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Themes, Sources, and Development of St. John Henry Newman's Ecclesiology in His Letters and Diaries During the Early Anglican Period (1816–1830)

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Abstract: John Henry Newman (1801–1890), a prominent Anglican and later Catholic theologian, a saint and Doctor of the Church, underwent a profound change of religious beliefs throughout his life. After converting to Anglican Calvinism at the age of fifteen, Newman's religious thinking gradually moved towards High Church Anglicanism before he was received into the Roman Catholic Church in 1845. This study focuses on the formative period of his ecclesiological development during his early Anglican years (1816–1830), as expressed in his letters and diaries. By examining these sources, we aim to present a synthesis of the major themes, theological influences, and the development of ecclesiological thought as it emerged within Newman's early Anglican context.

Keywords: John Henry Newman, letters, diaries, early Anglican period, ecclesiology

Saint John Henry Newman (1801–1890) is regarded as one of the most influential theological figures of the 19th century. In recent decades, he has attracted considerable scholarly attention, particularly with regard to his intellectual and spiritual journey from Anglicanism to Roman Catholicism, and for his influence on modern ecclesiological and ecumenical thought. While Newman's published works have been extensively studied in this context, his letters and diaries have often been regarded as secondary sources, which does them a disservice.

During Newman's life, namely in the Victorian era, letters and diaries played an important role in both personal and social life. Newman was no exception in this regard: over the course of his life, he became an outstanding epistolographer, demonstrating strong literary and rhetorical skill while reflecting the communicative norms of his time. He wrote over 20,000 letters and kept 20 diary journals, which he revised and organised in his later years (Gilley 2003, 2; Julián 2018, 28). Most of them have now been published in the 32-volume corpus *Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*.

Newman was raised in a liberal London family. In the *Apologia*, he recalled that his first conversion occurred sometime between August and December 1816, a period during which his family was facing bankruptcy. During this time, John Henry

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and his younger brother Francis spent many hours in the company of the Rev. Walter Mayers (1790–1828), an Anglican Calvinist who profoundly influenced the brothers' early religious outlook through his preaching and writings. This association distracted the young men from the family's financial anxieties and encouraged a deeper engagement with the Bible and with religious doctrine (Zuijdwegt 2022, 18–19; Newman 1908, 4).

Recent studies of Newman's ecclesiology have tended to focus particularly on the period from the 1830s onwards, largely in relation to the Oxford Movement and his reception into the Roman Catholic Church. This emphasis has contributed to the relative neglect of Newman's early religious formation, during which his ecclesiological thinking first took shape, although important exceptions should be noted, most notably the studies of Alain Thomasset (2006) and Geertjan Zuijdwegt (2022), which have addressed this period in the past two decades.

While research on Newman's doctrinal development is not in itself new, this article approaches the subject from an ecclesiological perspective, drawing primarily on Newman's letters and diaries to enlighten how he internalised and expressed this in his understanding of the Church. Focusing on the years 1816 to 1830, the study analyses Newman's correspondence and journals from the period in which he was emerging from his evangelical conversion and gradually encountering the complexities of the High Church Anglican tradition, with the aim of outlining the themes, sources, and development of his early theology of the Church. Our research adopts a historical-theological approach combined with textual analysis of Newman's personal writings. The sources are read contextually, with due consideration given to the socio-political background of the period, Newman's personal circumstances, and the various theological influences at work. The study is divided into three parts: first, it examines Newman's early understanding of the invisible Church; second, it traces his gradual movement towards the concept of the visible Church; and finally, it analyses the pre-Tractarian beginnings that emerged in response to political developments. Since letters and diaries are sometimes thematically extracted from their original context, they are read alongside other works (essays and sermons), allowing a chronological and thematic exploration of the development of Newman's early ecclesiological vision. Given the breadth of the topic, this study offers only an outline of the key developments within his formative period.[1]

1 The quotations from letters and diaries used in this article are taken directly from the original sources with all grammatical errors retained. Words that were originally underlined are written in italics in the article.

1. John Henry Newman's Paradigm of the Invisible Church (1816–1823)

As previously mentioned, during the summer and winter of 1816, Newman began to shift in his religious beliefs towards the evangelical authors of the time, such as William Romaine (1714–1795), Thomas Scott (1747–1821), Joseph Milner (1744–1797), Thomas Newton (1704–1782), and William Beveridge (1637–1708). These writers were recommended to him by his mentor Mayers, a devout clergyman who exerted influence on Newman by imparting the classic evangelical tenets in regard to his views of the Church and faith as we will show in the following chapters: the total corruption of human nature, the necessity of a new birth through conversion, and the distinction between a merely nominal Church membership and true spiritual regeneration, evident in holiness.

1.1. Adoption of Antipapal Beliefs

The first topic with which Newman engaged was antipopery. Among writers, the aforementioned Newton and John Milton (1608–1674) had the greatest influence on Newman regarding the Church and his anti-papal beliefs. Centred on the idea that Pope is the Antichrist, as he had learned from Newton's *Prophecies*, dominated his thinking until 1843. This is particularly obvious in the letter to his aunt Elizabeth dated October 30, 1816, where he alludes to Newton's influence (John Henry Newman to Elizabeth Newman, October 30, 1816, *LD* I, 27). Alongside Newton, Milton's political-theological works, such as *Of True Religion, Heresy, Schism, Toleration*, also reinforced Newman's initial stance. Newman adopted Milton's view that the papacy was a heresy, which reinforced his anti-Catholic attitude during his youth.

