

Saint John Henry Cardinal Newman and Our Lady II

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Just as is the case with many converts to the Catholic faith today, so too the Church's teaching and veneration of Mary was a problem for John Henry Newman as an Anglican. Should this have been the case and should it still be the case today? Not really because Mary has a very special, indeed unique place in God's plan in creation and redemption. It was created as a problem by Martin Luther and the so-called reformers. In order to break away from the Church, the enmity between the serpent and the New Eve, which Newman understood so well, had to be played to the hilt. Here is the late Father Peter Damian Fehlner's brilliant description of how this was achieved in a discourse which he gave at Fatima in 2005:

On the eve of the reformation no other country of the Catholic west was in such good condition, spiritually and culturally, as Mary's Dowry (cf. E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, New Haven 1992). How was so radical a change accomplished as it were "over-night"? The answer is: **the master-liar, the enemy of the Woman who owned England, cleverly manipulated, and those manipulated let themselves be manipulated because they did not consult their true "Advocate and Queen". ...**

The Woman has made this clear, here in Fatima, how the confrontation would end with or without her, and what both she and her Son expected of the Church and of all believers: not a faith conditioned by academic fashion, by greed, by lust, by political security, by personal preference, but a faith matching the Fiat of the Virgin: at Nazareth, on Calvary, in the Church. **Such a faith is a faith lived in the spirit of prayer and penance-reparation, that is, in a coredemptive spirit. Satan's success rested neither on superior power, nor on clever conspiracy, but on convincing key players at the right moment so to govern as to make in theory and then in practice the rejection of such a coredemptive spirit, rooted in the rejection of the mystery of the Immaculate Coredemptrix, the operative factor for advancement in the cultural, social-political and even religious dimensions of human existence. ...**

Let no one be so foolish as to imagine history cannot repeat itself, if Mary is not acknowledged for what she truly is in God's sight: the Immaculate Coredemptrix. She is the only one who can salvage the situation, and make all the other useful programs fruitful. And it should not require many degrees in theology to realize that **if the Church does not want her to help her way, she may not help. ...**

This is a reminder that **the Immaculate is not merely one of many objects of theological reflection, she is after Her Son the teacher of our theology, without whose active involvement enthusiastically seconded by her students, Catholic theology literally dies.**¹

Newman had found himself caught in the anti-Marian polemic that had been introduced into England by Henry VIII's break with Rome and it was one of the last hurdles that he himself had to overcome in his embrace of full Catholic communion. Let us listen to how he overcame it in this beautiful passage in his as he took the final step of entering the Roman Catholic Church:

This work of Segneri is written against persons who continue in sins under pretence of their devotion to St. Mary, and in consequence he is led to draw out the idea which good Catholics have of her. The idea is that that she is absolutely the first of created beings. Thus the treatise says, that 'God might have easily made a more beautiful firmament, and a greener earth, but it was not possible to make a higher Mother than the Virgin Mary; and in her formation there has been conferred on mere creatures all the glory of which they are capable, remaining mere creatures'. And as containing all created perfection, she has all those attributes, which, as was noticed above, the Arians and other heretics applied to our Lord, and which the Church denied of Him as infinitely below His Supreme Majesty. Thus she is 'the created Idea in the making of the world'; 'which, as being a more exact copy of the Incarnate Idea than was elsewhere to be found, was used as the original of the rest of the creation'. To her are applied the words, '*Ego primogenita prodivi ex ore Altissimi*',² because **she was predestinated in the Eternal Mind coevally with the Incarnation of her Divine Son.**³ But to Him alone the title of Wisdom Incarnate is reserved. Again, Christ is the First-born by nature; the Virgin in a less sublime order, viz. that of adoption. Again, **if omnipotence is ascribed to her, it is participated**

¹ *Maria "Unica Cooperatrice alla Redenzione" – Mary "Unique Cooperator in the Redemption": Atti del Simposio sul Mistero della Corredenzione Mariana* (New Bedford, MA: Academy of the Immaculate, 2005) 551, 553-554, 556. (My emphasis in bold.)

² 'I came forth, a first-born, from the mouth of the Most High' (Sirach 24:3).

