

# ECUMENICAL TRENDS

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*A Ministry of the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement*

## Defining Moments and Transformative Experiences: Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day 2011

By Veronica Miles

On December 1, 1955, Mrs. Rosa Parks, an unknown seamstress and civil rights worker in Montgomery, Alabama was arrested and fined for violating a city ordinance when she refused to give up her seat on a city bus to a white passenger. As a member of the NAACP, Mrs. Parks had worked on numerous cases in which black people had been murdered and/or brutalized. In a 1995 interview, Mrs. Parks recalled her work with the NAACP and the difficulty that they faced in obtaining public support for their cause. The bus incident, she explained, gave them the exposure necessary to draw attention to the ongoing struggles of black people in the U.S. It “was more a matter of trying to challenge the powers that be, and to let it be known that we did not wish to continue being second-class citizens.”<sup>1</sup>

The Women’s Political Council established in 1946 by Mary Fair Burks secured Mrs. Parks’ approval to use her arrest as a test case to challenge Montgomery’s seating policies and began planning a bus boycott to take place on the day of Mrs. Parks’ trial. The Montgomery Improvement Association, under the leadership of the then new pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., joined the effort and together they initiated the Montgomery bus boycott which lasted three hundred and eighty two days.<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Parks’ actions and the resultant bus boycott became defining symbols of the Civil Rights Movement, a watershed moment in U.S. history that definitively altered the landscape of our existence.

To suggest that the Civil Rights Movement is a watershed moment is to evoke exciting yet dangerous memories. Exciting because we remember the hope and possibility of the moment and celebrate the progress that we have made toward becoming a society in which not only our laws, but our attitudes and dispositions prohibit discrimination of all kinds based on race, color, religion, national origin and the many other descriptors that we use to delineate our beautifully diverse existence. Nonetheless dangerous, because as we celebrate we also remember the deeply divided society in which this movement took place and feel compelled to assess the extent to which that moment continues to inform our ways of being and relating. I am making a claim here that watershed moments

are not simply cathartic moments that make us feel good at the time, but defining moments or turning point in the lives of persons and communities that raise questions about our perception of the world in which we live and our place in the larger scheme of things. They invite us to experience life anew; to reconsider the social arrangements and practices that shape our world view and our perception of reality.

For better or worse, watershed experiences set us upon a new course. Some evoke fear and are imbued with decreasing potential. When accepted without critique or analysis – when, like a dream deferred, they are left to “fester like a sore and then run”<sup>3</sup> – they rob us of our capacity to live in loving and just relationship with God, ourselves and other human persons. Such may be the case of those who respond to the tragic events of September 11, 2001 in U.S. history, for example, with a xenophobic disposition toward all Muslims. The most powerful watershed moments, however, are filled with transformative and creative potential. They call into being that which is good and true and invite us to live therein. These formative experiences deepen our understanding of our world and of the structures that govern our existence, peeling back layer after layer and revealing that which prevents us from living together as human community. Though some may resist the momentum, such moments nudge us toward justice and life; toward God and God’s best for creation.

In other words, watershed experiences touch us deeply and invite us to periods of *anamnesis* – remembering our formative experiences and discerning the relationship of these experiences to our lives today. *Anamnesis* is like a whiff of apple pie filling our nostrils and suddenly feeling as though we are standing in grandmother’s kitchen once again tasting the sweet morsel that she has

*continued on page 2*

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### IN THIS ISSUE

Defining Moments and Transformative Experiences:  
Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day 2011

VERONICE MILES..... Page 1

The Liberal Spirit of John Henry Newman

AMBROSE MONG IH-REN, OP..... Page 5

baked just for us. The memory is so visceral that we know, beyond any shadow of doubting, that we are her grandchildren and graciously accept the responsibility that comes with being called by her name. It is the experience of a mother or father who hears a baby cry and remembers the joy and delight that the gift of new life brings both in the immediacy of childbirth and in their ongoing ministry of parenting their children. Such moments call us back and invite us to remember who we are and how these experiences continually give form to our engagement with the many others with whom we share our lives.

The nascent Christian community in Acts 2:42-47 affords us an opportunity for *anamnesis* as we recall one of the most important defining moments in the life of the Christian Church, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and consider the significance of this experience for our individual and collective existence. This powerful memory resonates throughout the sacred cosmos of the Christian Church, dangerously and delightfully reminding us of our mission and call. The Holy Spirit greets us in this moment and, as did Jesus during his post resurrection sojourn with his followers, wants to buoy our faith and prepare us to continue the ministry which Jesus began. In other words, this formative story invites us to discern how our life of faith might more fully reflect the communal sensibilities and ethic of care and mutuality evident in this new community.

Our story begins with the life and ministry of Jesus, his faith and sense of the world and his confidence that, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, ordinary women and men could become agents of creation and transformation. You might recall that Jesus' practice of faith led him to the margins of society; placed him in the midst of suffering and devastation, loss and grief, hunger and impoverishment. His persistence in proclaiming *good news to the poor* obliged him to respond to the suffering and marginalization of his time in a manner that the social and religious gatekeepers considered unseemly at best and blasphemous at worst – touching untouchable ones, sitting at table with sinners, standing among the social and religious outcasts, openly engaging those with whom he should not speak, standing in dead places and calling physically and emotionally departed ones back to life, and numerous other transgressions of the social and religious boundaries of his time. These practices suggest to us and to our ancient sisters and brothers patterns for living and relating that move us outside of our comfort zones and place us right in the center of Jesus' ongoing ministry of actualizing the kingdom or *kin-dom* of God in our midst.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout his ministry, Jesus urged those with whom he ministered to prepare themselves for the emergence of God's kin(g)dom. "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has

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come near; repent and believe in the good news" (Mk. 1:15), he proclaimed, beckoning all who heard him to remorsefully turn away from the ethic that had ordered their lives and toward a radically new reality in which love of God and neighbor would become the normative expression of human existence. Numerous persons experienced Jesus' healing and delivering touch and rejoiced in the news which he proclaimed, but his closest companions remained perplexed about his ministry and the nearness of God's kin(g)dom.

That his companions did not understand is evident in their conversation with him prior to his ascension. "Lord is this the time when you will restore the Kingdom of Israel?" (Acts 1:8), they ask, for they had grown weary of Roman rule and longed to become a powerful political entity. Jesus' response did not satisfy their longing and, in all likelihood, they made the journey from Mount Olivet back to Jerusalem still trying to reconcile their longing for national restoration with Jesus' insistence that the Holy Spirit would empower them to be his witnesses in word and deed "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Nevertheless, they wait, persistent in prayer and fellowship, and anxiously anticipating the promised Holy Spirit.

When we lean in to this text, we can almost see them gathered in the upper room; can hear the excitement in their voices as they tell stories and recall the miracles which Jesus performed. I imagine them speaking of the woman at the well and the hemorrhaging woman who touched him in the crowd, the children crying "Hosanna" in the temple and his defense of them as those who should also receive his welcome embrace; the man at the pool who now walks and the young man raging and cutting himself who, after his encounter with Jesus, could sit at table with his family once again. They also share their many personal experiences of Jesus' gracious embrace and words of encouragement, correction

*continued on page 3*

#### Ecumenical Trends

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and restoration, wondering if they would ever feel his touch again. As they move in and out of their communal space, scarcely noticing the hustle and bustle of the city, they must have pondered even the more how their experience of Jesus would inform their practice of faith going forward.

Outside of their gathering the city was teeming with excitement. The fiftieth day after Passover was rapidly approaching and people from throughout the region had already begun to gather in the city of Jerusalem. The harvest had just begun and everything was new; livestock, new wine and grain were abundant and the people brought their gifts with thankful hearts. The aroma of bread baking in open hearth ovens filled the air and the sound of children's laughter echoed throughout the city as they played in the streets and alleyways. The money changers practiced their trade with precision and a bit of cunning. The political and religious officials looked on from a distance, anticipating the profit that they would incur as their many guests frequented the markets and inns or brought monetary gifts to the Temple. The secular and the holy converge, as is often true of such gatherings, as people of faith and those with no particular concern for faith at all stand at the intersection of material consumption and the holy intent of the moment.

The priestly writers of Leviticus describe Pentecost as a time of *thanksgiving, proclamation and sharing*. Known also as the Festival of Weeks, Pentecost is a harvest festival that dates back to the time of Moses in biblical history. On Pentecost, family leaders brought their offerings of thanksgiving to the Lord and the entire community assembled for a holy convocation so that they might proclaim and hear of God's goodness (Lev. 23:21). Those who were able to bring an offering were also reminded to leave a portion for persons who were impoverished and bereft of the basic necessities of life: "*When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and for the alien: I am the Lord your God*" (Lev. 23:22).

At first glance, Pentecost appears as little more than an ancient festival incidentally connected to the Christian tradition because its calendar date coincided with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Many people today are also unfamiliar with harvest festivals and agrarian life and have no experiential referent for the type of festival that would have taken place on Pentecost. Even more, the discourse about harvests and permitting the poor to glean from our fields seems anachronistic in this age of technological advancement and programmatic models for addressing social concerns. Yet, the practices and disposition of heart that constitute Pentecost will not permit us to simply ignore it or deem it contextually insignificant.