1.2. Baptismal Regeneration as a Theological Issue

The next and arguably the most influential[2] theme is baptismal regeneration. Newman first discussed the theme in correspondence with Mayers between the end of 1816 and April 14, 1817. Mayers, denying baptismal regeneration, wanted to present the sacrament of baptism only as the formal initiation of the individual into the visible community of the Church (Mayers 1831, Sermon XXIII),[3] supporting that with

2 The issue was central to Anglican Evangelicals, who believed that conversion was necessary for a new birth (Zuijdwegt 2022, 43). Tensions arose from the *Book of Common Prayer* and the *Catechism*, both of which affirm that an infant is regenerated in baptism (*BCP*, "The Ministry of Private Baptism; Public Baptism of Infants; A Catechism"). As a result, the rejection of baptismal regeneration became a defining feature of Evangelical Anglican orthodoxy.

3 "We read, … 'If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.' Rom. viii. 9. To such we may apply the reproof addressed to one who deceived himself by a mere profession of religion; one who had indeed been baptized with water, but who proved, by lamentable experience, that he had not been baptized with the Spirit unto repentance and newness of life." (Mayers 1831, Sermon XXIII) What Mayers equates

Beveridge's work *Private Thoughts*. But after Newman read the work in January 1817, he did not simply confirm Mayers' interpretation:

> There is one passage in the first chapter of the second part, that I do not quite comprehend; it is on the Sacrament of Baptism. I had, before I read it, debated with myself how it could be that baptized infants, dying in their infancy, could be saved, unless the Spirit of God was given them; which seems to contradict the opinion that baptism is not accompanied by the Holy Ghost. Bishop Beveridge's opinion seems to be that the seeds of grace are sown in Baptism, although they often do not spring up; that Baptism is the mean whereby we receive the Holy Spirit, although not the only mean; that infants, when baptized receive the inward and spiritual grace without the requisite repentance and faith. (John Henry Newman to Walter Mayers, January 1817, *LD* I, 30)

At first sight, Newman's reading of Beveridge appeared to sit uneasily with Mayers' evangelical position and gestured towards the sacramental language of the High Church; however, this episode reflects an early moment of theological perplexity within an otherwise evangelical framework. In response, Newman received a comprehensive letter from Mayers three months later, dated April 14, 1817, in which his mentor sought to clarify and defend his own doctrinal position. Mayers' critique was not directed against the *Book of Common Prayer*, but namely against the assumption that sacramental grace is conferred *ipso facto* and independently of faith. In line with Calvinist anthropology, Mayers held a pessimistic view of human nature's innate ability for good, emphasizing that only God's grace can prompt genuine virtue. To prove this, Mayers had to show that Newman had misunderstood Beveridge's work.

Mayers challenged the High Church view with two liturgical-theological comparisons. Firstly, he contrasted the Anglican and Roman Catholic views of sacramental efficacy, especially *ex opere operato*. Newman's mentor substantiated this claim with Article XXIX of the *Book of Common Prayer* (*BCP*, "Of the Wicked, Which Eat Not the Body of Christ in the Use of the Lord's Supper"), which states that those who receive the Eucharist unworthily do not benefit spiritually and may even suffer judgment (John Henry Newman to Walter Mayers, January 1817, *LD* I, 32).

Secondly, Mayers supported his claims with the example of transubstantiation, which is rejected by the Anglican liturgy (John Henry Newman to Walter Mayers, January 1817, *LD* I, 32). Although Anglican Reformers used strong sacramental language this did not mean that they were trying to affirm the Roman understanding of the Real Presence, but according to Mayers, only to preserve the spiritual nature of Christ's presence. He supported his claims with Article XXVIII of the *Book of*

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with baptismal regeneration is holiness, an outwardly visible complete change of views, temperament, and behaviour (*metanoia*).

Common Prayer and explicitly rejects transubstantiation and insists that Christ is received only in a "heavenly and spiritual manner." (*BCP*, "Of the Lord's Supper")

Mayers extended his criticism to those who, in his view, misused prominent theological authorities to support High Church sacramentalism.[4] He provided a corrective reading of Beveridge, noting that while the author spoke of baptismal regeneration, he did so in a way that preserved the distinction between outward admission into the visible Church and inward spiritual regeneration. Mayers agreed that this distinction is fundamental: baptism may mark the beginning of formal ecclesial membership, but without subsequent conversion and sanctification, it offers no assurance of eternal life. The only reliable evidence of regeneration, he insisted, lies in the presence of the fruits of the Spirit in a person's life (Walter Mayers to John Henry Newman, April 14, 1817, *LD* I, 33).

Newman's direct reply to Mayers' letter of April 14, 1817 is lost, but in a follow-up letter on June 16, 1817, Mayers expressed satisfaction that Newman had taken his warnings seriously (John Henry Newman to Walter Mayers, June 16, 1817, *LD* I, 36) and reiterated his conviction that slow, reflective progress in theological understanding was more valuable and durable than hasty conclusions (Thomasset 2006).

