

St. John Henry Newman's Theory of Doctrinal Development and the Synodal Process: A Survey and Concrete Application

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Good afternoon, Your Excellencies, Most Reverend bishops, and my brother priests. Firstly, please permit me to say that, while it is certainly an honor to have been invited to speak to you, for which I would like to express my gratitude to my own bishop and our host for this reunion, His Excellency, Bishop Kevin W. Vann, it is also not a little bit daunting. To speak to such an erudite group of clerics, all of whom have a connection to our common alma mater and to the various celebrated universities in the Eternal City, brings back fond memories of my three years at the Casa Santa Maria. During that time, while I would occasionally have the opportunity to preach at Sunday Masses at the Casa, I was always keenly aware that I was not nearly as qualified to do so as many of my listeners. As such, I beg your pardon if I should fail to explain adequately any aspect of this lecture, and I would be grateful for any questions and/or corrections, theological or otherwise, that you may have afterwards.

Let us begin with a prayer:

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of thy faithful, and enkindle in them the fire of thy love. Send forth thy Spirit and they shall be created, and thou shalt renew the face of the earth.

Let us pray.

O God, who didst inspire thy faithful by the light of thy Holy Spirit, grant that, in the same Spirit we may be truly wise and ever more rejoice in His holy consolation.

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Vergine Immacolata . . . Aiutateci.

Introduction: The Synod on Synodality and Speculation on Doctrinal Change

In the late autumn of 2021, Bishop Vann appointed me and my colleague, Mrs. Katie Dawson, our diocesan director of parish faith formation, as the coordinators for the Synod on Synodality in the Diocese of Orange. In this role, we were tasked with bringing to fruition the diocesan phase of the synodal consultation of the faithful here in Orange County. Since last autumn, we have labored to carry out the bishop's synodal plan for this diocese, and I must say that I have been pleasantly surprised with the manner in which the consultation took place, and in its results, notwithstanding my initial reservations both as to the scope of this particular synod and as to the potential risks inherent in such a universal survey. As we all know from diocesan and parochial life, "listening sessions" have a tendency to become "shouting sessions"; and as a thoroughgoing introvert myself, such sessions do not *exactly* bring joy to my heart. Thankfully, though, my fears were *not* realized, and the actual experience of our synodal process was almost altogether pleasant.

Perhaps surprisingly, one of the fruits of our consultation, which we heard from the majority of the faithful, is their clear desire for doctrinal clarity in their faith journeys. The majority of the People of God in Orange County whom we surveyed do not want to see *any* doctrinal changes emerge from this synod that could be critiqued for being in serious discontinuity with the

solemnly defined magisterial teaching of the past. Regularly, they expressed to us that, if our “journeying together” is to be authentic and credible, then the continuity of our doctrinal teaching is a matter of no small importance. Indeed, the ability of many to take the Church’s faith seriously depends on whether the doctrinal content of that faith seems solid and unshakeable. If the content of our faith can shift substantially in ways that mirror modern shifts in secular thinking, then people can easily critique our faith as being blown about by the winds of change, with no certitude whatsoever. If something taught by the Catholic Church can be true today and false tomorrow, then why is the Catholic Church’s message worth listening to at all? What we heard from the overwhelming majority of our consultees is that most people want a Church that teaches the truth, even if it should be unpopular to do so.¹

But, since this is the case, and since our people would like to know how truth claims can both change and remain the same, how can we determine whether a putative “doctrinal development” be true or false? Since we are not doctrinal positivists, since it is *not* the case that doctrine is true simply *because* the Church teaches it, but rather that, since the Church knows the truth, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, her doctrines are therefore trustworthy, how can we theologians assist the magisterium of the Church in adjudicating difficult doctrinal questions, especially during a universal process of theological and doctrinal discernment such as the current Synod on Synodality?