The practices of Pentecost are important to this time of *anamnesis* because they testify to God's sustaining presence and ongoing involvement in the everydayness of our lives, calling us to a disposition of heart that acknowledges our interrelatedness as human family. Over against ideologies that promote personal comfort and material gain without consideration of the many others with whom we share the earth's resources and physical space, the communal nature of Pentecost invites those who reap bountifully to give thanks to God while leaving/giving/offering a portion of what we have for the common good. In this respect, the Pentecostal

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practices and disposition of heart among our ancient sisters and brothers resonate with *good news for the poor* and evince signs of the kin(g)dom. It seems just and right, therefore, that the unifying presence of God, the Holy Spirit, would begin her sojourn with humanity at this precise moment in time.

The Holy Spirit enters human history with cosmic display and tongues as of fire, transforming language and imagination, and making those who had been anxiously waiting free for the Gospel. Despite the strictures and structures that separated rich from poor, bond from free, women from men, and youths from the elders, the Holy Spirit rested upon each person as though God's justice had consumed the moment and initiated a cosmic moratorium on oppression. So powerful was this outpouring that it could not be contained in a room hidden away at the top of the stairs. No, the people spilled out into the streets, witnessing to "God's deeds of power" (Acts 2:11) in languages that all who gathered in the city could understand.

Daughters and sons prophetically proclaimed God's just intent for creation while elders and youths shared their dream of a life-affirming reality for all persons. Enslaved women and men spoke of freedom and those who were free decried the social and religious bondage that relegated far too many to the margins of society. Words from God, placed in the mouths of the powerless ones. Men, women and youths whose lives had been of little consequence to the larger society in which they lived become, in this radical moment, a true reflection of God's Spirit poured out upon human flesh. As they continue to speak and as we stand with them, we relish this transformative moment. Our hearts pick-up the rhythm of the Divine heartbeat and we dance and sing and consider the radical possibility of life infused by the Holy Spirit.

We sense the Spirit beckoning us "Come!" and, standing alongside our ancient brothers and sisters, we come. Receiving the good news like manna from heaven that satisfies longings so deep and an ache so persistent that we had almost forgotten that they were there, we come. With heart felt pain as we sense mournful cries within our human family, not at all certain that we are capable of responding but knowing that we must, we come. With longings that had been buried beneath *the way that things are* and distorted by the many voices that tell us that life infused by the Spirit is nothing more than a dream deferred, we come.

We come to this defining moment as though we were here from the beginning, remembering what we had almost forgotten; that the radical possibility of a world in which people are "not judged by the color of their skin" – or by any other delimiting

*continued on page 4*



factor – “but by the content of their character” entered human history at this very moment.<sup>5</sup> Even as people in various spaces and places resist embracing patterns for living grounded in love of God and neighbor, we hold on to the possibility that our world might indeed come to reflect the justice for which we long. All things have become new, even when we cannot sense it, because God’s Spirit fills us and dwells in the midst of a world crying out for wholeness. If we would but listen and permit our hearts to maintain the cadence, we might well discover that we hold in our hands and in our hearts the potential for making that for which we hope an actuality.

Our ancient sisters and brothers testify to this reality as they discern how they might live in the weeks and months after Pentecost. The festival is complete and many of the almost three thousand who responded “yes” to Peter’s proclamation had already made the journey home. Others remained in Jerusalem, gathering with friends and family to reflect upon this spiritual outpouring; “devot[ing] themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). Their numbers increased daily as people from all walks of life began to synchronize their heartbeat with the Divine and commit themselves to becoming the Church.

If Peter’s assertion that “this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel” is an indication of those who comprised this new community, then the Jerusalem church, in its composition and commitments, transgressed many of the social and religious boundaries of their time. Not only were they a diverse community, but a community radically committed to the common good. As Dr. King says of the early church, they “were not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion...[but] a thermostat that transformed the mores of society.”<sup>6</sup>

The Jerusalem church expressed its transformative potential by renegotiating social arrangements and creating a radically inclusive community grounded in an ethic of care and mutuality. So deep was their commitment to ways of being and relating that reflected mutuality that each person, of their own volition, “sold their possession and distributed the proceeds to all, as any had need” (Acts 2:45). No doubt some brought more to their communal coffer than others, but everyone contributed what they had and received all that they needed. They had all things common and, though difficult for us to imagine in an era in which self-sufficiency and individual achievement are more highly regarded than collective effort, “Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the good will of all the people” (Acts 2:46-47). They lived for the common good.

To live for the common good is to live as an expression of the unifying presence of the Holy Spirit in our day to day existence. It is to order our socio-political and religious lives in ways that evince moral and political action to the end of a world in which all persons are healthy and well nourished, have clothing and shelter appropriate to their social and geographic location, and are regarded with human dignity and respect. In other words, to live for the common good is to recognize that our moral commitments have political implications and to respond accordingly.

This is no easy task. Throughout the world, people are expe-

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riencing the growing ambiguity and painful realization that what we can expect of the future has reached a level of uncertainty that evokes more questions than answers. War and the threat of war looms large, genocidal regimes attack the most vulnerable in the name of preserving whatever it is that they hold dear, and division of every kind persists. These practices and dispositions of heart are undergirded by the rhetoric of separation and disunity, competition and individualism, “us” and “them” that flood the multiple terrains of our existence. Lack and instability are no longer socio-economic descriptor reserved for persons and communities, nations and peoples identifiable by rubrics such as “the have-nots,” “the powerless,” “the poor,” or “the colorful ones.” No, they speak to the present reality of many persons and communities who never imaged that they would feel the sting of social and economic insecurity.

These feelings of incongruence can easily collapse into anxiety and fear. Fear that we are not well or safe or strong enough. Fear that we do not have enough, have not saved enough, or are about to lose what we have. Fear that we need to accumulate more or prevent others from accumulating too much, lest our world collapse and we lose our place in the larger scheme of things. Yet, even as we share a common distress, many appear unable or unwilling to recognize that our fates are inextricably linked, whether we appreciate it or not, and our individual wellbeing is dependent upon the actions and dispositions of heart that we collectively share. We will not be well, truly well, until we clasp each other’s hands and work together.

Now, more than ever, we would do well to heed the words that the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote a little over forty-seven years ago. In response to criticism from Christian clergy who called his efforts toward freedom and justice “unwise and untimely,” Dr. King invites us to consider the danger of ignoring our interrelatedness:

I am in Birmingham because injustice is here. Just as the prophets of the eighth century B.C. left their villages and carried their “thus saith the Lord” far beyond the boundaries of their home towns, and just as the Apostle Paul left his village in Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to the far corners of the Greco-Roman world, so I am compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my own home town... Moreover, I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.<sup>7</sup>

The 2011 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity reminds us that

*continued on page 15*

# The Liberal Spirit of John Henry Newman

By Ambrose Mong Ih-Ren, OP

In John Henry Newman's *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk*, he affirms that the consciences of Catholics were not bound to the teaching of the pope as he writes "I shall drink – to the Pope, if you please – still, to Conscience first, and to the Pope afterwards."<sup>1</sup> By writing a reply to Gladstone who believed that Catholicism infringed civil loyalty, Newman revealed himself to be a champion of liberal-minded Catholicism. Newman recognized the positive aspects of liberalism, even in religion as he pointed out that "there is much in the liberalistic theory which is good and true; for example... the precepts of justice, truthfulness, sobriety, self-command, benevolence." The problem is not so much the principle of liberalism as such, but the attempt to use this principle to obliterate religion. When this happens, liberalism becomes evil.<sup>2</sup>

Thus for Newman, liberalism was not evil in itself, because as a social and cultural phenomenon liberalism has many virtues especially in an age where society and the church are falling apart under the influence of rational enquiry, political efficiency and pluralism. It promotes the liberal virtues of tolerance, democracy and freedom which are essential to the preservation of society. He recognized too that there was no going back to the authoritarian and monolithic tradition of the past. For Newman, the church could not afford to oppose liberalism in the political and social spheres, but must exercise her authority reasonably and judiciously or Christianity will suffer. This is reflected in his understanding of the role of the theologian and the practice of theology.<sup>3</sup>

Edward Jeremy Miller asserts that Newman formed his view of the church in a highly authoritarian phase of Roman Catholicism, and although he defended Rome's authority in matters of doctrine, in many ways his full views were different from the mentality of the age.<sup>4</sup> In other words, he was a liberal who fought for an open church, against the Ultramontanists and their backers. Although the title of cardinal seemed to have restrained him somewhat, Newman was "the great polemist against church detractors" and champion of laity's rights. He advocated freedom of thought, and as a critic of authoritarianism of the church, he fought for more freedom in the church for three decades. Newman was able to integrate his love for the church and to criticize its defects: he was both loyal and questioning.<sup>5</sup>

A man not unaccustomed to controversy, Newman was constantly dealing with misunderstandings and suspicions. Although he had converted to Roman Catholicism which he believed was the true church, he did not think it was perfect, and so he advocated reforms in ecclesiastical authority and theological reflection which were over-centralized. Newman was against clericalism that paid little attention to the life of the laity.