1.3. Distinction Between the Visible and the Invisible Church

Alongside the question of baptismal regeneration, Mayers' letter to Newman of April 14, 1817 contained a reflection on the distinction between the visible and invisible Church. Drawing on the authority of Bishop Ezekiel Hopkins (1633–1690), Mayers maintained that many baptized individuals remain spiritually unregenerate; only the elect who undergo conversion belong to the true, invisible Church.[5] As shown before, this emphasises that while the Church of England's liturgy uses language of regeneration in the baptismal rite, such language must be understood with caution (Walter Mayers to John Henry Newman, April 14, 1817, *LD* I, 33). However, according to Mayers, the Church *hopes* all the baptized are regenerate and treats them as such until proven otherwise, but it does *not* teach that regeneration infallibly occurs in baptism (Sheridan 1967, 39). The evidence of this is many baptized individuals living unholy lives (Walter Mayers to John Henry Newman, April 14, 1817, *LD* I, 33).

This framework echoed the distinction articulated by Jean Calvin in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, where he described the Church as outwardly populated by both the faithful and the hypocrites, while the *true* Church is known only to God (Calvin 1960, 2:1016). Mayers thus links the nature of baptism directly

4 Those critics were indirectly targeted at Newman.

5 According to Hopkins, baptismal regeneration is a formal admission into the visible Church, but it's not equivalent to spiritual regeneration. It's a lower form of regeneration, an outward status which should not be confused with the "change of heart" brought about by the Holy Spirit (Walter Mayers to John Henry Newman, April 14, 1817, *LD* I, 33).

to ecclesiology, arguing that one's conception of sacramental efficacy determines one's conception of the Church itself. In line with this, Mayers conceded that grace might be given in baptism "sometimes" (especially to infants who later evidence it), "doubtless sometimes communicated in baptism," but "more often it is the fruit of maturer years." (Sheridan 1967, 40) While it is unclear to what extent Newman accepted this dualistic view at the time, his later reflections suggest that he was at least receptive to Mayers' ecclesiological logic, even though he did not engage explicitly with the question of the Church until 1823 (Walter Mayers to John Henry Newman, April 14, 1817, *LD* I, 33).

1.4. Personal Crisis and Doubt in the Invisible Church

After the theological exchanges with Mayers, Newman entered a period of silence. Between 1817 and 1820, sacramental or ecclesiological topics were no longer mentioned in his correspondence, diaries or even sermon drafts. The reason for the absence is most likely related to intensive preparations for his final examinations at Trinity College, Oxford (*LD* I, 80). All writings from that period, especially letters, reflect Newman's spiritual unease and a deep existential crisis characterised by feelings of religious inadequacy and doubt in own abilities (John Henry Newman to Walter Mayers, September 12, 1820, *LD* I, 86–87).

The first reappearance of the topics can be traced to the diary entry of September 29, 1820. Here Newman reflected on the nature of baptismal regeneration and, even more importantly, on his own experience of conversion. He acknowledged that he did not regard himself as being spiritually regenerated at baptism, but rather later through personal conversion. In a passage that echoes John 3:3–5, he wrote that unless one is born anew, one cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Newman testified that belief with the words, "I was blind, but now I see." (Newman 1956, 165) This statement reflects the evangelical emphasis on personal *metanoia* as the only true sign of rebirth.

Although Newman did not directly reject the possibility of baptismal regeneration, he questioned its universality and placed greater emphasis on the inner transformation of the soul. The diary entry suggests that he regarded the Bible, and not the Anglican Church or its formulae, as the primary authority in matters of doctrine. That also aligns with Mayers' central conviction: holiness and newness of life are prerequisites for salvation. This shows that even in a time of personal uncertainty, Newman remained theologically anchored in the evangelical belief that true regeneration must be visible in a person's life (Newman 1956, 165–66).

1.5. Re-Entry Into Theological Discourse with the Essays

After diary entries made in the late 1820s, Newman gradually resumed theological studies, particularly between 1821 and 1823. Newman frequently used essays as a space to explore his evolving views on baptismal regeneration, doctrine, and the authority of the Church. Worth mentioning is the essay "The Nature of Holiness," probably written in 1822.[6] In it, Newman drew on biblical language, emphasising what Mayers had stated in a letter of April 14, 1817: holiness in is not self-generated but the result of God's sanctifying presence acting upon the human soul through the Holy Spirit (Newman, n.d.).

What sets this essay apart from other evangelical exhortations is Newman's interest in the relational and Christological aspects of holiness. True holiness, he writes, is conformity to the image of Christ, a participation in Christ's own holiness that reaches beyond ethics into the realm of ontological transformation. He speaks of holiness as a "real inner change," a new creation in the believer, echoing 2 Cor 5:17, suggesting that while the sacraments are means of grace, their efficacy must be confirmed in a life visibly characterised by holiness, humility and charity. The essay concludes with a pastoral exhortation: Christian life is portrayed as a journey to God, characterised by moral struggle, repentance, and continual sanctification. Newman resists both despair and triumphalism; the soul does not become perfect in an instant but gradually grows into holiness by God's grace (Newman, n.d.).

1.6. Oriel College, Edward Bouverie Pusey, and the Beginnings of Change in Thought

The year 1822 marked an important intellectual and spiritual turning point for Newman as a Fellow of Oriel College, which was officially confirmed on April 4, 1823. We cannot ignore the fact that the intellectual environment at Oriel challenged Newman's evangelical assumptions. Among the key figures who undoubtedly challenged Newman during this period was Edward Bouverie Pusey (1800–1882), whom Newman first met on the day of his election: an encounter that marked a symbolic turning point in the development of Newman's understanding of the Church (Newman 1956, 190; *LD* I, 162), as it is one of the first documented moments in which Newman explicitly reflected on the concept of the true Church (Newman 1956, 190).