I would like to propose that St. John Henry Cardinal Newman’s theory of doctrinal development provides us with a guide in this regard which is both helpful and salutary. Not uncommonly, those who would like to see real 180-degree shifts in Church teaching on any number of issues will invoke Newman’s theory as potentially vindicating their desired shifts; however, based on the way they themselves describe *why* they think Newman’s theory makes such changes possible, I am always left wondering whether such individuals have actually *read* Newman. As such, since many of us have *heard of* Newman’s theory, but may not be familiar with how it works and how it can be used, I will present this talk in two parts. First, in the majority of this lecture’s content I will explain Newman’s theory in detail—we will hear his own words and the words of some of his most noted interpreters, so that we can see what his theory *actually* entails; and then, second, I will

¹ It should be noted that our synodal “synthesis” also includes a “minority report” section, in which we include the opinions of people who *do* want to see doctrinal change on certain issues.

apply his theory *very briefly* to one speculative doctrinal postulate contrary to the settled doctrine of the Church: namely, the idea that women can and should be ordained to the ministerial priesthood (and, by extension, to the episcopate), which is one of the so-called “minority report” themes that emerged from our own synodal process, and which likely emerged from your diocesan consultations as well.

Through this investigation of Newman’s theory, I hope to provide us with one tool that we can use to determine whether speculative doctrinal claims proposed for our consideration—especially during the synodal process—might be true or false, and why or why not. Naturally, of course, this is not meant to replace the magisterium’s role as teacher of the faith, nor to call into question the Church’s authoritative discernments of authentic developments, but rather to be an aid to the magisterium’s work. I pray that it may also be a useful tool for you all, as you seek to guide the faithful in your Dioceses and parishes as to why certain speculative ideas are doctrinally possible or impossible, and why or why not.

St. John Henry Newman and the Development of Doctrine

Let us proceed now to Newman’s theory of doctrinal development itself. In this presentation, I will be examining his two main works on the subject; namely, in passing, the fifteenth *Oxford University Sermon* and, extensively, his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*. I will treat of two main points: (1) a brief history of his theory and its role in the Catholic theological tradition, then and now; and (2) his description of his seven notes of authentic development and how they can be used to analyze developments in doctrinal history. I will largely follow Newman in the way in which he himself presents his views. Of course, it is impossible in a brief treatment such as this to examine every aspect of this theory, but I will nonetheless endeavor to touch on what are perhaps the most important aspects.²

Newman’s Theory of Developments—History and Purpose

Newman’s first real foray into tackling the issue of doctrinal development can be seen in his fifteenth *Oxford University Sermon*, in which, as Gerard McCarren writes, “Newman took up the topic [of doctrinal development]

² This section is an edited and updated excerpt from the sixth chapter of my doctoral dissertation written at the Pontificia Università S. Tommaso D’Aquino (the Angelicum): William B. Goldin, “St. Thomas Aquinas and Supersessionism: A Contextual Study and Doctrinal Application” (doctoral diss., Pontificia Università S. Tommaso D’Aquino [Angelicum], 2017), 357–77.

directly.”³ His *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, however, is where we find his fully developed and “pioneering understanding of doctrinal development, . . . which came starkly to grips with historical change.”⁴ The major difference between these two works, aside from the obvious difference of size (the fifteenth *Oxford University Sermon* being twenty or so pages in length, and the *Essay* well over four hundred), can be seen in that, in the *Essay*, Newman sought to answer the question of the locus of the true Church of Christ—a question he deliberately eschewed in the fifteenth *Oxford University Sermon*.⁵ In that sermon, written while Newman was still an Anglican, his main focus is on the social development of the “idea of Christianity” within the Christian faithful.⁶ That “idea” for Newman, becomes the guiding force of the community, and as it were, takes control over those who have received it and owned it as theirs.⁷ The reason for the *Essay*, on the other hand, is utterly practical: “The following Essay is directed towards a solution of the difficulty . . . which lies in the way of our using in controversy the testimony of our most natural informant concerning the doctrine and worship of Christianity,” that is to say, Church history.⁸ Thus, for Newman, the postulate of doctrinal development is a tool, “an hypothesis

³ Gerard H. McCarren, “Development of Doctrine,” in *The Cambridge Companion to John Henry Newman*, ed. Ian Ker and Terrence Merrigan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 119.

⁴ McCarren, “Development of Doctrine,” 120.

⁵ McCarren, “Development of Doctrine,” 124–25.

⁶ See Terrence Merrigan, “The Imagination in the Life and Thought of John Henry Newman,” *Cahiers victoriens et edouardiens* 70 (Autumn 2009 [John Henry Newman: Texts collected by Christophe Duvey]): 195.