Newman maintained great respect for authority, but at the same time he was moving against the leadership of the Catholic Church under Pius IX with his reforming voice. As a result, English Catholics, from the 1860s onwards, who valued freedom of opinion and open discussion, looked to Newman for direction, and in this he managed to provoke the ecclesiastical authority. Considered an ally by some Catholics who were dissatisfied with papal policy, he was an icon for the reform-minded Catholics in the

early twentieth century. If not for its counterproductive aspects, Newman would have supported the authority of the pope in the modern world and also papal authority exercised in an authoritarian manner. Eventually, for practical purposes, he concealed his conservative view of the role the church ought to play in the public life of the nation and his later Catholic period was characterized by a "preference for the tolerant and even neutral state."<sup>6</sup>

This paper attempts to explore the liberal legacy of Newman by examining his views on papal infallibility, biblical criticism, the theology of the laity and his experience of modernity, in order to demonstrate that he had more in common with liberal Catholicism than might have been perceived.

## Papal Infallibility

In a private letter to his bishop at the First Vatican Council, a letter that later became public knowledge early in 1870, Newman expressed his concern over the rush to promulgate papal infallibility because it was a doctrine that was hard to define accurately, although he did believe it was true.<sup>7</sup> The effort to push the definition of papal infallibility through the council without proper discussion was scandalous, and Newman regarded Ultramontane party members like Manning, Ward and Cardinal Herbert Vaughan as conspirators in "an aggressive insolent faction."<sup>8</sup>

The council formulated the pope's infallibility only as an exercise in special and rare circumstances of "that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer wished to endow his Church," and this infallibility was only for the purpose of defining doctrine on faith and morals. Newman understood this as limiting infallible teaching to matters of revelation, but the Ultramontanes proceeded to interpret the dogmatic constitution of July 18, 1870 as broadly as possible, which resulted in doctrinal confusion. Newman then published his *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk* in 1875, in which he "defended the doctrinal import of the new dogma of papal infallibility from the exaggerations of Manning on the one side by refuting the parallel exaggerations of Gladstone on the other."<sup>9</sup> This work demonstrates Newman's display of learning and was a huge success in winning young thinkers and future writers like Ward and Baron Friedrich von Hügel.<sup>10</sup>

Newman also represented cultural liberalism in the same way as Friedrich Schlegel did – both of them were hostile to popular education. For Schlegel, liberalism was a cultured state, and the illiberal man was a philistine and "adorer of mediocrity."<sup>11</sup> Newman shared similar views with Schlegel regarding the need for a liberal education which find full expression in *The Idea of a University*.<sup>12</sup>

Edward Norman argues that Newman was "not in any ordinary sense a liberal Catholic," but in his opposition to the temporal power of the papacy, and in his limited interpretation of papal infallibility, he was closer to the liberal Catholics, although his

*continued on page 6*

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*Newman also represented cultural liberalism in the same way as Friedrich Schlegel did – both of them were hostile to popular education.*

reasoning was different from theirs.<sup>13</sup> Newman also believed Christianity and knowledge were compatible, and that a proper understanding of the relationship between faith and culture was important to gain an insight into religious truth. Liberal Catholics and modernists also sought to reconcile Catholicism and secular knowledge, but they were not aware of the inherent values in those structures. They were critical of the past but not the present. Newman, however, understood that change was inevitable, and that dogma can provide a standard to assess the transformation that was occurring in both the secular and religious spheres.<sup>14</sup>

### Modernity and Modernism

Born in the nineteenth century, Newman had experienced modernity which was seen as a threat to traditional Catholic faith in his time; modernity includes individualism which we take for granted now. Martin Luther stood for individualism when he claimed that the individual has the free authority to interpret scripture and to develop a personal relationship with God. Ronald Burke reminds us that such an emphasis on rights and responsibilities was not part of medieval culture.<sup>15</sup> Modernity also includes a new appreciation for cultural specificity and a growing recognition that people from different cultures dealt with things differently. According to Burke “these differences gave some persons a self-reflective recognition of the interdependence of thought and culture. Not only are cultures slowly shaped by human thought; in subtle and encompassing ways, human thought itself is largely shaped by the thinker’s surrounding culture.”<sup>16</sup> Newman grew up in a particular modern culture, was educated at Oxford, and raised as an Anglican, and hence he was in no sense a traditional Catholic priest trained in scholasticism. As a result, he was able to deal with the issue of doctrinal development in the church which involved an understanding of modernity and history as a process.

“Modernism” was a term used by Pius X and the Roman Curia to describe certain liberal, anti-scholastic and historico-critical forms of thoughts in the Catholic Church between 1890 and 1914. According to Richard McBrien, modernism implies that “there can be no real continuity between dogma and the reality they presume to describe,” and a dogma is more “a rule of conduct than a rule of faith.”<sup>17</sup> As we have seen, Newman was against this kind of modernism. McBrien also acknowledges that the modernists must be commended for their efforts to bring some historical realism to the interpretation of Christian faith.<sup>18</sup> In this aspect, some of Newman’s writings were quite correctly interpreted as having a modernist outlook.

George Tyrrell considered Newman the father of modernism, because, innocent of scholasticism and formed in the tradition of

British empiricism, he wrote his religious ideas in the “living thought-forms of his culture.” Tyrrell also pointed out that Newman was like Thomas Aquinas, who applied the teaching of Aristotle in his work, because he was an “essentially liberal-minded” spirit and had an “elastic sympathy with contemporary culture.” Thomas had successfully translated the deposit of faith into a marvelous dogmatic system based on the current philosophical and theological thought form of his day. The problem is that scholasticism, instead of imitating Thomas’ method – as Newman had done – slavishly took his system but failed to be imbued with his inquiring spirit.<sup>19</sup>

Tyrrell argued that “Newman’s theology formulates certain subjective immanent impressions or ideas analogous to sense impressions which are realities of experience by which notions and inferences can be criticised.”<sup>20</sup> This in principle is “Liberal Theology” and what Tyrrell meant by “liberal” is that Newman’s theology was “non-Scholastic.” The term “liberal” was replaced by “modernism” in the early twentieth century.<sup>21</sup> Tyrrell insisted that it is important to distinguish between the content of Newman’s thought and his philosophical method, for he applied the liberal method to justify his conservative stand. Newman’s mind was liberal but his temperament and sentiments were conservative.<sup>22</sup>

Newman had found the Roman theology mechanical and impersonal. Gabriel Daly argues that Newman’s rejection of Paley’s rationalism is actually a rejection of Roman fundamental theology, especially its approach to the theology of revelation which is rationalistic.<sup>23</sup> In *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, Newman says he did not wish to be converted by a smart syllogism or to convert others by overcoming their reason without touching their hearts:

If I am asked to use Paley’s argument for my own conversion, I say plainly I do not want to be converted by a smart syllogism; if I am asked to convert others by it, I say plainly I do not care to overcome their reason without touching their hearts...And how after all, is a man better for Christianity, who has never felt the need of it or the desire? On the other hand, if he has longed for a revelation to enlighten him and to cleanse his heart, why may he not use, in his inquiries after it, that just and reasonable anticipation of its probability, which such longing has opened the way to his entertaining?<sup>24</sup>

Newman’s most influential work, *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, views doctrinal development in accordance with historical and material influences – revealed truth is transmitted through human agency and subjected to historical processes. He was convinced that all life is change and that “men cannot become external to their own involvement with the stuff of reality.”<sup>25</sup> Development shows continuities, and Catholic teachings like Marian devotions not found in antiquity are actually fruits of the process. According to Norman, Newman stood in the English tradition of Empirical thinking:

[Newman’s] idea of development valued tradition yet placed it upon a shifting basis; it recognized the relativity of human investments in what were incorrectly regarded as immutable expression of truth while it saw an essential deposit of revealed knowledge at the centre; it appreciated the corruption of institutions while it found permanency in a universal perception of authentic apostolic doctrine.<sup>26</sup>

*continued on page 7*



*Newman's most influential work, Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine, views doctrinal development in accordance with historical and material influences – revealed truth is transmitted through human agency and subjected to historical processes.*

In this work, Newman applies the general philosophy of movement that was dominating western thought at the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth century. This theory of movement and development culminated in the philosophy of Hegel and Darwin's theory of evolution. Newman argues that although the Church of Rome appeared to have added many things which seemed like excesses and idolatries, she in fact had not corrupted the gospel. He accepts the notions of process and evolution and applies them to the continuity and history of the Catholic Church.

According to Quinn, *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* is also a refutation of all that integralism stands for – “a cast of mind and outlook that is in some ways more pernicious than doctrinal indifference or heterodoxy.”<sup>27</sup> Like the fundamentalist, the integralist tries to absolutise everything, select papal and church teachings in order to support their rigidity of mind. Integralism believes that faith, the church, and doctrine, coming from the past, must remain unchanged. It must admit of no diversity of expression and no new insights. Clearly, Newman could not accept this narrow-minded ideology that blocks communion, freedom and understanding. Thus, he attempts to demonstrate that the content of revelation is akin to the “idea” Christianity impressed on the imagination.