Although Newman initially opposed Pusey's view and even considered him unfit for holiness, he also recognised the influence of the Holy Spirit in Pusey through his virtues. This led to a re-evaluation of his earlier understanding of the "elect," a concept derived from evangelical doctrine (*LD* I, 163, n. 1).

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6 On the essay, Newman wrote "1822 or 1823?"

Another change in his thinking can be seen in the diary entry from August 9, 1823, written after a walk with his younger brother Charles. Newman's brother sharply criticised evangelical authors, particularly what he perceived as the inadequacy of their accounts of human nature, sin, and grace. Newman recalled his brother's words:

> People are not in earnest, when they call themselves the vilest of sinners. In gratitude to God! I do not see we have so many calls for gratitude. Man is not so bad; your way of asking for grace is very roundabout; so much machinery; why not read the Bible, and employ reason at once? I acknowledge that the Bible is full of declarations that the frame of our minds must be changed. (Newman 1956, 193)

After the polemic with his brother, Newman wrote:

> I repeated my strong conviction that no one could understand the Scriptures fruitfully, unless it were given him from above, however orthodox his creed &c. that I did not confine salvation to one sect-that in any communion whoever sought truth sincerely would not fail of heaven; that three things were incumbent on every one, before he could pretend to judge of the Scripture doctrines, to read the Bible constantly and attentively, to pray for grace to understand it incessantly, and to strive to live up to the dictates of conscience and what the mind acknowledges to be right. (Newman 1956, 193)

Newman thus signalled an important turning point: the true Church was no longer identified with belonging to a particular religious tradition, but increasingly with those who sincerely sought truth under the guidance of grace. This opened space for the universal dimension of the Church. At the same time, he articulated conditions for genuine participation in the Church: (1) persistent and committed reading of Scripture; (2) prayer for the grace of understanding; and (3) living according to conscience and knowledge of the truth. In doing so, he moves beyond the evangelical view that limits membership of the true Church to the invisible Church (Newman 1908, 8).

2. John Henry Newman's Paradigm of the Visible Church (1824–1826)

As shown in the previous chapter, Newman's strict evangelical view of the invisible Church gradually began to crumble. The established doctrine failed to correspond to Newman's own experience, causing him unease.

At Oriel College, Newman came under the influence of eminent Oxford theologians such as Edward Hawkins (1789–1882), Richard Whately (1787–1863), and Charles Lloyd (1784–1829), who advocated a rational approach and a hermeneutical reading of Scripture. It was these colleagues who promoted a gradual theological

and ecclesiastical shift, steering him away from Evangelicalism and towards liberal intellectualism.

2.1. Edward Hawkins and John Bird Sumner's *Apostolical Preaching*

Hawkins was the first who criticised Newman's evangelical sermons, exposing the limitations of Newman's preaching and showing the need for a more structured, doctrinally grounded homiletic approach (Newman 1956, 77). The senior colleague gifted him *Apostolical Preaching* by John Bird Sumner (1780–1862).[7] In his work, Sumner accepts the distinction between the visible and the invisible Church, but not as Mayers or the Calvinists do: for Sumner, this distinction is conditioned by baptismal regeneration and the inner disposition of man. The visible Church represents the baptised, nominal Christians, while the invisible Church represents Christians who live exemplary Christian lives (Sumner 1830, 18, 19, n. m, 84, 90–96). The book proved deeply unsettling for Newman. As he noted in his diary on August 24, 1824:

> Lately I have been thinking much on the subject of grace, regeneration &c. and reading Sumner's Apostolical Preaching, which Hawkins has given me. Sumner's book threatens to drive me either into Calvinism, or baptismal regeneration, and I wish to steer clear of both, at least in preaching. I am always slow on deciding a question; last night I was so distressed and low about it, that a slight roughness from someone nearly brought me to tears, and the thought even struck me I must leave the Church. I have been praying about it before I rose this morning, & I do not know what will be the end of it. I think I really desire the truth, and would embrace it wherever I found it. (Newman 1956, 202)

Although the preaching at that time was still evangelical (Shrimpton 2024), the Englishman confided in a letter to his mother:

> My parish (I fear) wants to be taught the principles of Christian doctrine.… I shall certainly always strive in every pulpit so to preach the Christian doctrine, as at the same time to warn people that it is quite idle to pretend to faith and holiness, unless they show forth their inward principles by a pure, disinterested, up- right line of conduct. (John Henry Newman to Mrs. Newman, August 30, 1824, *LD* I, 188–89)

These remarks are the first sign of Newman's convergence with Sumner's understanding of the relationship between the visible and invisible Church. However, during

7 Sumner's work emphasizes a practical example, whereby he sees the apostles, especially St. Paul, as central figures in preaching. Sumner wants to prove that what matters in preaching is the choice of material and the way in which it is treated, rather than the demonstration of individual opinions, sharply criticising the tendency to emphasise the preacher's personal opinions.

a home visit to the Shepherds on September 3, Newman was accused of being "not Calvinistic enough," (Newman 1956, 202) which caused him even greater distress.

Newman again spent time in silence until December 12, when in a sermon no. 42–iii, 3 "On Attending the Ordinances of Grace," he explicitly developed ecclesiological thinking for the first time, marking an important thematic focus in his homiletic work.