⁷ Terrence Merrigan, *Clear Heads and Holy Hearts: The Religious and Theological Ideal of John Henry Newman* (Louvain: Peeters, 1991), 254. See John Henry Newman, “Sermon XV: The Theory of Developments in Religious Doctrine,” in *Fifteen Sermons Preached Before the University of Oxford Between A.D. 1826 and 1843* (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1966), §6: “What a remarkable sight it is, as almost all unprejudiced persons will admit, to trace the course of the controversy, from its first disorders to its exact and determinate issue. Full of deep interest, to see how the great idea takes hold of a thousand minds by its living force, and will not be ruled or stinted, but is ‘like a burning fire,’ as the Prophet speaks, ‘shut up’ within them, till they are ‘weary of forbearing, and cannot stay,’ and grows within them, and at length is born through them, perhaps in a long course of years, and even successive generations; so that the doctrine may rather be said to use the minds of Christians, than to be used by them.” See also McCarren, “Development of Doctrine,” 122.

⁸ John Henry Cardinal Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, 6th ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 29. See also Charles Stephen Dessain, *John Henry Newman* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1966), 80.

to account for a difficulty,” and “an expedient to enable us to solve what has now become a necessary and an anxious problem.”⁹

In terms of a purpose for Newman’s theory, Avery Cardinal Dulles holds that it is geared towards explaining the continued existence and coherence of the ancient Christian faith: “For him it is axiomatic that the faith of the apostles must endure.”¹⁰ For Dulles, what Newman’s theory is emphatically not, however, is “a brief for a kind of dogmatic Darwinism.”¹¹ On the contrary, Dulles notes that, unlike a blind evolutionary model, Newman wants to hold that, “in order to retain its vitality and ward off new errors, the living Church will sometimes have to articulate its faith in new ways.”¹² According to McCarren, Newman’s model of doctrinal development is notable in that it gives real importance to the significance of history in doctrinal formulation: “Only with Newman’s publication of his *Essay* could it be said that history’s inexorable bearing on Christian doctrinal claims was recognized and met with a somewhat tentative, but imposing answer.”¹³ In writing the *Essay*, Newman the Anglican was seeking to find the truth, and to make up his mind regarding whether Roman Catholicism was that truth.¹⁴ Newman was certain at the outset of his *Essay* that his model of doctrinal development could not possibly give an infallible answer to the question of whether or not the claims of Roman Catholicism were true, nor would he ever have the time to answer all the questions regarding Roman Catholic doctrinal claims.¹⁵ As Aidan Nichols notes, “the *Essay* does not offer a full criteriology of doctrinal development which would show Roman developments to be the genuine ones.”¹⁶ It is important to note, therefore, that his theory will also not be an infallible guide for evaluating all possible doctrinal developments, but merely a tool to “account for a difficulty.”¹⁷

With these preliminary points in mind, it is now possible to begin to describe Newman’s “pioneering” theory.¹⁸ Unlike a dry mathematical

⁹ Newman, *Essay*, 30.

¹⁰ Avery Cardinal Dulles, *John Henry Newman* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 74. Cf. Dessain, *John Henry Newman*, 81.

¹¹ Dulles, *John Henry Newman*, 74.

¹² Dulles, *John Henry Newman*, 74.

¹³ McCarren, “Development of Doctrine,” 118.

¹⁴ Dulles, *John Henry Newman*, 74. Cf. McCarren, “Development of Doctrine,” 124–25; Dessain, *John Henry Newman*, 80–81.

¹⁵ Newman, *Essay*, 31–32.

¹⁶ Aidan Nichols, O.P., *From Newman to Congar: The Idea of Doctrinal Development from the Victorians to the Second Vatican Council* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 47, cited in McCarren, “Development of Doctrine,” 125.

¹⁷ Newman, *Essay*, 30.