The notion of a “living idea” requires a concept far wider and richer than what was used in the nineteenth century. Although revelation was definitely and completely given from the beginning, Newman also held that it was present in some way in the original idea impressed on the imagination. In this work, he says the apostles knew all the truth of theology without words and later the theologians began to formulate and develop them through argument. In other words, Christian scholars translate the apostles' experience into words and concepts.

Newman in the tradition of modernism approached the theology of revelation by emphasizing experience, especially moral experience, and the important role played by the imagination in the apprehension and interpretation of experience. Daly claims that these issues are still important today and “the appeal to experience in liberal theology of all kinds, including that of the Modernists, was intended as a corrective to essentialism and extrinsicism.”<sup>28</sup> Daly also asserts that “the appeal of both Newman and the Modernists to wordless and concept-less mental experience as the

initial moment in the reception of revelation is open to challenge from a variety of postmodernists; but challenge, as Newman pointed out, is one of the ways through which great ideas are developed.”<sup>29</sup>

#### A Modernist Text: *Grammar of Assent*

It was Newman, Tyrrell told Ward in 1893, who would “unbarbarise us and enable us to pour Catholic truth from the scholastic into the modern mould without losing a drop in the transfer,” and thus Tyrrell would set out “to prosecute [his] analysis of the *Grammar of Assent*.”<sup>30</sup> In *Essay in aid of a Grammar of Assent*, Newman showed that he had more in common with the modernists than the anti-modernists in that he discussed the assent of faith as a growth in imaginative responsiveness. Part of modernism implies that religious language can only approximate realities to which assent is given; it cannot replicate it exactly. In *Grammar of Assent*, we see the modernist's demand answered – the “distinction between what is revealed and how it is described, defined, and spoken of.”<sup>31</sup> Hence, in spite of their differences, Newman had more in common with the Modernists than the Anti-Modernists.

In the first part of *Grammar of Assent*, he justifies the principle of dogma as a pattern of ordinary mental consideration which functions as “real assent” as opposed to “notional assent.” These realities are made known to us through the power of imagination and no amount of reasoning could convince us that they are mere probabilities. The element of trust does not make it less certain. In the life of faith, both the educated and uneducated give a real assent through devotion to a personal God. The role of moral conscience helps us acknowledge the reality of the divine being, and dogma aids in our devotion to God.

In Part II of *Grammar of Assent*, Newman shows that we can believe what we cannot absolutely prove. In everyday living, we give unconditional assent to facts, truths and moral assessment of situations without proof or validity. Rationalistic or scientific evidences account for very little in our human knowledge, and they are certainly not the most important part. We normally act or respond through instinct or intuition. Newman calls this process of arriving at certitude in practical matters “informal inference,” an operation that is more fundamental than formal logic:

... that the processes of reasoning which legitimately lead to assent, to action, to certitude, are in fact too multiform, subtle, omnigenous, too implicit, to allow of being measured by rule, ... they are after all personal, - verbal argumentation being useful only in subordination to a higher logic.<sup>32</sup>

continued on page 8

*The role of moral conscience helps us acknowledge the reality of the divine being, and dogma aids in our devotion to God.*

Rules for scientific investigation do not apply to everyday affairs or matters for personal decisions in conscience. The “illative sense” is simply this spontaneous process of reasoning in concrete matters – one learns how to do through practice and experience. Newman also stresses that probability is the guide of life. The converging and accumulative probabilities to certitude through informal inference is likened to a cable made up of many weak strands or to a polygon expanding into the enclosing circle.<sup>33</sup> His writings on faith, reason and personal conscience provide an alternative approach to the neo-scholastic apologetic with its emphasis on intellectually probative demonstrations of the existence of God. Newman took Locke seriously and brought together the questions in religious epistemology.<sup>34</sup>

### Liberal Catholicism

Liberal Catholicism was a new phenomenon among English Catholics in the nineteenth century. In 1858, its two leading representatives, Lord Acton and Richard Simpson, were in charge of a periodical called the *Rambler*, which under their direction, soon came into conflict with the ecclesiastical authorities because it was permeated by a form of liberalism.<sup>35</sup> Cardinal Wiseman warned his priests of the *Rambler*’s “treatment of persons or things deemed sacred, its gazing over the edges of the most perilous abysses of error, and its habitual preferences of uncatholic to Catholic instincts, tendencies, and motive.”<sup>36</sup> In reply, Acton wrote that “principles of religion, government, and science, are in harmony, always and absolutely; but their interests are not. And though all other interests must yield to those of religion, no principle can succumb to any interest. A political law or a scientific truth may be perilous to the morals or the faith of individuals, but it cannot on this ground be resisted by the church ... A discovery may be made in science which will shake the faith of thousands; yet religion cannot refute it or object to it.”<sup>37</sup>

The period of these reviews, 1858-1864, was a time of great struggle between liberal Catholicism and Ultramontanism. Newman was clearly on the side of the liberal Catholics, although he might not agree with the way they acted or expressed themselves. He sympathized with many of Acton’s views and realized that the church must take note of new scientific theories. He also strongly supported the liberal Catholics in their demand for an intellectual awakening among the Catholics and insisted that the modern state must not force a particular religion or its teachings on its members.<sup>38</sup> A supporter of the secular state, Newman was prepared to accept religious plurality. Far in advance of his time, he stressed the role of the laity in the church in his article, “On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine.” He was also a thinker of much greater originality and depth than either Acton or Ward, and adopted a more balanced approach in religious matters and ecclesiastical policies.

Catholics were beginning to open up to the values of the modern world such as self-determination and scientific spirit before the publication of Pius IX’s *Syllabus of Errors* in 1864. “Liberal Catholics” were led by a desire to bridge the gap between an obsolete clerical culture that no longer served the church’s mission in the world and the intellectual, social and political challenges of the day. The church was successful in keeping the

nineteenth century at bay due to the development of Ultramontanism (papalism) which was originally an anti-Gallican movement. However, Catholics like Félicité de Lamennais, Antonio Romsini, Henri-Dominique Lacordaire, the abbé Maret, Charles Montalembert, and Lord Acton who had chosen to accommodate to the realities of the modern age were considered “Liberal.” And as I have mentioned earlier, Newman was “a figure head of the reformed-minded Catholics in the early twentieth century.”<sup>39</sup>

### Liberal Education

In *The Idea of a University*, Newman defended the idea that “cultivation of mind is surely worth pursuing for its own sake” and that just such cultivation is a university’s proper object:

When, then, we speak of the communication of Knowledge as being Education, we thereby really imply that that Knowledge is a state or condition of mind; and since cultivation of mind is surely worth seeking for its own sake, we are thus brought once more to the conclusion, which the word “Liberal” and the word “Philosophy” have already suggested, that there is a Knowledge, which is desirable, though nothing come of it, as being of itself a treasure, and a sufficient remuneration of years of labour.<sup>40</sup>

This is liberalism in the Aristotelian sense - the cultivation of knowledge for its own sake, acquiring intellectual satisfaction and possessing truth for its own sake. This is the dignity and value of liberal knowledge that Newman tried to promote in this work: “that Liberal Education, viewed in itself, is simply the cultivation of the intellect, as such, and its object is nothing more or less than intellectual excellence. Every thing has its own perfection, be it higher or lower in the scale of things; and the perfection of one is not the perfection of another.”<sup>41</sup>

In *The Idea of a University*, Newman also teaches that “all knowledge forms one whole, because its subject-matter is one; for the universe in its length and breadth is so intimately knit together.”<sup>42</sup> He was influenced by the Church Fathers who in turn were influenced by Greek philosophers, including Plato and Aristotle, and his idea of liberal education lies in this spiritual vision of oneness. Newman stood for “integration, philosophy, intuition and faith,” at a time of increasing rationalism and secularism, and he defended the ideal of a liberal education as opposed to pragmatic and utilitarian training.<sup>43</sup> Even theology is not the exclusive property of one people or creed and this “ancient, this far-spreading philosophy” can be found in various religions and Christian denominations. God is the sole source of everything that is good, true and beautiful, including pagan literature and religion.<sup>44</sup>

Newman had great admiration for pagan classics; he thought that Xenophon was one of the “best principled and most religious” writers who ever lived and that the Roman poet Virgil was a prophet whose words were oracles that spoke directly to the human heart.<sup>45</sup> He believed that all true art, regardless of origins, is part of divine revelation, and the great orators of ancient Greece had articulated a “beautiful idea” which could reach perfection in the coming of Christ’s kingdom.<sup>46</sup> Newman’s understanding of the role of conscience came from his study of the classics and he thought that Greek ethics was too close to Christian ethics to be coincidence.<sup>47</sup> The church and scripture are ordinary channels of revela-

