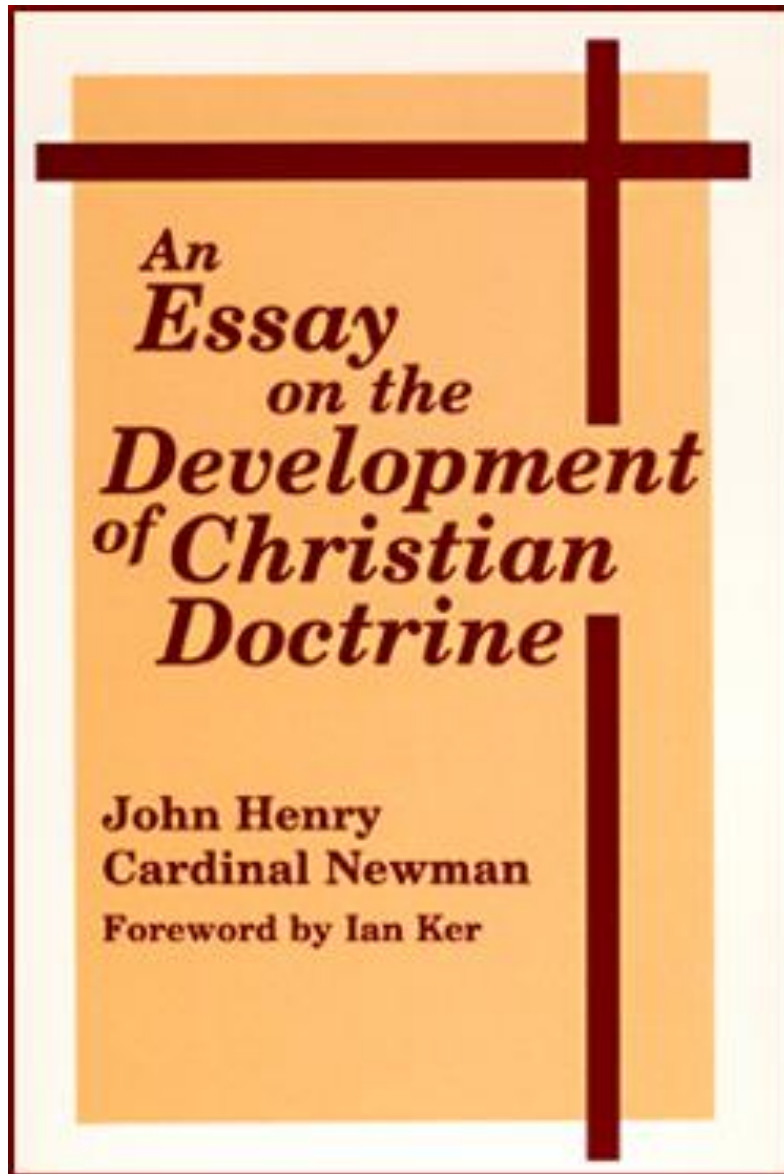


A Summary of An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine by John Henry Cardinal Newman



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About The Author

The founder of the Oxford movement, the now Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman was born in London on February 21, 1801 and died in Birmingham on August 11, 1890. He studied at Trinity College, Oxford where he was ordained to the priesthood for the Church of England in 1824. He became vicar to St. Mary's, Oxford, in 1827 and was a select preacher for the university. In 1832 he went on a tour of the Mediterranean, in which the Catholicism he encountered had a major impact on him. In 1841 Newman published *Tract 90* demonstrating that the thirty-nine articles, the formulary of faith of the Church of England, were consistent with the Roman Catholic Church. He entered into a type of monastic seclusion where he intellectually wrestled with Catholicism, and in 1845 he was received into the Roman Catholic Church. In 1846 he traveled to Rome where he received ordination and a Doctorate of Divinity. In 1854 he, with the bishops of Ireland, unsuccessfully attempted to found a Catholic university in Dublin. Later in his priestly career John Henry Newman was elevated to the office of Cardinal by Leo XIII at the demand of English Catholicism.

Newman is one of the masters of English prose. His greatest published works consist in *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, *The Idea of a University Defined*, *Apologia pro vita sua*, *The Grammar of Assent*, and his sermons. Upon his death he bequeathed to the Catholic Church with a greater understanding of the faith.

General Overview

One of the fruits of the retirement that resulted in his conversion was the *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*. This work provides an overview in Christian history and theology as the foundation for his definition of true development in Christian doctrine. The real problem, he distinguishes, is to recognize true development from amongst the doctrinal decay. Newman's *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* shows how throughout history it has really been true development that has been what has protected the Church from corruption.