In a sermon addressing the role of the priesthood within the Church, Newman referred to the visible Church by quoting Article XIX of the *Book of Common Prayer*: "The visible Church of Christ … is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered." (Newman 2011, 5–6) This sermon is often regarded as the beginning of a shift towards the paradigm of the visible Church and pre-Tractarian thinking (Newman 2011, 6, n. 6).

Yet the development it represents should not be overstated. Although the sermon presented a new paradigm, a few days later, on December16, Newman made a note in his diary: "Pusey and I are in the same house and talk much about the faith. I defend imputed righteousness, but he is against it. I was inclined to separate regeneration from baptism, but he doubts this separation, etc." (Newman 1956, 203) Despite his familiarity with Sumner's view of the Church, Hawkins' theological guidance, discussions with Pusey as well as his pastoral experience, Newman remained divided on these questions in the latter half of 1824. It is clear that he had not yet succeeded in formulating a consistent theological synthesis that would combine his earlier evangelical inheritance with the vision of the Church as a visible, historical, and sacramental reality without forcing him to revise his own theological premises.

2.2. The Mediatorial Kingdom as a Temporary Solution to the Problem of the Invisible and Visible Church

A tentative solution to Newman's understanding of the visible and invisible Church appeared in three post-Christmas sermons, nos. 46, 51, and 52. Although these themes did not reappear explicitly in his diaries or correspondence until 1827, the sermons indicate an important stage in the gradual clarification of his ecclesiological thinking.

Drawing on the Calvinist doctrine of the two kingdoms, Newman primarily developed this concept in sermons between 1824 and 1827, arguing that by nature believers belong to the universal kingdom of God's providence, while by grace they belong to the mediatorial kingdom—the visible Church created by Christ's redemptive work (Zuijdwegt 2022, 103–4).

Newman distinguished between the two kingdoms: The kingdom of Christ as God is absolute, eternal, and unchanging, while the mediatorial kingdom of the incarnate Christ, i.e. the Church, is a temporal institution that begins with the resurrection and ends with the Last Judgement and serves the restoration of baptised

sinners. It is thus a realm of mercy, correction, and discipline, providing the Church with the necessary means to carry out the ongoing mediation of Christ among believers (Newman 1991, 277, 293, n. 1, 322–23, 325–26).

While preparing his third sermon on the mediatorial kingdom in January 1825, Newman recorded a revealing diary entry: "I think, I am not certain, I must give up the doctrine of imputed righteousness and that of regeneration as apart from baptism." (Newman 1956, 203)

This entry marks a decisive moment in Newman's theology, less than a month after he disagreed with Pusey on the question of baptismal regeneration. It seems that the sermons on the mediatorial kingdom brought clarity to Newman's ecclesiological vision: baptism is no longer treated merely as a symbolic rite but is presented as an essential entrance into Christ's kingdom of grace and a preparation for the eternal kingdom of glory.

Newman remained deliberately cautious about specifying the precise moment or mechanism of regeneration. He was not concerned with whether regeneration takes place in baptism itself, but with the opposition to any theology that denies the need for a "change of heart." As he noted in diary: "It seems to me the great stand is to be made, not against those who connect a spiritual change with baptism, but those who deny a spiritual change altogether." (Newman 1956, 203)

In this context, Newman formulated four important theological responses to Mayers' letter of April 14, 1817, which had offered a detailed rejection of baptismal regeneration. These points represent a defence of sacramental theology and also lay the foundation for Newman's broader ecclesiological synthesis.

Newman's first counter-argument takes the form of a rhetorical question: "First, unless God is likely to vouchsafe grace in baptism, why ordain it for infants?" (Newman 1956, 203) This question contains two arguments: first, Newman implicitly defends the sacramental character of baptism by aligning it with Scripture and the liturgical tradition of the Church of England, where he refers to the *Book of Common Prayer*, which presupposes the efficacy of baptism for infants. Secondly, he elevates the liturgy itself to a *locus theologicus* and not merely an expression of piety. In contrast to Mayers' reading of Anglican liturgy as ambiguous or even contradictory to baptismal regeneration, Newman argues that baptism is an instrument through which God truly works.

Mayers argued that baptism could not be a means of regeneration because the baptised clearly lacked holiness. Newman responded by exposing what he regarded as the implicit anthropological consequences of this position: "I will not think so well of human nature as to suppose that it's capable of originating the good thoughts which careless men often have…" (Newman 1956, 203) Newman's comment functions rhetorically: by denying baptismal grace, Mayers' position is portrayed as implicitly crediting fallen human nature with good impulses, a conclusion Newman deliberately frames as theologically untenable. Newman's polemic thus operates by

inversion: precisely because he shared Mayers' pessimistic account of fallen nature, he increasingly regarded baptismal grace as the only coherent explanation for the presence of even partial moral good among the baptised.

Newman's third argument situates baptism within the logic of the covenant: "Why, then, should not baptism put a man into that covenant state in which God is, by promise, bound to give him His Spirit as far as he can bear it?" (Newman 1956, 204)

Here, Newman reinterprets baptism as an act of the covenant that introduces the believer into the mediatorial kingdom. Its effectiveness isn't based on the perfection of the recipient, but on God's faithfulness to his promise. This is also a decisive break from the evangelical assumption that visible holiness must precede or confirm baptismal regeneration: "And it is presumptuous to attempt to decide confidently concerning the spiritual state of others; and surely I have seen instances in which even excellent men have grievously erred against charity by judging others." (Newman 1956, 204) Instead, Newman affirms that the grace of baptism should be presumed unless demonstrably absent, which is a complete reversal of his earlier view (Thomasset 2006).