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*He believed that all true art, regardless of origins, is part of divine revelation, and the great orators of ancient Greece had articulated a “beautiful idea” which could reach perfection in the coming of Christ’s kingdom.*

tion but they are not the only ones. He believed all genuine religions rooted in nature or the supernatural are part of God’s plan of salvation and divine truth comes to us through a variety of channels including Greek classics, philosophy and the sacred books of other religions.<sup>48</sup>

The establishment of public reading rooms in England in the nineteenth century was meant to promote a new spirit of universal utilitarian education. This was based on the conviction that education was best served by the cultivation of “useful knowledge [as] the great instrument of education.”<sup>49</sup> It was believed that knowledge can make us better because human being “by being accustomed to such contemplations will feel the moral dignity of his nature exalted.”<sup>50</sup> In “The Tamworth Reading Room,” Newman, however, argues that development in physical science is not going to improve our morals, and that without the influence of Christianity, the mere acquisition of knowledge will lead to pride in one’s own achievement. Men are not moved by reason, and in the absence of spiritual education, “the inevitable human tendency toward self-aggrandizement is given free rein.”<sup>51</sup>

Science also cannot lead people to recognize the seriousness of sin and the need for redemption, and the study of nature will not lead people to contemplate the creator. In the absence of religious feeling, Newman contends, the mind will be led to atheism as the simplest and easiest theory. Even when a person is spiritually disposed, he may not be able to discover the Christian God, but something like “the animated principle of a vast and complicated system,” “world soul,” “vital power,” or “the Supreme Being,” as what John Hick has advocated. But for Newman, the essence of religion is “the idea of a Moral Governor and a particular Providence,” and we can comprehend this only through a realization of sin and redemption in the Christian sense.<sup>52</sup> Thus, Newman believes the cultivation of this religious sense that should form the basis of education. He perceives the danger in the separation of education and disciplines from the spiritual life of man which assures him of meaning, rationality and goodness of their knowledge. This critical dissociation occurs when the force of spiritual truth not only loses its power to command obedience, but is reduced to purely subjective emotion, where truth and falsity, right and wrong do not have significance.

Although Newman criticized liberalism for its anti-dogmatic principle, he was against dogmatism. In his Oxford University sermon on “Wisdom as Contrasted with Faith and with Bigotry,” dogmatism is characterized as bigotry, the application of narrow

principles. He says that “our presumptions ... deserve the name of bigotry and dogmatism [when] ... we make a wrong use of such light as given us, and mistake what is a lantern unto our feet for the sun in the heavens ... Bigotry professes to understand what it maintains, though it does not; ... it persists, not in abandoning argument, but in arguing only in one way.”<sup>53</sup>

This narrow-minded dogmatism or conservatism is the opposite of the enlargement of the mind which is the aim of liberal education, as Newman advocates in *The Idea of a University*: the cultivation, illumination, and opening of the mind that is no longer confined to an ego-centric view of the world. Newman writes:

[The student] apprehends the great outlines of knowledge, the principles on which it rests, the scale of its parts, its lights and its shades, its great points and its little, as he otherwise cannot apprehend them. Hence it is that his education is called “Liberal.” A habit of mind is formed which lasts through life, of which the attributes are, freedom, equitableness, calmness, moderation, and wisdom; or what in a former Discourse I have ventured to call a philosophical habit. This then I would assign as the special fruit of the education furnished at a University, as contrasted with other places of teaching or modes of teaching. This is the main purpose of a University in its treatment of its students.<sup>54</sup>

### Biblical Criticism

Newman was aware of the bible’s ambiguities, indeterminacies, and openness to many interpretations which may lead to misreading and heresy. He grappled with issues like that which later led him to be labeled modernist. According to T. Wright, “He [Newman] comes to us as a modern,” the “child of British empiricism ... overlaid with Romanticism,” “hypersensitive to epistemological issues, concerned with the psychology of impressions and ideas, agnostic about their object.”<sup>55</sup> Newman’s skepticism about our obtaining objective knowledge of ultimate truth brings him “remarkably close to what may be termed a ‘postmodern’ perspective.”<sup>56</sup>

Newman’s recognition of the bible’s openness to many differing interpretations is seen not as a weakness but “as a product of its inner life and creativity, its openness to the operations of grace.”<sup>57</sup> He remained orthodox because he submitted wholeheartedly to the teaching authority of the church in the final analysis in what counts as Catholic truths, even though Newman’s belief fell well short of absolute truth. In post-modernity, John Milbank says, “there are infinitely many possible versions of truth, inseparable from particular narratives.”<sup>58</sup> Thus, Wright argues that “Newman can be said to anticipate post modernity in particular in

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continued on page 10

his awareness of textuality, the limits of language, the phenomenologically peculiar status of written marks, seemingly objective on the page but only coming to life in the minds of their readers.”<sup>59</sup>

In his *University Sermons* Newman teaches that words are inadequate to express reality and even scripture is limited, and thus, “God has condescended to speak to us so far as human thought and language will admit, by approximations.”<sup>60</sup> He saw precision in language as “an act of Arian insolence” and his own language is so rich with metaphors, ambiguities and complexities, and at times, even confusing.<sup>61</sup> Newman accepts the fact that men continually misinterpret scripture but believes that they usually misinterpret the accidents of faith and not the fundamentals. Schism occurs within the church when there are differences, and it is not that the Scriptures speaks variously, but that the church has failed to resolve the question of interpretation.<sup>62</sup>

Wright argues that Newman’s understanding of the complexities of the reading process and the prejudices and prepossessions that people bring to the text is close to the post-modern pragmatic reader-response theory of Stanley Fish. Newman believes most people cannot contemplate scripture without bringing in their own interpretation which they inherit from their education, and different people have different abilities in reading the scripture.<sup>63</sup>

In the area of biblical criticism, Newman also encouraged free discussion and was against premature closure of open questions. The aim of his 1884 articles on biblical inspiration was to establish that theologians had no *a priori* right to settle open questions on inspiration and inerrancy without examining them in new contexts. He published his essay “On the Inspiration of Scripture” in February 1884 which alluded to the difficulties of pseudonymous attributions of biblical books to a Moses or a David; the several authors of a book such as Genesis or Isaiah; the assimilation of pagan sources or traditions and the incorporation of profane writings.<sup>64</sup> Newman was aware that the question of inspiration could raise problem for educated modern believers or would-be believers.

### Theology of the Laity

Newman lived at a time when the church was highly clerical, the laity had only a passive role, and theological debate was limited. Miller says Newman’s vision of the church was “pastoral” in the sense that he wanted more involvement of the laity in church affairs, to reclaim what was initially their rightful role.<sup>65</sup> Newman rightly said to his bishop that the church would look foolish without the laity, because they were an active force in the church and society. His experience at Oxford convinced him that an educated Catholic laity would form the public mind and exert moral influence on the world. In this, Newman was a liberal and at odds with the prevailing “hierarchology” - Roman machinery bent on controlling the faithful.<sup>66</sup> He believed that lay people should work hand in hand with church authorities to discern the will of God and the Christian message is realized in the fellowship of hierarchy and laity which constitutes what Vatican II calls “the people of God.”<sup>67</sup>

The laity’s personal experience of Christian life is not a replica of clerical life – they live in the secular world, and thus, their experience is unique and a source of distinctive insight which they can bring to the ministry. Newman believed the laity can offer

unique perspective into revelation because of their involvement in the world. His stress was on the entire people of God at the service of the gospel message, and he also advocated a type of evangelization based on personal influence: “The great instrument of propagating moral truth is personal knowledge.”<sup>68</sup> Newman was right to stress that people are more influenced by the personal examples than by someone’s ability to discuss Christian apologetics.

To be effective in evangelization, the laity must be grounded in revealed doctrines, competent in the intellectual disciplines and affairs of the world. Thus, Newman was convinced that the church must support higher education for its laity, although he was quick to add that this kind of superior education cannot be a translated version of seminary training for the priests. He was attempting to establish a Catholic university in Dublin based on the Oxford model. The other alternative was to establish a Catholic college at Oxford or Cambridge, or have Catholic youth attending one of the existing colleges. Unfortunately, Newman failed in his educational endeavors: in his opinion, the bishop resisted having a Catholic university which they could not control. The Vatican also prohibited starting a Catholic college at Oxford and discouraged parents from sending their children to existing colleges because they thought it would endanger their faith. The real reason, Newman rightly believed was the clergy’s fear of losing control because an educated and articulated laity would no longer be docile. An independent-minded and competent laity was worse than the threat of secularism, the church believed.<sup>69</sup>

The church was afraid an educated laity would be unmanageable, but Newman feared that poorly educated laity would turn anti-clerical without confidence in church leadership. He was convinced that an educated laity would be the strength of the church if they were to be given trust and responsibility instead of authoritarian control which stifled their creativity and energy. It was painful for Newman to see the talents of convert Anglicans wasted because the church feared an educated and initiative-taking laity: “It has always been a real grief, and almost wound which I have carried with me, that married and especially clerically married converts, have been so tossed aside, and suffered to live or die as they may. We have lost a vast deal of power and zeal, of high talents and devotion, which might have done much for the glory of God.”<sup>70</sup>