³ This is in full accord with what Blessed Pius IX would teach in 1854, nine years after Newman wrote this, in *Ineffabilis Deus*, the bull whereby he solemnly defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception by stating that "by one and the same decree God established the origin of Mary and the Incarnation of Divine Wisdom". This had been the consistent teaching of the Franciscan School for hundreds of years. Cf. Peter Damian Fehlner, "Fr. Juniper B. Carol, O.F.M.: His Mariology and Scholarly Achievement" in *Marian Studies*, 43 (1992) 17-59.

omnipotence (as she and all Saints have a participated sonship, divinity, glory, holiness, and worship), and is explained by the words, ‘*Quod Deus imperio, tu prece, Virgo, potes*’.⁴ ...

Again, a particular *cultus* is due to the Virgin beyond comparison greater than that given to any other Saint, because her dignity belongs to another order, namely to one which in some sense belongs to the order of the Hypostatic Union itself, and is necessarily connected with it’.⁵

This final reference to a particular *cultus*⁶ follows the classical Catholic distinction that God alone deserves *latría* or worship, that the saints deserve our *dulia* or veneration, but that Mary deserves hyperdulia or the highest form of veneration, above and beyond all the saints.⁷ Newman says this again in his which were delivered to both Protestants and Catholics and which constituted a genuine and nonpolitical form of genuine ecumenism.

Mary must surpass all the saints; the very fact that certain privileges are known to have been theirs persuades us. Almost from the necessity of the case, that she had the same and higher. Her conception was immaculate, in order that she might surpass all saints in the date as well as the fullness of her sanctification.⁸

Even as an Anglican, John Henry Newman had come to recognize the extraordinary holiness of Mary. In a sermon that he had preached already on 29 March 1832 he asked

Who can estimate the holiness and perfection of her, who was chosen to be the Mother of Christ? **If to him that hath, more is given, and holiness and Divine favour go together (and this we are expressly**

⁴ ‘What God can do with a command, you are able to do by your prayer.’

⁵ As in my previous article all references are to *Mary: The Virgin Mary in the Life and Writings of John Henry Newman* Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Philip Boyce, O.C.D., (Leominster, Herefordshire: Gracewing; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001) [henceforth referred to as Boyce] 300-301, 301-302. Paolo Segneri (1624-94) was an Italian Jesuit whose book *Il devoto di Maria* was still well known was known to Newman; cf. Boyce 299 (My emphasis in bold).

⁶ The Latin word *cultus* has a wide range of meaning that covers worship and veneration whereas the English word “cult” has decidedly negative connotations.

⁷ Cf. Arthur Burton Calkins, *Totus Tuus: Pope Saint John Paul II’s Program of Marian Consecration and Entrustment*, Second edition, revised and brought up to the end of the Pontificate of Pope Saint John Paul II (New Bedford, MA: Academy of the Immaculate, 2017) 173-185.

⁸ Boyce 160 (My emphasis in bold).

told), what must have been the transcendent purity of her, whom the Creator Spirit condescended to overshadow with His miraculous presence? What must have been her gifts, who was chosen to be the only near earthly relative of the Son of God, the only one whom He was bound by nature to revere and look up to; the one appointed to train and educate Him day by day, as He grew in wisdom and in stature?⁹

In his advanced years he wrote a number of meditations published after his death entitled *Meditations and Devotions of the Late Cardinal Newman*. I present two here in which he treats of the unique and extraordinary holiness of the Mother of God.

[W]hen our Lady is called the ‘Mirror of Justice’, it is meant to say that she is the Mirror of sanctity, holiness, supernatural goodness.

Next, what is meant by calling her a *mirror*? A mirror is a surface which reflects, as still water, polished steel, or a looking-glass. **What did Mary reflect? She reflected our Lord – but *He* is infinite Sanctity. She then, as far as a creature could, reflected His Divine sanctity, and therefore she is the *Mirror of Sanctity*, or, as the Litany says, of *Justice*. ...**

Now, consider that Mary loved her Divine Son with an unutterable love; and consider too she had Him all to herself for thirty years. **Do we not see that, as she was full of grace *before* she conceived Him in her womb, she must have had a vast incomprehensible sanctity when she had lived close to God for thirty years? – a sanctity of an angelical order, reflecting back the attributes of God with a fullness and exactness of which no saint upon earth, or hermit, or holy virgin, can even remind us.** Truly then she is the *Speculum Justitiæ*, the *Mirror of Divine Perfection*.¹⁰

For if such a close and continued intimacy with her Son created in her a sanctity inconceivably great, must not also the knowledge which she gained during those many years from His conversation of present, past, and future, have been so large, and so profound, and so diversified, and so thorough, that, though she was a poor woman without human advantages, she must in her knowledge of creation, of the universe, and of history have excelled the greatest of philosophers, and in her theological knowledge the greatest of theologians, and in her prophetic discernment the most favoured of prophets? ...