The last argument refers to children: "What did our Lord mean by bidding children to come to Him, if not for spiritual blessings?" (Newman 1956, 204) This serves as a biblical basis for the spiritual validity of infant baptism. Newman suggests that Jesus' openness to children reflects their capacity to receive divine grace. In doing so, he rejects the view held by Hopkins and Mayers that infants are incapable of spiritual regeneration because they are unable to exercise conscious faith.

These four arguments offered a systematic and theological critique of the Protestant view that linked sacramental efficacy exclusively to conscious faith or moral performance. Each point progressively undermined Mayers' position and affirmed regeneration as an objective spiritual reality that does not depend on the consciousness or moral performance of the recipient. Though not obvious, this shift in Newman's thinking coincided with a broader intellectual change. As we read in a diary entry dated February 21, 1825, he noted that preparing the weekly sermons had forced him to think more deeply and systematically about a range of theological topics. Nevertheless, he remained cautious: "I can hardly say with confidence that the change of opinion has brought me nearer to the truth." (Newman 1956, 204)

Nevertheless, Newman explicitly began to distance himself from earlier evangelical authorities such as Scott, whose teachings he now found difficult to reconcile with Scripture, especially the doctrine of predestination, which he by then hardly regarded as a biblical teaching.

This period of intense reflection found its public expression in the sermons Newman preached between February and March 1825 (sermons 56–67), which focused on the mediatorial kingdom, the believer's covenantal status initiated at baptism, and the nature of true faith. The permanence of this theological change was confirmed in his diary entry of May 29, written after his ordination at Christ Church Cathedral,

in which he noted a striking change in his view of the spiritual condition of others: "Now, I think there are none but probably, nay almost certainly, have been visited by Him." (Newman 1956, 206)

Previously, Newman had believed that only a few in the Church bore witness to divine grace. Now he regarded grace as the presumed state of all baptised members until proven otherwise. The theological burden of proof had shifted from those who claimed someone was truly regenerate to those who denied it.

Despite his rather sacramental view, Newman did not fully accept the doctrine. He conceded, "Yet I do not even now actually maintain that the Spirit always or generally accompanies the very act of baptism." (Newman 1956, 206) Thus, while Newman affirmed baptism as an entry into the mediatorial kingdom and the possibility of grace, he resisted a mechanistic understanding of sacramental causality. His view reflects a desire to preserve divine freedom and personal responsibility without undermining the objective gift of grace.

2.3. Joseph Butler's *Analogy of Religion*

This theological reorientation reached a new depth in the summer of 1825, when Newman began to read Joseph Butler's *Analogy of Religion*. He later described that as ushering in "a new era in my religious views." (Newman 1908, 10) Butler's analogy between nature and revelation affirmed that God's action in salvation history mirrors the gradual and organic processes of the natural world. Newman began to apply this framework to the Church, understanding it as a visible witness of truth and a sacramental *oikonomia* organically embedded within divine providence.

By the end of 1825, Newman had stopped discussing ecclesiological questions in his diary, having internalised a new theological position. In a final note dated October 30, he simply writes: "My views continue to change." (Newman 1956, 206)

The short note shows Newman's awareness, which became evident in a following year. Newman's reflections moved away from an evangelical distrust of sacramental and visible realities to a confident affirmation of baptismal grace, ecclesiastical mediation, and the constant presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church.

His ecclesiological silence ended with a diary entry on his birthday in 1826: "I am almost convinced against predestination and election in the Calvinistic sense, that is, I see no proof of them in Scripture. Pusey accused me the other day of becoming more High Church." (Newman 1956, 208)

3. A Pre-Tractarian Turn (1827–1830)

In 1826, Newman again entered a period of silence in his diaries and letters. He seemed to concentrate mainly on writing sermons in which he explored the pneumatological and ecclesiological aspects of the Church and its community. It was only towards the end of 1826 that Newman directly addressed the growing divide between the High and Low Church parties within Anglicanism in a letter to Samuel Rickards (1796–1865).

Recognising the urgent need for a unified theological identity capable of preserving the truth of Revelation and apostolic tradition, Newman began to realise that the internal ideological fragmentation of the Church of England, if left unresolved, would eventually lead to irreparable schism. Rather than simplistically committing to one pole of the theological spectrum, Newman proposed a method of theological restoration: a collective return to the sources (John Henry Newman to Samuel Rickards, November 26, 1826, *LD* I, 310). He writes:

> I begin by assuming that the old worthies of our Church are neither orthodox nor evangelical, but untractable persons, suspicious characters, neither one thing nor the other—Now it would be a most useful thing to give a kind of summary of their opinions—Passages we see constantly quoted from them for this side and for that—but I do not desiderate the work of an advocate, but the result of an investigation—not to bring them to us, but to go to them—If then in a calm candid impartial manner their views were sought out and developed, would not the effect be good in a variety of ways? (John Henry Newman to Samuel Rickards, November 26, 1826, *LD* I, 310)

It was in this context that Newman first clearly articulated the need to establish a single Anglican Church, transcending the current divisions between parties. He wanted more than just a consensus; he wanted a doctrinally articulated ecclesial identity:

> I would advise taking them *as a whole*, a corpus theologicum et ecclesiasticum, *the* English Church—stating indeed *how far* they differ among themselves, yet distinctly marking out the grand bold scriptural features of that doctrine in which they all agree—They would then be a band of witnesses for the truth, not opposed to each other (as they now are) but *one* – each tending to the edification of the body of Christ, according to the effectual working of His Spirit in every one, according to the diversity of their gifts and the variety of circumstances under which each spake his testimony. (John Henry Newman to Samuel Rickards, November 26, 1826, *LD* I, 310)

In this vision, Newman elevated the doctrine of regeneration as the central theological principle of the Anglican system, a doctrine that structures Anglican thought from within and also serves as the main distinguishing feature from other theological

trends. As he explained to Rickards, the various theological positions branch off to a coherent Anglican identity or to theologies that are incompatible with it, such as Calvinism, anti-paedobaptism, ecclesial minimalism, and even ethical relativism (John Henry Newman to Samuel Rickards, November 26, 1826, *LD* I, 310).

Alongside regeneration, Newman named a second central doctrinal issue: the observance of the Lord's Day. He suggested that reflection on this issue could provide a platform for debates on Sabbatarianism, Church discipline, schism, and Church governance (John Henry Newman to Samuel Rickards, November 26, 1826, *LD* I, 310).

Newman's proposal for ecclesiastical unity was partly influenced by Whately, whom he met in 1822 and with whom he formed a close intellectual partnership. As Newman later admitted in *Apologia*, "What he did for me in point of religious opinion, was, first, to teach me the existence of the Church, as a substantive body or corporation; next to fix in me those anti-Erastian views of Church polity." (Newman 1908, 12) These views were crucial in the coming years, as they shaped Newman's ecclesiological thought, which is evident in his writings on Catholic emancipation and the early foundations of the Oxford Movement.

In the spring of 1827, parliamentary debates over Catholic emancipation came into view, exposing deep national separation over civil rights for Roman Catholics. Newman's engagement with this issue is reflected in a letter to his sister Harriett (John Henry Newman to Harriett Newman, March 19, 1827, *LD* II, 7), a response where he deliberately distanced himself and even used irony. Dismissing the question as primarily historical and political, Newman argued that it was unwise to take any firm stance in the matter without such a background. Nevertheless, he cautiously concluded, by expressing his distrust of Catholic ambitions for political influence and hinting that they might demand further concessions once some had been granted.

3.1. John Henry Newman's Diary and Correspondence on the "Arian" Sermon

As Newman recorded in his diary, on Easter Sunday, April 15, 1827, at Oriel Chapel, Oxford, he preached a sermon no. 160 titled "On the Mediatorial Kingdom of Christ" (*LD* II, 11). The sermon examines the fundamental assertion that Christ's mediatorial kingship constitutes the central truth of Christian revelation. Newman's aim in this sermon was to clarify the nature, identity, and mission of Christ as Mediator. He criticises contemporary formulations of the doctrine as either too extensive or too disorganised to offer a coherent understanding (*LD* II, 15).

Newman makes a clear distinction between the mediatorial kingdom of the Son and the eternal reign of God. Citing John 17 and 1 Cor 15, he emphasises that Christ's kingdom is a temporary economy established for the salvation of the elect. This mediatorial order does not extend to the world, but is limited to those who are called into the Church. Here Newman offers a profound ecclesiological interpretation of

Christ's mission: the Church is the embodied form of God's redemptive work, structured as a spiritual polity with Christ as the reigning King. This model attempts to resolve the tension between the visible and invisible Church through a soteriological vision rooted in the mediation of Christ. It presents the Church as the provisional locus of salvation, that will reach its fulfilment when "God will be all in all" (1 Cor 15:28).

Importantly, Newman introduced a theological distinction that caused controversy among his colleagues: Christ as Mediator is "inferior to the Father" in function, but not in essence (*LD* II, 16). This statement, based on 1 Cor 11:3 and John 6:38, led to accusations of Arianism from Whately and, more cautiously, from Hawkins.

In a diary memorandum dated May 13, 1827, Newman wrote a reflective apologia in which he responded to criticism. With self-criticism, Newman acknowledged the partiality of his presentation, admitting that he had only offered "one aspect of a complex doctrine" rather than a comprehensive theological exposition. Newman regretted that he had not made it clear that his explanation of Christ's mediatorial role represented only one aspect of the wider structure of salvation based on Trinitarian unity (*LD* II, 15).

In response to accusations of Arianism, Newman clarified that his intent was not concerned with speculative Trinitarian theology, but with the soteriological significance of Christ's mediatorial mission. He also defended the semantic duality of the term "Son," which signifies both divine essence and functional subordination, and distinguished between theological identity and the economy of salvation. Newman emphasised that he was not proposing a new doctrine, but rather attempting to resolve a theological tension that had troubled him for nearly a decade (*LD* II, 16).

3.2. The Shift to Political Ecclesiology

Newman's gradual shift towards political ecclesiology becomes evident in his correspondence in 1828. That coincided with the sudden political shifts that started with the Clare election in Ireland. Candidate Daniel O'Connell (1775–1847), a Catholic, was elected, despite him being denied that right by the constitution. This event led to increased support for Catholic emancipation in the Empire and finally culminated in the repeal of the *Test and Corporation Acts* in 1828. Although Newman was intellectually reticent, he recognised the implications for ecclesiological and national identity (John Henry Newman to Joseph Blanco White, July 4, 1828, *LD* II, 80).