Hence, Newman’s theology of the laity is based on the unique experience of men and women working in the secular world which they can bring to the church to help in evangelization. The Christian message will be reflected in their discernments which cannot be found in the experience of the hierarchy. If the church were to be

*continued on page 11*

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bent on controlling the minds of the laity by denying them higher education, the church would be impoverished. Newman rightly attributed the fear of an educated and involved laity to the Latin mentality's need for control and uniformity. He could foresee that the Latin race would no longer have charge of the Magisterium in the church, and he counseled patience, for God works in his own time.<sup>71</sup>

### *Sensus Fidelium*

In his studies of church history, Newman found that the function of transmitting and formulating the faith had not always been carried out properly by the ecclesiastical authorities. In *Arians of the Fourth Century*, Newman teaches that it is the *sensus fidelium* (sense of the faithful) of the people and not the Magisterium or teaching authority of the bishops that maintained the Catholic faith in the aftermath of the Arian controversy:

The episcopate, whose action was so prompt and concordant at Nicea on the rise of Arianism, did not, as a class or order of men, play a good part in the troubles consequent upon the Council; and the laity did. The Catholic people, in the length and breadth of Christendom, were the obstinate champions of Catholic truth, and the bishops were not.<sup>72</sup>

He avoided the simplistic distinction between clerics and non-clerical teachers by extending the term "faithful" to everyone in the church:

In speaking of the laity, I speak inclusively of their parish-priests (so to call them), at least in many places; but on the whole, taking a wide view of the history, we are obliged to say that the governing body of the Church came short, and the governed were pre-eminent in faith, zeal, courage, and constancy.<sup>73</sup>

The Magisterium of the church in Newman's time as well as in our own is one sure note of catholic unity and it "is situated here *within* the living instinct for faith possessed by all the faithful, and not apart from it or even formally prior to it."<sup>74</sup> In each part of the church, everyone has a distinct role to play. But in the Arian controversy, Newman demonstrates his principle that the *sensus fidelium* is the guardian of the Catholic faith in times of uncertainty in the church. His treatment of this ancient controversy is novel because he treats it not as a doctrinal problem but as an ecclesial problem. Newman pits "different senses of faith against one another in a struggle over the meaning and practice of faith."<sup>75</sup>

According to Paul Crowley, the Arian controversy reflects how the faithful maintained orthodoxy in a cultural situation that was different from that of mainstream churches in the empire. It is an example of the conflict between the Catholic faith and its "inculturated theological forms." The faithful experienced the tension and held fast to their understanding of the Catholic faith, "though with distinctive local flourishes, ranging from riots to *anachoresis*."<sup>76</sup> For Newman, the Arian controversy was not just about ideas abstracted from history. It involved the creed which became the battleground of the bishops in their struggle over authority. It also concerned all the people in the church of Egypt and beyond because it involved the local expressions of faith.<sup>77</sup> Viewed in this light, Newman's appeal to the *sensus fidelium* as the mainstay of the Catholic faith during the Arian controversy is a profound theological principle, and this is still relevant today as we see the rise of new theologies from the third world challenging the traditional western theological discourse.

Newman's treatment of *sensus fidelium* pertains to the reception and transmission of the faith in its doctrinal forms. His most enduring contribution, which led many to regard him as a liberal is the claim he made that the faith is transmitted and received by the faithful themselves, by the entire church of a particular time and place, in a special relationship with the church authority. It is in the faith of the people, Newman claims, that the catholicity of the faith is safeguarded. This claim continues to challenge us because the church cannot escape the tension between a universal teaching function and the various theologies that spring up from diverse cultural situations. In Newman's perception, it is the people who are taught, in a particular place, who become the universal teacher. The present situation of religious pluralism in Asia means that local Christian churches in their encounter with the great spiritual traditions of Asia, constitutes a new situation, which requires new answers.

In view of this, we can look to Newman's teaching to resolve the tension between catholicity and inculturation in our day, to draw out its implications. According to Crowley, a good example of this is the theology of liberation:

The theology of liberation rests upon an assertion of a church model that begins with the *sensus fidelium*, not with hierarchical structures. It challenges other theological streams within the church, including those expressed by the hierarchical magisterium, to listen and to become engaged with the legitimate mediations of the faith tradition that have taken place within the local church contexts.<sup>78</sup>

Newman would never have imagined that his ideas could be used to resolve the tensions between official church teaching and a local theology that springs out of a specific economic-political situation; the situation in Latin America is far from the idyllic world of Victorian England. But the idea of *sensus fidelium*, inspired by Newman, could serve as a tool in resolving the tension between the catholicity of faith and its cultural manifestation of the catholicity. His use of the *sensus fidelium* comes from the principle taken from his work on the development of Christian doctrines. This work looks upon Christian truth as undergoing development which is grasped vaguely but becomes clear through time or under the catalyst of some challenges. The official vision of the church is institutional and hierarchical, but Newman's idea of the church is organic and communal. That Crowley is able to associate Newman's *sensus fidelium* with the theology of liberation is a testimony of his liberal spirit and legacy.

Newman rightly felt that a conservative and over-centralized church might lose the laity if the latter have no involvement in the process by which revelation is discerned: they are reduced to having an "implicit faith." The educated class will end up in indifference, the poor class in superstition. If doctrines are imposed from the top without taking into consideration people's experience and insight, then the laity are likely to become alienated by the church and by the message intended by God to strengthen their faith. Newman realized that the ecclesiastical authorities cannot afford to prevent the laity from the process of discernment. Miller rightly argues that Newman was farsighted to perceive that the challenge to ministry would come from secular life: "The philosophy of the day, its literature, and especially the growing techno-scientific ethos had

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*Newman rightly felt that a conservative and over-centralized church might lose the laity if the latter have no involvement in the process by which revelation is discerned: they are reduced to having an “implicit faith.”*

abandoned Christian roots and were distinct to clash with religion. Educated, committed laity were the proper witnesses to a living faith and were the best evangelisers of the secularist society that was surely coming.”<sup>79</sup>

### *Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine*

“What is the province of the laity? To hunt, to shoot, to entertain,” wrote Monsignor George Talbot in response to Newman’s “On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine,” which was published in the *Rambler* in July, 1859. John Coulson says Newman’s publication of this essay “was an act of political suicide from which his career within the church was never fully to recover; at one stroke he, whose reputation is the one honest broker between the extremes of English Catholic opinion had hitherto stood untarnished, gained the Pope’s personal displeasure, the reputation at Rome of being the most dangerous man in England, and a formal accusation of heresy proffered against him by the Bishop of Newport.” Talbot believed that the laity are in the church to “pray up, pay up and shut up!”<sup>80</sup>

Although the hierarchy is responsible for defining and enforcing the church tradition, Newman insists the laity must be consulted because: “The body of the faithful is one of the witnesses to the fact of the tradition of revealed doctrine... their consensus through Christendom is the voice of the Infallible Church.”<sup>81</sup> At the same time he also states that the power and prerogative of defining dogmas rest exclusively with Magisterium.<sup>82</sup> To “consult” means to seek an opinion, but it can also meant to find out something as when one consults a barometer. According to Newman, consulting the “sense of the faithful” means ascertaining in fact what the laity believes. This actually took place when the bishops consulted the faithful six years before the promulgation of the Immaculate Conception in 1854. Newman also located infallibility in the totality of the church which means the laity as well as the hierarchy: “Infallibility resides in the laity and Magisterium in a unitary way, as a figure is contained both on the seal (Magisterium) and on the wax (laity).”<sup>83</sup>

Newman observes, as we have seen earlier in the Arian controversy, that although in the fourth century there were bishops and saints like Athanasius and Ambrose, “nevertheless in that very day the divine tradition committed to the infallible Church was proclaimed and maintained far more by the faithful than by the Episcopate.”<sup>84</sup> The laity in Newman’s understanding is not merely a stamp, and he maintains the possibility of bishops teaching heretical doctrines while the laity hold fast to orthodoxy.

During the Arian heresy, “in that time of immense confusion the divine dogma of our Lord’s divinity was proclaimed, enforced, maintained, and (humanly speaking) preserved, far more by the ‘Ecclesia docta’ than by the ‘Ecclesia docens’ ... the body of the episcopate was unfaithful to its commission, while the body of the laity was faithful to its baptism.”<sup>85</sup> He concludes by saying that “there was a temporary suspense of the functions” of the teaching church, the unpalatable truth being that the “body of Bishops failed in their confession of the faith.”<sup>86</sup>

The danger now, he asserts, is that when the hierarchy is sound and faithful, the laity would be neglected and relegated to being an audience, or at best, playing a supporting role. This kind of liberal understanding of the role of laity in the church did not go over well with church authorities, and Newman remained under a cloud of Vatican suspicion for years.