Doctrinal Developments Viewed in Themselves: Chapters I-IV

In order to delve into the topic of the development of doctrine, Newman first speaks on the development of ideas. Ideas in the mind of man are the basis for the faith. The faith can be broken down into different ideas. When man learns, he compares, contrasts, abstracts, generalizes, connects, adjusts, and classifies. All knowledge, all of man's ideas is viewed in relation to this process, the process of the development of ideas. God through supernatural revelation makes ideas known to man. An idea, however, cannot encapsulate everything that enters into the thought of the idea. It will, however, possess the mind. And thus Newman states on Christianity's relationship to ideas, "Christianity is dogmatically, devotional, practical all at once; it is esoteric and exoteric; it is indulgent and strict; it is light and dark; it is love, and it is fear." Ideas must develop, "the aspects of an idea are brought into consistency and form...being the germination and maturation of some truth or apparent truth on a large mental field." An idea not only is modified, but modifies in its practical application. Newman first attempted to illustrate the something of the process of a development in ideas.

Newman then proceeds to classify the kinds of developments in ideas. He enunciates five types of external developments: linguistic, mathematical, physical, material, and political. Intellectual developments may also occur and they include logical, historical, ethical, and metaphysical developments. So much of the development of the idea depends on the subject matter and he goes on to say, "in many cases, development simply stands for exhibition, as in some of the instances adduced above." In order for Christianity to have development in doctrine it must be political, logical, historical, ethical, or metaphysical development. These are some examples of development in ideas.

There is an antecedent argument on behalf of developments in Christian doctrine. As Christianity is a fact that impresses an idea of itself on our minds and is the subject matter of exercises of reason, that idea will in the context of time, “expand into a multitude of ideas, and aspects of ideas, connected and harmonious with one another, and in themselves determinate and immutable, as is the object fact itself which is thus represented.” Due to the nature of the concept of an idea, its speculative nature, there will be numerous other ideas, or developments, that flow from the central nature of the first idea.

Cardinal Newman places antecedent arguments on behalf of developments in Christian ideas or doctrine. What does this mean? There will be certain fundamental doctrines from which all other doctrine will flow. Those fundamental doctrines, however, will be essential to the natural developments that should take place. Developments of doctrine are to be expected. Just as there are different methods of presentation there will be different methods of presentation of the Faith. The doctrines that develop from the Faith will be different, but the Faith will remain essentially the same. Concerning this thought, Cardinal Newman says, “Two persons may each convey the same truth to a third, yet by methods and through representations altogether different. The same person will treat the same argument differently in an essay or speech, according to the accident of the day of writing, or of the audience, yet it will be substantially the same.” An example of this can be seen in the development of doctrine on Scripture. Scripture, as an inspired doctrine, contains a message that the author is trying to convey. Whether this message reaches the reader in its entirety on his first perception or over time does not change the nature of Scripture. Scripture has been used by Newman as an example of a natural development of Christian doctrine and he says thus, “Christian doctrine admits of formal, legitimate, and true developments, that is, of developments contemplated by its author.”

An infallible doctrine of the authority of the Church is to be expected as a result of the development of Christian doctrine. Newman has already stated that Christian developments are natural and true, “contemplated and taken into account by its Author, who in designing the work designed its legitimate results.” It has already been asserted that developments exist but then the question is raised regarding the nature of those existing developments. One of the first developments that Newman posits is the necessity of infallibility. The infallible nature of the Church is what governs all other developments in Christian doctrine. No one will maintain that all points of belief are of equal importance. As these developments arise it is also only natural, according to Newman, that an external authority should arise, “to decide upon them, thereby separating them from the mass of mere human speculation, extravagance, corruption, and error, in and out of which they grow.” Infallibility of the Church for Newman is reduced to the necessity of a governance of the Deposit of Faith by an authority.

Time, containing numerous examples of developments in doctrine, also contains existing developments of doctrine and probable fulfillments of those expectations. There are certain doctrines that are formally defined in later centuries but may be coeval with the Apostles or are expressed or implied in the texts of Scripture. What is the method of proof that is used in development of doctrine? The body of Christ (i.e. the Faithful) is to follow the guidance of the Church who looks to Scripture and the Apostles for the basis of an unfolding of the Faith. Newman says, “Where a doctrine comes recommended to us by strong presumptions of its truth we are bound to receive it unsuspectingly, and use it as a key to the evidences to which it appeals, or the facts which it professes to systematize, whatever may be our eventual judgment about it.” One cannot be opposed to any development of doctrine as they are natural and necessary occurrences.

