 361-364.

should not judge Newman by his blunt remarks: 'What a dreadful thing this democracy is'³⁰ and 'No one can dislike the democratic principle more than I do'.³¹

(b) For him, the *major social problem* was the rapid decline of Christian belief. In 1883 Newman wrote to a friend: 'It has never been my line to take up political or social questions, unless they came close to me as matters of personal duty'.³² Dessain comments that 'the direct curing of the social ills of nineteenth century England did not lie in his sphere of activity'.³³ So Newman disliked the 1832 Reform Bill because of his fear of an oligarchy rather than because he feared democracy. The Bill's passage would give political power to those who were unfavourable towards the Church. He was afraid for the Church, and dreaded 'above all things the pollution of such men as Lord Brougham, affecting to lay a kindly hand on it'.³⁴ Newman did not deny the need for reform in 1832. But he was representative of Tory opinion that the Act had made the task of responsible government impossible.

(c) In an age of expanding liberties, Newman was a strong conservative. Yet his Toryism 'was not that of the defenders of vested interests'.³⁵ He recognized the validity of reform. He was appalled at the heartlessness of workhouses, prisons, hospitals and the factory system. He eagerly accepted the reforming conservatives known as the 'Peelites'—men who followed Prime Minister Robert Peel out of the 'hungry forties' hide-bound Toryism. Significantly Newman placed full confidence in the most famous Peelite, Gladstone; he regarded his Anglo-Catholicism as the safeguard to any political injury to the Church. Following the Peelites' alignment with the Liberals, he continued to trust them. He saw in this party a hope for social justice, a force for human progress insofar as secular efforts could bring this about. Yet he observed with alarm that the Liberals were tinged with theological liberalism and were hostile to institutional religion, especially to its most dogmatic form, Roman Catholicism.

(d) For Newman, as for Carlyle and Ruskin, the word 'democracy' still retained a great deal of its original meaning that suggested anarchic domination by the mob. All three men had a conviction that a stratified social order was ordained of or at least permitted by God. Newman regarded rebellion and revolution as a sin against 'Him who forbids us to oppose constituted authority'.³⁶ He had already noted the distinction between civilization and barbarism and he dreaded, not the spread of democratic and responsible government by

³⁰Costigan, 72.

³¹J. H. Newman, *Difficulties of Anglicans II* (London: Pickering, 1876), p. 268.

³²C. S. Dessain, *John Henry Newman* (London: Nelson, 1966), p. 70.

³³Dessain, 70.

³⁴A. Mozley, *Letters of J. H. Newman I*, (1891), p. 237.

³⁵Christopher Dawson, *Spirit of the Oxford Movement* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1933), p. xi.

³⁶J. H. Newman, *Oxford University Sermons* (1872), p. 150. *Difficulties of Anglicans*, II, pp. 262 ff. 268-269.

the people, but the triumph of what Carlyle called *Mobocracy*. C. F. Harrold comments on Newman's severely moral approach to human nature: 'One realizes, with him, the possibilities of a "new Barbarism", coming not like the Goths and Vandals from northern Europe, but from our own frustrated or misguided lower classes; these, says Newman, "will rise up from the depths of the modern cities, and will be the new scourges of God"—unless, one infers, they are spiritually reconstituted and spiritually led'.³⁷

(e) There exists a letter dated May 28th, 1878 that goes a long way to explain Newman's attitude to social problems. He wrote (in part):

For the last fifty years, since 1827, there has been a formidable movement amongst us towards assigning in the national life political or civil motives for social and personal duties, and thereby withdrawing matters of conduct from the jurisdiction of religion. Men are to be made virtuous, and do good works, to become good members of society, good husbands and fathers, on purely secular motives. We are having a wedge thrust into us which tends to the destruction of religion altogether; and this is our misery that there is no definite point at which we can logically take our stand, and resist encroachment on principle. Such is the workhouse system, such was the civil marriage act. On this account I looked with jealousy even on Dr. Miller's October Hospital Collections; yet it was impossible to refuse to take part in them. The proceedings of the School Board are only a more pronounced form of what really is the Pelagian heresy. As I have said, the misery is that the wedge works its way. Plausible innovations introduced serious ones.³⁸

Essentially Newman stands in relative isolation from his time. His eyes are fixed upon great issues that will outlast the fever and fret of his age. The continuity of Christian doctrine he viewed with primitive severity and uncompromising other-worldliness. He strove to safeguard Orthodox Christian doctrine, which he saw as the bedrock of western culture and the ultimate solution to the world's guilt. Social problems for Newman were of relatively little importance. But his was not a callous or hypocritical complacency. Social injustice was certainly not God's will, yet Newman's attitude towards his contemporary world was inadequate 'partly because it was negative only and based on too limited an understanding of God's will and partly because it was not related to what was happening to men at that time'.³⁹

³⁷Harrold, 355. The quotation is from W. Ward's *Life of Newman*, II (London: Longmans, 1897), p. 344.

³⁸Kenny, 172-173; *Copied Letter*.

³⁹Maurice Reckitt, *Maurice to Temple* (London: Faber, 1946), p. 24.