“On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine,” is actually a tract against the bishops because the faithful includes priests and religious. According to Ian Ker, the origin of the essay lay in Newman’s concern about the English bishops who did not hold consultations with the laity regarding the Royal Commission and the state of primary education. At a deeper theological level, Newman taught that faith did not belong to the bishops alone but to the whole people of God.<sup>87</sup> This was dramatically highlighted during the Arian heresy when the leadership failed to proclaim and teach the faith. And since faith is not the property of the bishops alone, it was the body of laity that saved the faith. Newman lived in a highly clericalised church where the division of clergy and laity was sharp; he wanted to protect the rights of the laity or the whole body of the faithful.

### *Resisting the Spirit of Liberalism of His Time*

As mentioned before, Newman insisted the church must learn to cope with liberalism. This mindset of liberalism, according to him is characterized by skepticism, an inevitable consequence of the development of human reason. Liberalism is a way of thinking that operates without reference to the principles and doctrines of traditional religion; it originates in the empirical order or reason exercised by the natural man. Liberalism is pragmatism - it makes its presence felt first in the social and political arenas. Newman resisted liberalism only when it interfered with the rights and authority of the Established Church. In the fields of education, politics and even in church organization, his outlook was liberal in many ways.

The Oxford Movement, as we have seen, was founded to resist liberalism and to restore the Anglican Church to its Catholic character. Newman explains in his *Apologia* that his involvement in the Movement was founded on the theological principle that the church has been given a revelation and her duty was to preserve, protect and defend it. It was felt the church was threatened by secularism. By the time he left the Anglican Church, Newman was convinced it did not have the resources to resist the onslaught of liberalism. Later he would accept the fact that liberalism was here to stay and would try to make the best of the situation. But in the beginning, Newman was championing a cause and not just the


*continued on page 13*

*By the time he left the Anglican Church, Newman was convinced it did not have the resources to resist the onslaught of liberalism.*

prevention of changes. He was fighting on behalf of revealed religion, and Merrigan has correctly argued that he was resisting the spirit of liberalism and not liberalism as such.<sup>88</sup> It is significant that Newman was fighting the spirit of liberalism of that particular time - the onslaught of secularism and the decline of Christianity.

## Conclusion

J. M. Cameron warns us that it would be a mistake to see Newman merely as a young man who avoided the danger of liberalism of Whately in his early years at Oxford and remained the same in his attitude towards liberalism. In Rome, he had had the reputation of a strong liberal ever since he published his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* and "On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine." Newman, in the note he added to the second edition of the *Apologia*, stated that we must go beyond calling liberalism the "Anti-Dogmatic Principle" not just because this does not say much, but also there were great Catholic liberals like Montalembert and Lacordaire for whom Newman had great sympathies.<sup>89</sup>

Adrian Hastings comes up with a definition of liberalism applicable to both the secular and religious spheres: liberalism is a commitment to freedom in a society fragmented by the influence of rational enquiry, political efficiency and pluralism. It is opposed to the conservative commitment to control society on the basis of authority, including religious authority. Liberalism is a practical acceptance of social and intellectual pluralism. It seeks to get rid of the public authority of religion. It does not renounce the concept of truth, but renounces the right to impose truth on others. Acceptance of truth, according to the liberal, must be based on conviction or reason. It recognizes that the formulation of truth is historically conditioned. The liberal stands for freedom, the anti-liberal is for public order; the liberal appeals to reason, while the anti-liberal appeals to authority, tradition, and revelation. The liberal is influenced by evolution and a sense of history.<sup>90</sup> Based on Hastings' definition of liberalism, we can see how closely Newman identified with some of the features of liberal thought, and at the same time he stood for authority, tradition and revelation. 

## Notes:

1. *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk*, <http://www.newmanreader.org/works/anglicans/volume2/gladstone/section5.html>, 261.
2. Terrence Merrigan, "Newman and theological liberalism," *Theological Studies* 66, no. 3 (September 2005): 610.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Edward Jeremy Miller, *John Henry Newman on the Idea of Church* (West Virginia: The Patmos Press, 1987), xvi.
5. *Ibid.*, xvii.

6. Paul Misner, "The 'liberal' legacy of John Henry Newman," *Newman and the Modernists* (Lanham, Md: University Press of America, 1985), 5.

7. In his letters, between 1866 and 1868, Newman expressed this issue of papal infallibility in the following: "I have ever thought it likely to be true, never thought it was certain." "On the whole, then, I hold it, but I should account it no sin if, on grounds of reason, I doubted it." "I hold the Pope's Infallibility, not as dogma, but as a theological opinion; that is, not as a certainty, but as a probability." "I have only an opinion (not faith) that the Pope is infallible." Quoted in Francis A. Sullivan, SJ, and "Newman on Infallibility" in *Newman after a Hundred Years*, edited by Ian Ker and Alan G. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 430.

8. Quoted in Paul Misner, "The 'liberal' legacy of John Henry Newman" in *Newman and the Modernists* (Lanham, Md: University Press of America, 1985), 9.

9. *Ibid.*, 10.

10. *Ibid.*

11. Terrence Kenny, *The Political Thought of John Henry Newman* (London: Longman, Green and Co., 1957), 164.

12. *Ibid.*

13. Edward Norman, *Roman Catholicism in England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 99.

14. *Ibid.*

15. Ronald R. Burke, "Newman, Lindbeck and Models of Doctrine" in Michael E. Allsopp and Ronald R. Burke ed., *John Henry Newman: Theology and Reform* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1992), 20.

16. *Ibid.*, 21.

17. Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994), 49.

18. *Ibid.*

19. David G. Schultenover, "George Tyrrell: Devout Disciple of Newman," in *John Henry Newman: Theology and Reform*, edited by Michael E. Allsopp and Ronald R. Burke (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1992), 69-70.

20. Quoted in Gabriel Daly, "Newman, Divine Revelations, and the Catholic Modernists," in *Newman and the Word*, edited by Terrence Merrigan and Ian T. Ker (Louvain: Peeters Press, 2000), 50.

21. Gabriel Daly, "Newman, Divine Revelations, and the Catholic Modernists," in *Newman and the Word*, edited by Terrence Merrigan and Ian T. Ker (Louvain: Peeters Press, 2000), 53.

22. *Ibid.*, 55-56.

23. *Ibid.*, 56.

24. *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, <http://www.newmanreader.org/works/grammar/chapter10-2.html>, 425.

25. Edward Norman, *Roman Catholicism in England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 100.

26. *Ibid.*

27. John Raphael Quinn, "Orthodoxy as opposed to fundamentalism, theological liberalism, and integralism," *New Oxford Review* 58 (May 1991): 22.

28. Gabriel Daly, "Newman, Divine Revelations, and the Catholic Modernists," in *Newman and the Word*, edited by Terrence Merrigan and Ian T. Ker (Louvain: Peeters Press, 2000), 53.

29. *Ibid.*

30. Quoted in David G. Schultenover, "George Tyrrell: Devout Disciple of Newman," in *John Henry Newman: Theology and Reform*, edited by Michael E. Allsopp and Ronald R. Burke (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1992), 70.