There remains a state of evidence on which to base the development of doctrine. To find this evidence we, Newman says, must do our best with what has been given to us and seek any aid that might assist us. We are to use, “the opinions of others, the traditions of the ages, the prescriptions of authority, antecedent auguries, analogies, parallel cases, these and the like, not indeed taken at random, but, like the evidence from the senses, sifted, scrutinized, obviously become of great importance.” It is also assumed that God in His merciful Providence has supplied us with the means of gaining pertinent truth with different instruments. It must be determined, however, what those instruments are in that particular case. Man, in knowing, must presume something because it is presumption on behalf of man that is his ordinary instrument of proof. The later developments of doctrine, according to Newman, “are in great measure brought *ex abundante*, a matter of grace, not of compulsion.” However, the only essential question in determining whether or not something is a

true development of doctrine is whether or not that development has been contradicted by the Church Herself, “Whether the recognized organ of teaching, the Church Herself, acting through Pope or Council as the oracle of heaven, has ever contradicted Her own enunciations.” This, however, Newman will later show is “so great an improbability.”

There are particular instances in which there are illuminated examples of genuine development of doctrine. All the historical examples stem from the first age of Christianity. Since Apostolic time the Church’s teaching foreshadowed the ecclesiastical dogmas which would be later recognized and defined by Mother Church. The prominent advancement of the doctrine is what justified its definition. In this manner, defined doctrines are placed in “the position of rightful interpretations and keys of the remains and the records in history of the teaching which had so terminated.” The instances which are curiously noticed by Newman are concerning the Canon of the New Testament, original sin, infant baptism, communion of one kind, and homoousion (the subject of our Lord’s Consubstantiality and Coeternity). These are all instances where the Church later defined as dogma what was historically held from the time of the Apostles. Three main illustrations of development of doctrine are our Lord’s Incarnation, the dignity of His Blessed Mother and of all saints, and Papal supremacy. Newman traces each development through its historical course.

Second section

Newman in his second main section examines genuine doctrinal developments in relation to doctrinal corruptions. He is further supporting his thesis that, “modern Catholicism is nothing else but simply the legitimate growth and complement, that is, the natural and necessary development, of the doctrine of the earth Church, and that its divine authority is included in the divinity of Christianity.” To support this it becomes necessary for Newman to assign certain characteristics of faithful developments as a test to discriminate amongst doctrines and prove the validity of the genuine developments. Corruption, what is in opposition to true development is, “the breaking up of life preparatory to its termination.” There is no corruption, Newman retains, if all the foregoing conditions are met, “if it retains one and the same type, the same principles, the same organization; if its beginnings anticipate its subsequent phases, and its later phenomena protect and subserve its earlier; if it has a power of assimilation and revival, and a vigorous action from first to last.” These are the tests that distinguish a genuine development from a corruption in doctrine.

The preservation of something’s type, as seen in a development of doctrine, is found in its analogy to physical growth. Things grow, and one cause of corruption is actually the refusal to follow the course of doctrine as it moves on and obstinacy in the notions of the past. The best example of this is seen in the chosen race, the Jewish people who rejected the very channel of their salvation. An organic growth, as seen in God’s creation, is a necessary component of a healthy Church.

Although doctrine may develop a continuity of the fundamental principles which are the foundations for that doctrine, principles themselves are never altered. What exactly are principles for Newman? Principles are abstract, permanent, ethical, and general whereas doctrines develop, grow and are enlarged, and relate to facts. Doctrines are what develop whereas principles at a first glance do not. There, however, is an integral relationship between principles and doctrines because, “systems live in principles and represent doctrines.” A development if it is a true development must maintain both the doctrine and principle to which it began. If at any point the principles of an idea are altered then the development is no longer a true development but a corruption. True development must maintain its fundamental principles as a foundation for true development.

A development of doctrine from its foundational principles must be logical; it must follow a logical sequence from its basis. Newman defines logic and its necessity as, “the organization of thought, and, as being such, is a security for the faithfulness of intellectual developments.” This logic, however, must remain within the context of present thought. Man in his formulation of logical doctrines must remain within the context of the Church as he has no right to the private judgment. A negative consequence of this is seen in Luther’s logic and his

resulting false dogma. Through the endurance of time a professed doctrine is likely to be a true development in its proportion to, “the logical issue of its original teaching.”

An idea is a living entity in the minds of man and because of this the idea is still growing. The particular doctrines as revealed in the context of time merely provide a further anticipation to the fullness of the coming doctrine. Newman previously has spoken of the idea as a living being in the minds of men. Developments are in great measure only aspects of the idea from which it proceeds. An examination of history will reveal its basis to which the development, seen in the present, is founded. An idea or principle must live and breathe with the Church and it finds its particular application in doctrine.