¹⁸ McCarren, “Development of Doctrine,” 120.

formula, Newman describes the development of doctrine through history by using the language of a river, which develops out from its source and becomes all the “clearer” in the process: “It is indeed sometimes said that the stream is clearest near the spring, . . . [but this] does not apply to the history of a philosophy or belief, which on the contrary is more equable, and purer, and stronger, when its bed has become deep, and broad, and full.” This image from the natural world is helpful for understanding his theory, for it is easy for anyone to grasp the image of a river, moving through the earth, which “remains perhaps for a time quiescent, . . . tries, as it were, its limbs, and proves the ground under it, and feels its way.” Furthermore, the river, or the developing doctrine, can do this even should it encounter obstacles: “It seems in suspense which way to go; it wavers, and at length strikes out in one definite direction; . . . parties rise and fall around it; dangers and hopes appear in new relations; and old principles appear in new forms.” Finally, in this analogy, Newman concludes with one of his most famous and oft-repeated sayings by noting that this process is even *required* in our world of inconstancy and motion: “In a higher world it is otherwise, but here below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.”¹⁹

This theory of the development of doctrine has influenced Catholic theology profoundly since Newman, even at very high levels of the Roman Catholic Church’s official magisterium, or teaching authority. As Dulles writes: “The principle of the development of doctrine, pioneered by Newman, came to be universally accepted in the Catholic Church by the end of the nineteenth century.”²⁰ And as McCarren puts it: “The *Essay* framed subsequent confrontations with the problem [of doctrinal development]; indeed the compatibility between Newman’s *Essay* and the understanding of doctrinal development espoused by the Second Vatican Council is conspicuous.”²¹ Having briefly investigated the history and purpose of Newman’s theory, let us now turn to his seven notes, or signs, of authentic doctrinal development.

¹⁹ For these three citations, see Newman, *Essay*, 40.

²⁰ Dulles, *John Henry Newman*, 154. Cf. International Theological Commission, *Texts and Documents: 1986–2007*, ed. Michael Sharkey and Thomas Weinandy (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009), 52; Benedict XVI, “A Proper Hermeneutic for the Second Vatican Council,” in *Vatican II: Renewal within Tradition*, ed. Matthew L. Lamb and Matthew Levering (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), xiii [originally: “Ad Romanam Curiam ab omnia natalicia,” *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 98 (January 6, 2006): 40–53]. See also Dessain, *John Henry Newman*, 44.

²¹ McCarren, “Development of Doctrine,” 118.

The Seven Notes of Authentic Doctrinal Development

In his *Essay*, Newman begins by presenting his notes one at a time and in brief,²² and then he moves on, as he himself describes it, “to apply the foregoing seven Notes of fidelity in intellectual developments to the instance of Christian Doctrine.”²³ Before introducing his first note, Newman describes the reason for needing such explanatory devices for the determination of true developments: “It may be said in answer to me . . . that what I have called developments in the Roman Church are nothing more or less than what used to be called her corruptions; and that new names do not destroy old grievances.”²⁴ As such, Newman attempts to provide a system which can answer such a claim.²⁵ As Dulles writes in this regard: “Granted that development must occur, it must still be asked whether the new formulations are in accord with the ancient faith,” which as we have already seen, “must perdure.” To this end, Dulles continues, Newman “proposed seven tests for authentic development.”²⁶ As Newman himself notes, “it becomes necessary in consequence to assign certain characteristics of faithful developments, which none but faithful developments have, and the presence of which serves as a test to discriminate between them and corruptions.”²⁷ Newman does this by investigating Christian antiquity, and indeed he even “derives his tests from the patristic period, with which he was familiar.”²⁸ Following Newman’s *modus operandi*, then, let us turn now to his presentation of the notes in order that we might have them as a tool for our application to speculative doctrinal postulates.

NOTE 1: “PRESERVATION OF TYPE”

Newman calls his first note of authentic doctrinal development the “Preservation of Type.”²⁹ In his initial brief treatment of this first note, he provides several useful analogies and descriptions of his meaning for helping his readers to understand it.³⁰ The first of these analogies, “the analogy of physical growth,” is particularly important.³¹ Newman describes how it is possible to see a definite connection between the physical state of a young animal and

²² See Newman, *Essay*, 171–206.

²³ Newman, *Essay*, 207.

²⁴ Newman, *Essay*, 169–70.

²⁵ Newman, *Essay*, 170.

²⁶ For these two citations, see Dulles, *John Henry Newman*, 74.

²⁷ Newman, *Essay*, 170.

²⁸ Dulles, *John Henry Newman*, 76.

²⁹ Newman, *Essay*, 171.

³⁰ Newman, *Essay*, 171–78.