continued on page 14

31. Quoted in Paul Misner, "The 'liberal' legacy of John Henry Newman" in *Newman and the Modernists* (Lanham, Md: University Press of America, 1985), 15.
32. *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, <http://www.newmanreader.org/works/grammar/chapter8-2.html>, 303.
33. Paul Misner, "The 'liberal' legacy of John Henry Newman" in *Newman and the Modernists* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1985), 15.
34. *Ibid.*, 16.
35. K Theodore Hoppen, "W. G. Ward and liberal Catholicism," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 23, no. 4 (October 1972): 331.
36. Quoted in K Theodore Hoppen, "W. G. Ward and liberal Catholicism," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 23, no. 4 (October 1972): 339.
37. *Ibid.*
38. Terrence Kenny, *The Political Thought of John Henry Newman* (London: Longman, Green and Co., 1957), 18. Norman, however, argues that Newman had "unclear affinity" with the Liberal Catholics on various issues. Newman was never really a Liberal Catholic himself and his empirical outlook in politics was an insignificant part of his general outlook. See Edward Norman, "Newman's Social and Political Thinking," in *Newman after a Hundred Years*, edited by Ian Ker and Alan G. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 168..
39. Paul Misner, "The 'liberal' legacy of John Henry Newman" in *Newman and the Modernists* (Lanham, Md: University Press of America, 1985), 5. According to Kenny, Newman "sympathized warmly with the general policy and sentiment of Lacordaire, and Montalembert, and still more of Dupanloup." See Terrence Kenny, *The Political Thought of John Henry Newman* (London: Longman, Green and Co., 1957), 151.
40. *The Idea of a University*, <http://www.newmanreader.org/works/ideal/discourse5.html>, 114.
41. *Ibid.*, 121.
42. *Ibid.*, 50.
43. David Walsh, "Newman on the Secular Need for a Religious Education," *Faith and Reason* (1992): 359-360.
44. Francis McGrath, *John Henry Newman: Universal Revelation* (Mulgrave, Victoria: John Garratt Publishing, 1977), 86.
45. *Sermons Preached on Various Occasions*, <http://www.newmanreader.org/works/occasions/sermon2.html>, 23.
46. Francis McGrath, *John Henry Newman: Universal Revelation* (Mulgrave, Victoria: John Garratt Publishing, 1977), 87.
47. *Ibid.*
48. *Ibid.*, 88.
49. *Discussions and Arguments*, "The Tamworth Reading Room," <http://www.newmanreader.org/works/arguments/tamworth/section1.html>, 255.
50. *Ibid.*, <http://www.newmanreader.org/works/arguments/tamworth/section2.html>, 261.
51. David Walsh, "Newman on the Secular Need for a Religious Education," *Faith and Reason* (1992): 363.
52. *Ibid.*, 364.
53. Quoted Mary Katherine Tillman, "Newman: the dialectic of 'liberalism' and 'conservatism,'" *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 9, no. 2 (Sum-Fall 2002): 189.
54. *The Idea of a University*, <http://www.newmanreader.org/works/idea/discourse5.html>, 101-102.
55. Quoted in T.R. Wright, "Newman on the Bible: a *Via Media* to Postmodernity" in *Newman and the Word*, edited by Terrence Merrigan and Ian T. Ker (Louvain: Peeters Press, 2000), 218. Basil Mitchell claims that Newman was firmly rooted in the empiricist tradition of Locke and Hume. He was also influenced by the Romantic preoccupation with the interior life and historical process, but not Schleiermacher's understanding of Christian dogma as expression of emotion, imagination or will. See Basil Mitchell, "Newman as a Philosopher," in *Newman after a Hundred Years*, edited by Ian Ker and Alan G. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 223.
56. *Ibid.*
57. *Ibid.*, 219.
58. *Ibid.*
59. T.R. Wright, "Newman on the Bible: a *Via Media* to Postmodernity" in *Newman and the Word*, edited by Terrence Merrigan and Ian T. Ker (Louvain: Peeters Press, 2000), 220.
60. *Oxford University Sermons*, <http://www.newmanreader.org/works/oxford/sermon13.html>, 269.
61. Quoted in T.R. Wright, "Newman on the Bible: a *Via Media* to Postmodernity" in *Newman and the Word*, edited by Terrence Merrigan and Ian T. Ker (Louvain: Peeters Press, 2000), 222.
62. T.R. Wright, "Newman on the Bible: a *Via Media* to Postmodernity" in *Newman and the Word*, edited by Terrence Merrigan and Ian T. Ker (Louvain: Peeters Press, 2000), 226.
63. *Ibid.*, 227.
64. Paul Misner, "The 'liberal' legacy of John Henry Newman" in *Newman and the Modernists* (Lanham, Md: University Press of America, 1985), 18.
65. Edward Jeremy Miller, *John Henry Newman on the Idea of Church* (West Virginia: The Patmos Press, 1987), 59.
66. *Ibid.*, 63.
67. *Lumen Gentium*, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html), chapter 2.
68. *Lectures on the Present Position of Catholics in England*, <http://www.newmanreader.org/works/england/lecture9.html>, 381.
69. Edward Jeremy Miller, *John Henry Newman on the Idea of Church* (West Virginia: The Patmos Press, 1987), 67.
70. Quoted in Edward Jeremy Miller, *John Henry Newman on the Idea of Church* (West Virginia: The Patmos Press, 1987), 68.
71. *Ibid.*, 68-69.
72. *Arians of the Fourth Century* <http://www.newmanreader.org/works/arians/note5.html>, 445.
73. *Ibid.*
74. Paul G. Crowley, S.J., "The *Sensus Fidelium* and Catholicity: Newman's Legacy in the Age of the Inculturation," in *John Henry Newman: Theology and Reform*, edited by Michael E. Allsopp and Ronald R. Burke (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1992), 115.
75. *Ibid.*, 116. See also *Arians of the Fourth Century*, Appendix Note V, <http://www.newmanreader.org/works/arians/note5.html>, 445-468.
76. *Ibid.*, 117.
77. *Ibid.*
78. *Ibid.*, 123.
79. Edward Jeremy Miller, *John Henry Newman on the Idea of Church* (West Virginia: The Patmos Press, 1987), 75.
80. See Michael Sharkey, "Newman on the Laity," <http://www.ewtn.com/library/Theology/NEWMNLAY.HTM>
81. "On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine," <http://www.newmanreader.org/works/rambler/consulting.html>, 205.

continued on page 15



## THE LIBERAL SPIRIT OF JOHN HENRY NEWMAN, from page 14

82. Mary Katherine Tillman, "Newman: the dialectic of 'liberalism' and 'conservatism,'" *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 9, no. 2 (Sum-Fall 2002): 183.

83. Edward Jeremy Miller, *John Henry Newman on the Idea of Church* (West Virginia: The Patmos Press, 1987), 71.

84. "On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine," [http://www.newmanreader.org/works/](http://www.newmanreader.org/works/rambler/consulting.html)

rambler/consulting.html, 213. Gunton sees this work as a sincere desire of Newman to develop a communal rather than a merely clerical conception of the nature of authority. As a result of this writing, Newman became a suspect in high places. See Colin Gunton, "Newman's Dialectic Dogma and Reason in the Seventy-Third Tract for the Times" in *Newman after a Hundred Years*, edited by Ian Ker and Alan G. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 312.

85. *Ibid.*

86. *Ibid.*, 214.

87. Ian Ker, "Newman on the *Consensus Fidelium* as 'The Voice of The Infallible Church'," in *Newman and the Word*, edited by Terrence Merrigan and Ian T. Ker (Louvain: Peeters Press, 2000), 77.

88. Terrence Merrigan, "Newman and theological liberalism," *Theological Studies* 66, no. 3 (September 2005), 609.

89. J.M. Cameron, "Newman and Liberalism," *Cross Currents* 30, no. 2 (Summer 1980): 155.

90. Adrian Hastings, *The Theology of a Protestant Catholic* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 119.

## DEFINING MOMENTS AND TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCES, from page 4

to live for the common good is not simply a charitable act that some of us do on the behalf of others of us. We live for the common good for our own sake *and* for the sake of creation; so that we might be complete *and* so that God's favor might fill the earth *and* so that the kin(g)dom of God might become a reality within the concreteness of human existence. We are not mere observers peering through the windows of time with wishful hearts, but those whose lives have been touched by the Divine, filled to the brim by the Holy Spirit and awakened to the possibility of life made new each day. Distractions and distortions are numerous in our world today, vying for our attention and our commitments. But during times of *anamnesis*, those reflective and life-affirming moments, we remember who we are and sense God's Spirit showering over us as though we had just begun.


Our liturgical practices and confessions of faith are rife with possibilities for *anamnesis*. We break bread together, offering morsels to our sisters and brothers and receiving bread in return. As faithful community throughout the land, we also share our table with the children, women, men who planted and harvested the grain, crushed the grapes and filtered the wine. We hold them in our hearts while inquiring about their well-being and asking if they have received a living wage. We whisper a prayer for them and for the well-being all creation, while also availing ourselves for the work of dismantling the structures that sustain poverty in our world today.

Our songs, hymns and anthems are also imbued with formative potential, such that our plea for bread – "bread of heaven, bread of heaven, feed me till I want no more" – awakens in us a desire to ensure that all persons have access to a healthy diet and enough to eat each day. With rich melodies still ringing in the air, we confess our faith and remember the One in whose name we have come. Even more, we remain keenly aware that when we match our gait to his gait our journey may take us to the hedges and highways or to mountainous villages and impoverished neighborhoods, at home and abroad.

We place our feet in the baptismal waters or lift our faces to the sky and feel a cool drizzle flowing over our cheeks. We give our babies to a trusted pastor and, with words of blessing or standing before the baptismal font, we welcome our children into the

*We place our feet in the baptismal waters or lift our faces to the sky and feel a cool drizzle flowing over our cheeks.*

Christian family; moments that remind us that we are connected to a community of believing persons that will hold us in our time of distress. Baptismal waters, holy waters, drawn from the natural springs and aquifers, rivers and streams, oceans and seas intended to sustain life throughout the planet. Cool and refreshing, clean and pure; these are the waters divinely bequeathed to every human person and every living thing.

We live for the common good because that is who we are; these faithful, spirit-filled yet fallible followers of Jesus whose deepest desire is to live the life of faith in our world today. 

### Notes:

1. See complete interview and biography at <http://www.achievement.org>, Academy of Achievement.

2. For a complete account of the Women's Political Council's involvement in the Montgomery bus boycott *cf.* Burks, Mary Fair, "Trailblazers: Women in the Montgomery Bus Boycott" in *Women in the civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965*, ed. Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse & Barbara Woods (Indiana University Press, 1993).

3. *Cf.* Langston Hughes' poem, "A Dream Deferred," at <http://famouspoetsandpoems.com>.

4. *Cf.* Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *En La Lucha: In the Struggle – Elaborating a Mujerista Theology*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) for use of descriptive language "kin-dom."

5. *Cf.* Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "I Have A Dream" speech delivered on August 23, 1963 at the Lincoln Memorial, Washington, D.C.

6. "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" (April 16, 1963) in *King Remembered*, ed. Flip Schulke & Penelope McPhee (New York: Pocket Books New York, 1986).

7. *Ibid.*

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