Another element of the true development of doctrine is its conservative action upon the past. A true development conserves the course of antecedent developments because the development is really those antecedents yet something besides them. True development participates in the past but finds a new type of being in the present. It is an addition, “which illustrates, not obscures, corroborates, not corrects, the body of thought from which it proceeds; and this is its characteristic as contrasted with a corruption.” Development of doctrine should always possess a conservative tendency of the past.

The seventh and final development of true doctrine has the characteristic of chronic vigor. Chronic vigor is contrasted with corruption which cannot possess long standing; the duration of an idea is a result of its chronic vigor. The course of all heresies is short so that idea will die away, while true doctrine will still strongly resound in the hearts of man. Newman also factors another form of corruption, decay, into his discourse on the chronic vigor of an idea. Decay, as opposed to corruption, is a form of corruption that is slow. However, it is a state in which there is no violent or vigorous action at all; the conservative or destructive character of the idea is completely obsolete. While a corruption is distinguished from decay by its energetic action, corruption is distinguished from development by its transitory character. Concluding the thought on the seven notes of development Newman says that, “the point to be ascertained is the unity and identity of the idea with itself through all stages of its development from first to last, and these are seven tokens that it may rightly be accounted one and the same all along.”

Application of the seven notes

Newman then proceeds to apply all seven notes of true development to the existing examples found in the history of the Catholic Church. The first notes that he applies is the preservation its type to the Church of the first century, the Church of the fourth century, and the Church of the fifth and sixth centuries. Concerning texts that are set forth to exemplify the Church in the first century, Newman illustrates all the misconceptions that were present in Christianity and the facts that they were based on. Society was not Christian so Christians were thought of as very strange and hated by many. The Apostolic teachings that the misconceptions were based, however, form the foundation for the whole history of the Church. In correlation to this, Newman progresses to set out the Church in the fourth century. In the fourth century the Imperial government under Charlemagne had converted to Christianity. According to Newman, “the face of Christendom presented much the same appearance all along as on the first propagation of the religion.” Numerous examples are given on how the Church in conjuncture with the state suffered and defeated obstacles. The Church is shown in her wisdom to defeat all outside of her communion that threaten her. The Church in alignment with the state was preserved in the fourth century. Progressing on to the last time segment that Newman illustrates, the fifth and sixth centuries, the Church is demonstrating fighting against the greatest heresies Arianism, which infiltrated her internally, Nestorianism, and Monophysitism. The Church, in principle, remains triumphant over her enemies.

The basic principles of Christianity are fundamental. A continuity of those fundamental principles remains within the Church and never changes. “There has been a certain general type of Christianity in every age, by which it is known at first sight, differing from itself only as what is young differs from what is mature, or as found in Europe or in America, so that it is named at once and without hesitation, as forms of nature are

recognized by experts in physical sciences; or as some work of literature or art is assigned to its right author by the critic, difficult as may be the analysis of that specific impression by which he is enabled to do so.” The continuity of the principles of doctrine are seen by Newman in the Church’s teaching pertaining to the supremacy of faith, Theology, scripture and its mystical interpretation, dogma, and numerous other topics. In speaking on these examples of continuity of the principles of the Church, Newman makes use of: dogma, “supernatural truths irrevocably committed to human language, imperfect because it is human, but definitive and necessary because given from above,” faith, “the absolute acceptance of the Divine Word with an internal assent, in opposition to the information, if such, of sight and reason,” Theology, as the science of religion founded on faith, and the Incarnation as uniting heaven and earth paves the way for the Sacraments, mystical sense of Scripture, grace, asceticism, and the sanctification of both matter and mind.

Newman then proceeds to apply the third note of a true development, its assimilative power, to dogmatic truth and sacramental grace. According to Newman, a true philosophy in relation to other philosophical systems is, “to be polemical, eclectic, unitive: Christianity was polemical; it could not but be eclectic; but was it also unitive? Had it the power, while keeping its own identity, of absorbing its antagonists, as Aaron’s rod, according to St. Jerome’s illustration, devoured the rods of the sorcerers of Egypt? Did it incorporate them into itself, or was it dissolved into them?” When he speaks of the assimilating power of dogmatic truth Newman is elaborating on the one truth that is purely moral. The dogmatic truth of something is seen in the confession of the Faith of the Church. The other type of assimilation in development of doctrine is exemplified in sacramental grace. It is here that the externality of the various rites of the Church, “lose their earthly character and become Sacraments under the Gospel.” The Church is able to assimilate the external manifestation of the Gospel into physical channels of grace. The Church is able to truly assimilate things in a manner that brings the faithful closer to the good news of the salvation that is found in Christ.