³¹ Newman, *Essay*, 171. Cf. Dulles, *John Henry Newman*, 74.

that of the same animal when fully developed: "The adult animal has the same make, as it had on its birth; young birds do not grow into fishes, nor does the child degenerate into the brute, wild or domestic, of which he is by inheritance lord."³² Furthermore, Newman quotes St. Vincent of Lérins, who recognized the same principle in doctrinal development: "Vincentius . . . adopts this illustration in distinct reference to Christian doctrine . . . 'Let the soul's religion . . . imitate the law of the body. . . . Small are the baby's limbs, a youth's are larger, yet they are the same.'"³³ As Dulles remarks on this point, Newman wants to show that, "just as an adult keeps the same members and organs as the newborn child, so the Church and its teaching must always remain recognizably the same."³⁴ All of this being said, while Newman posits continuity in this physical analogy between the beginnings of an animal (or a doctrine) and its later state, this is not to say that this continuity excludes the possibility of real change:

However, as the last instances suggest to us, this unity of type, characteristic as it is of faithful developments, must not be pressed to the extent of denying all variation, nay, considerable alteration of proportion and relation, as time goes on, in the parts or aspects of an idea. Great changes in outward appearance and internal harmony occur in the instance of the animal creation itself. The fledged bird differs much from its rudimentary form in the egg. The butterfly is the development, but not in any sense the image, of the grub.³⁵

NOTE 2: "CONTINUITY OF PRINCIPLES"

In Thomistic philosophy and theology, the soul is the *form* of the body; that is to say, the soul is the body's unifying and governing principle. While Newman was by no means a Thomist, this notion of *form* is a helpful analogy for Newman's second note, the "Continuity of Principles."³⁶ As Newman

³² Newman, *Essay*, 171–72.

³³ Newman, *Essay*, 171–72.

³⁴ Dulles, *John Henry Newman*, 74.

³⁵ Newman, *Essay*, 173.

³⁶ Newman, *Essay*, 178. Cf. Merrigan, *Clear Heads and Holy Hearts*, 262: "Newman was not a systematic philosopher, and his attempts to explore the character of human perception—as a propaedeutic to his consideration of the grasp of the idea—make this very clear. His terminology is imprecise, even at times contradictory, certainly not consistent. He continually shuttles between analogies, talking now of the experience of a material object, then of the intuition of one's own existence, and yet again of the power of imagination and so forth. Nowhere does he provide a comprehensive epistemological framework within which one can situate all these reflections—at least

himself puts it: "The life of doctrines may be said to consist in the law or principle which they embody." Furthermore, whereas doctrines are particular and "relate to facts," principles, on the other hand, are "abstract and general." Thus, Newman wants to posit here that principles are the undergirding form, as it were, of doctrines: "Doctrines develop, and principles at first sight do not; doctrines grow and are enlarged, principles are permanent; doctrines are intellectual, and principles are more immediately practical."³⁷ In Dulles's interpretation of Newman's second note, what Newman desires to show is that, "in order to preserve its type, the Church must stand by its foundational principles, . . . [and] if any of these principles were abandoned, Christianity itself would be mutilated."³⁸ Or, as McCarren describes it: "It is because development takes place 'on definite and continuous principles' that type is preserved."³⁹ For Newman, these principles are, as it were, the engines behind the doctrines of Christianity: "Doctrines are developed by the operation of principles, and develop variously according to those principles."⁴⁰ Thus, to apply Dulles's observation listed above in a mechanical analogy, if one does damage to the engine of a machine, either the machine will not function at all or it will begin to work in a faulty manner. To see principles as engines is but one image; they might also be seen as the "stimulant" of thinking itself: "Principles stimulate thought, and an idea concentrates it."⁴¹ In Newman's understanding, this can apply to developments both within the Catholic Church and also outside the Church. Thus, he notes that, "the various sects of Protestantism . . . are called developments of the principle of Private Judgment, of which they are but applications and results." And, therefore, it is clear that true doctrinal development "must retain both the doctrine and

not consistently with one another. . . . That being said, however, it must be remembered that Newman, in his day, was working on the edge, so to speak, of prevailing English philosophy, and this in two senses: first, and most obviously, as an outsider, a non-philosopher with a limited knowledge of current philosophical trends in England, and almost none of recent continental philosophy; secondly, and more significantly, as a very individualistic thinker, who, in view of his distance from the center, as it were, was free to explore new avenues of inquiry, and experiment with new approaches to the issues that concerned him." See also Dessain, *John Henry Newman*, 44: "Unlike the Roman theologians, he was brought up under the influence of no dominant philosophy or tradition of theology."