Another major turn of events in the religious and political history of the British Empire occurred the following year, in 1829. On February 5, King George IV urged both Houses of Parliament to review the legal restrictions regarding Roman Catholics and their subjects. On the same day, Robert Peel (1788–1850), a representative of Oxford University in Parliament, reversed his earlier opinion and publicly supported Catholic emancipation. Peel's change of heart meant an immediate resignation as

Oxford's MP (Peel 1856, 313). In his letter to Rickards, Newman could not help but express his mixed feelings: admiration for Peel's integrity on one side, but distrust of his political motives on the other. He feared that such concessions would only encourage future demands and weaken the spiritual authority of the Anglican Church. When the university debated Peel's replacement, Newman supported the anti-emancipation candidate, seeing this as a necessary step for the autonomy of the Church and the university (John Henry Newman to Samuel Rickards, February 6, 1829, *LD* II, 119).

This period brought to light the intellectual division within Oriel College. The group known as the Oriel Noetics (including Edward Copleston, Hawkins, and Whately) had long shaped the college's intellectual tone. Although originally committed to a High-Church model, by the late 1820s they had adopted a politically liberal theology centred on national Church reform, rational religion, and moral ethics (Brent 1997, 72; Nockles 2018, 90). However, Newman and his fellows increasingly saw this as compromising the doctrinal and institutional integrity. The Peel controversy highlighted the divide: Hawkins and Whately supported Peel, while Newman and his allies (Hurrell Froude and Keble) saw it as a betrayal of Anglican ecclesial identity.

Newman's intellectual transformation during the Peel crisis marked the beginning of Tractarianism. In his letters, he expressed concern about the weakening of ecclesiastical authority and the rise of religious pluralism. He saw the increasing acceptance of individual judgment over clerical teaching as a dangerous trend that undermined doctrinal truth. Newman feared that utilitarianism, secularism, and dissenting Protestantism would displace the Church of England's role in national life and devalue Church doctrine and discipline. Without a unified and authoritative Church, Newman warned, the cohesion of national religious identity would disintegrate (John Henry Newman to Mrs Newman, March 13, 1829, *LD* II, 130).

A concrete example of ecclesiastical disorder emerged in the controversy surrounding the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in late 1829 and 1830. This episode deepened Newman's conviction that the Church required structural reform. In a letter to Hawkins, he advocated for episcopal oversight of the CMS (John Henry Newman to Edward Hawkins, end of 1829, *LD* II, 182). He envisioned a centralised church body capable of regulating doctrine and enforcing disciplinary standards, a vision perhaps best expressed in a sermon no. 216, "On Church-Union, and the Sin of Schism," which encapsulated his emerging High- Church theology, denouncing schism as a grave sin against Christ's will. For Newman, the unity of the Church was institutional, sacramental, and doctrinal and could not be replaced by private judgment or denominational sentiment (Newman 2011, 65). This sermon marks a decisive moment in Newman's theological development. It synthesises biblical, historical, and ecclesiological arguments to assert that unity in Church's order is as important as unity in faith, anticipates the core principles of the Oxford Movement and lays the foundation for Newman's later defence of Catholicism.

Conclusions

We can say that Newman's early ecclesiology was nonetheless complex and developed rapidly in the 1830s. His early letters and diaries reveal a very intimate access to this process, indicating an understanding of the Church that he clearly did not see as a fixed doctrinal system, but as a living and dynamic reality. Newman's early writings show us three constant thematic patterns: baptismal regeneration, the relationship between the visible and invisible Church, and the unity and authority of the Church. His evangelical framework, influenced particularly by Mayers, emphasised the invisible Church as the exclusive community of the elect. This theme dominated his early correspondence, especially between 1816 and 1817, in which questions about the efficacy of baptism and the conditions for salvation frequently arise.

Over time, Newman's diaries begin to reflect a change: an entry from January 1825 indicates that he accepted regeneration not just as an abstract concept but as a central ecclesiological principle. Moreover, letters from 1826 and 1827 indicate a growing interest in Church unity and a gradual transition towards a more "Catholic," doctrinally oriented vision of the Church as visible and divinely created reality.

An important role was also played by Newman's correspondents, and we must not overlook all the reading material that served as a theological source. Letters exchanged with family members, Mayers, and academic colleagues shaped the development of his ecclesiology. The influence of liturgical texts, especially the *Book of Common Prayer*, was also significant. The liturgical reflections in the diaries, and ultimately, the reference to Article XIX in a sermon preached in December 1824, point to a growing tendency to view Anglican formularies as authoritative theological sources rather than merely devotional books.

Newman's theological development, as documented in the sources, could be best described as a gradual but decisive shift from evangelical "bubble" to a sacramental ecclesiology. The development became evident by the late 1820s as the vision of *one* Church was realized in Christ's mediatorial kingdom: here Newman theologically articulated unity.

We can therefore conclude that the saint's letters and diaries form an important corpus that lets us understand the development of his early ecclesiological identity. Undoubtedly, we can argue that these writings are more than just secondary material; they serve as theological documents and testimonies that Newman's ecclesiology was shaped in a continuous dialogue with Scripture, tradition, mentors, academic colleagues, family relationships, and his own interior life, rather than being the product of abstract or isolated reflection.

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