The fourth note of the development of doctrine, the logical sequence of the Faith from its fundamental principles, is seen by Newman in the examples of pardons, penances, satisfactions, purgatory, meritorious works, and the monastic rule. These examples that Newman gives are such that, “if the former be admitted (as a principle of the faith) the later can hardly be denied, and the latter can hardly be called a corruption without taking exception to the former.” When the Church is able to absolve sin in her power to bind and loose, she is able to assign pardons, penances, and satisfactions for past sins that have been committed by the sinner. Purgatory is the logical consequence of the necessity of one being purged from sin prior to the beatific vision. Meritorious works affirm the fact that man is capable of doing good and progressing toward heaven in his journey on earth. Last but not least, the monastic rule, defined by Newman as a form of penance is a continual vocation of meritorious works. Pardons, penances, satisfactions, purgatory, meritorious works, and the monastic rule are all various particular developments, of the principles of the Catholic faith, which enable the Church to lead man to a higher state of perfection.

The Church in its fifth characteristic of true development, an anticipation of its future, looks to the future in anticipation to a reunion with her spouse. From this anticipation various doctrines based on fundamental principles are shown to anticipate this future. These include, but are not limited to, the Church’s teaching on the resurrection and relics, the virgin life, the cultus of saints and angels, and the office of the Blessed Virgin. The Church will find what she anticipates in the future as seated in the past, in the foundation of the Church. Newman particularly says, “Supposing then the so-called Catholic doctrines and practices are true and legitimate developments, and not corruptions, we may expect from the force of logic to find instances of them in the first centuries.” The resurrection and relics are the first example that Newman uses to illustrate the anticipation of the future as revealed in the present doctrine. Relics are reminders to Christians of the anticipation in hope of the body reuniting with the soul at the end of time. The Virgin life is seen by the Church as the epitome of holiness that man is striving to attain. Mary also provides the example of virginity which is the foundation for the religious life of both men and women. The Cultus of Saints and Angels provides a hope in individuals and allows visible reminders of images in order for individuals to strive for perfection. The Office of the Blessed Virgin, in her reception of Christ, provides a further example for man’s reception of Christ. Mary was obedient in the Divine economy of Gabriel’s message. Mary reversed the sin of Eve. All of these various developments in the Church: the Resurrection and Relics, the Virgin life, Cultus of

Saints and Angels, and the Office of the Blessed Virgin are developments of doctrine, seated in the past that looks with anticipation to a reunion with Christ.

The Sixth note of a true development, the conservative action in its past, allows the Church to move forward into the future by maintaining a foundation in the past. Christians must protect the historical foundations of Christianity because it is by their innovations that heretics think they are serving and protecting some aspect of Christianity. The examples that Newman uses are divided into various instances and devotion to the Blessed Virgin. Newman in his section on the various instances of conservative action in the Church give various historical instances, but bases them on this saying; “She started with suffering, which turned into victory; but when she was set free from the house of her prison, she did not quit it so much as turn it into a cell. Meekness inherited the earth; strength came forth from weakness; the poor made many rich; yet meekness and poverty remained. The rulers of the world were monks, when they could not be Martyrs.” Then the other form of conservative action is found in the reverence shown to the Blessed Virgin Mary. It has previously been stated that the reverence owed to Mary is distinct in theory from the incommunicable worship paid to God, but then in conservative action, Newman addresses the practicality or expedience of such reverence. He concludes that when one lives in accord with Christ he will necessarily reverence Christ’s mother.

Newman’s last and final application of the seventh note of a true development is its chronic vigor. A corruption if its vigor is of brief duration, runs quickly, and ends in death or if it is a corruption that lasts it loses vigor and decays. Newman then goes on to say that the Church maintains itself through dogmatism, which is, “a religion’s profession of its own reality as contrasted with other systems.” Dogmatic theology reaffirms that the absolutes of Theology are fundamental for Christianity and reaffirm its connection with truth.

Conclusion

Newman in this work has shown how the Church has lived and breathed throughout the ages. She is based on revealed fundamental principles, yet her doctrine is able to develop over time in conjunction with her fundamental principles. That doctrine, however, is firmly rooted in the Deposit of Faith that is divine revelation. Just as Christ became incarnate in the fullness of time, so the development of doctrine happens in conjunction to the time and place of its organic growth. The Church is able to develop and develop her doctrine over the ages but she will always be the, “one, true, Catholic, and apostolic Church.”