⁹ Boyce 120.

¹⁰ Boyce 380-381. (My emphasis in bold.)

God spoke to the Prophets: we have His communications to them in Scripture. Be He spoke to them in figure and parable. There was one, viz., Moses, to whom He vouchsafed to speak face to face. 'If there be among you a prophet of the Lord,' God says, 'I will appear to him in a vision, and I will speak to him in a dream. But it is not so with my servant Moses. ... For I will speak to him mouth to mouth, and plainly, and not by riddles and figures doth he see the Lord.' This was the great privilege of the inspired Lawgiver of the Jews; but how much was it below that of Mary! Moses had the privilege only now and then, from time to time; but Mary for thirty continuous years saw and heard Him, being all through that time face to face with Him.¹¹

I should like to conclude this article with a corollary that John Henry Newman saw very clearly already in the mid-nineteenth century: where Mary is given the homage which her holiness merits and which she alone deserves, Jesus is still adored. Where she does not receive hyperdulia, Jesus does not receive *latria*. He made the first of these statements already in his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* of 1845:

And if we take a survey at least of Europe, we shall find that it is not those religious communions which are characterized by devotion towards the Blessed Virgin that have ceased to adore her Eternal Son, but those very bodies, (when allowed by the law,) which have renounced devotion to her. The regard for His glory, which was professed in that keen jealousy of her exaltation has not been supported by the event. They who were accused of worshipping a creature in His stead, still worship Him; their accusers, who hoped to worship Him so purely, they, wherever obstacles to the development of their principles have been removed, have ceased to worship Him altogether.¹²

The next statement of this "Newmanian" corollary occurs in the *Discourses to Mixed Congregations* of 1849

If Mary is the Mother of God, Christ must be literally Emmanuel, God with us. And hence it was, that, when time went on and the bod spirits and false prophets grew stronger and bolder, and found a way into the Catholic body itself, then the Church, guided by God, could find no more effectual and sure way of expelling them than that of using this word *Deipara* against them; and, on the other hand, when they came up

¹¹ Boyce 382-383.

¹² Boyce 289. (My emphasis in bold.)

again from the realms of darkness, and plotted the utter overthrow of Christian faith in the sixteenth century, then they could find no more certain expedient for their hateful purpose than that of reviling and blaspheming the prerogatives of Mary, for knew full well that, if they could one get the world to dishonour the Mother, the dishonour of the Son would follow close. **The Church and Satan agreed together in this, that the Son and Mother went together; and the experience of three centuries has confirmed their testimony, for Catholics who have honoured the Mother, still worship the Son, while Protestants, who now have ceased to confess the Son, began then by scoffing at the Mother.**¹³

The great Cardinal made his final declaration on this matter in his old age. It was completely in line with what he said about liberalism in his *biglietto* speech on being served formal notice of his being named a cardinal in 1879:

For if Mary's glory is so very great, how cannot His be greater still who is the Lord and God of Mary? He is infinitely above His Mother; and all that grace which filled her is but the overflowings and superfluities of His incomprehensible Sanctity. And history teaches us the same lesson. Look at the Protestant countries which threw off all devotion to her three centuries ago, under the notion that to put her from their thoughts would be exalting the praises of her Son. Has that consequence really followed from their profane conduct towards her? Just the reverse – **the countries, Germany, Switzerland, England, which so acted, have in great measure ceased to worship Him, and have given up their belief in His divinity, while the Catholic Church, wherever she is to be found, adores Christ as true God and true Man, as firmly as ever she did; and strange indeed would it be, if it ever happened otherwise.**¹⁴

These profound reflections are the product of grace in the soul of Saint John Henry Cardinal Newman and a gift to the entire Church in an age of great turmoil, which he so clearly foresaw.

¹³ Boyce 137. (My emphasis in bold.)

¹⁴ Boyce 405-406. (My emphasis in bold.)