³⁷ For these three citations, see Newman, *Essay*, 178.

³⁸ Dulles, *John Henry Newman*, 75.

³⁹ McCarren, "Development of Doctrine," 126.

⁴⁰ Newman, *Essay*, 180.

⁴¹ Newman, *Essay*, 186.

the principle with which it started.”⁴² In this line of thinking, “corruption” in doctrine consists of “the destruction of the special laws or principles of a development.”⁴³

NOTE 3: “POWER OF ASSIMILATION”

Life requires feeding, as is obvious to all who have lived, and if animals do not eat, they soon die.⁴⁴ Yet is it not a marvel of the living being that it eats something external to and quite different from itself which, provided it is the correct food and the animal is healthy, not only gives sustenance to the animal but provides for its further thriving?⁴⁵ In Newman's third note, the “Power of Assimilation,” he applies this very phenomenon to the development of doctrine by providing just such an analogy to living beings: “In the physical world, whatever has life is characterized by growth, . . . [and] it grows by taking into its own substance external materials; and this . . . assimilation is completed when the materials . . . come to belong to it or enter into its unity.” Furthermore, he notes that, “two things cannot become one, except there be a power of assimilation in one or the other.”⁴⁶ In Newman's view, this can also be applied as a proper tool for understanding “certain peculiarities in the growth or development in ideas.” Thus, continuing here, he remarks that, “doctrines and views which relate to man are not placed in a void, but in the crowded world, and make way for themselves by interpenetration, and develop by absorption.”⁴⁷ Or, as Dulles writes in his analysis: “As a healthy organism builds itself up by ingesting food, so the Church takes in what is assimilable in the cultures it meets, and transforms what it appropriates.”⁴⁸ In this view, since “development is a process of incorporation,” it is precisely this ability to receive and grow that shows forth a true development of doctrine.⁴⁹

NOTE 4: “LOGICAL SEQUENCE”

For Newman, the preeminent existence of the life of the Christian faith in the minds of its first and greatest proponents, the apostles, those chosen

⁴² For these two citations, see Newman, *Essay*, 181.

⁴³ Newman, *Essay*, 185: “If it be true that the principles of the later Church are the same as those of the earlier, then, whatever are the variations of belief between the two periods, the later in reality agrees more than it differs with the earlier, for principles are responsible for doctrines.”

⁴⁴ Dulles, *John Henry Newman*, 75.

⁴⁵ Newman, *Essay*, 185–86. Cf. Dulles, *John Henry Newman*, 75.

⁴⁶ For these two citations, see Newman, *Essay*, 185–86.

⁴⁷ For these two citations, see Newman, *Essay*, 186.

⁴⁸ Dulles, *John Henry Newman*, 75.

⁴⁹ Newman, *Essay*, 186–87.

witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, constitutes the background content for this fourth note—the “stuff” upon which human reasoning can later act: “Thus, the holy Apostles would without words know all the truths concerning the high doctrines of theology, which controversialists after them have piously and charitably reduced to formulae, and developed through argument.”⁵⁰ Commenting on the meaning of this note, Dulles remarks that “Newman’s term ‘logical sequence’ is much broader in scope than formal inference of conclusions from premises, although Newman does not exclude deductive argument.” Rather, Dulles continues, this note affirms the reality that “certain truths, when believed and put into practice, are seen to imply other truths.”⁵¹ These additional “implied truths” lead to “new” realizations and, according to McCarren, “because Newman interpreted logic in the widest sense, doctrines which proceed one from the other can be said to be truly new.”⁵²

This emergence of truth from truth is key to Newman’s understanding of this note.⁵³ Newman’s explanation here takes reason beyond mere logical formulations, such as syllogisms, and brings it to a richer exercise than that of mere mathematical formulation: “Logic is the organization of thought, and, as being such, is a security for the faithfulness of intellectual developments, . . . but, if by this is meant a conscious reasoning from premises to conclusion, of course the answer must be in the negative.”⁵⁴ Therefore, in this altogether human explication of the mental exercise of reason upon the truths of faith, Newman shows that the Christian faithful “logically” develop the content of the faith and are able to explain the necessities engendered by the articles of the faith.⁵⁵ (It should be noted that this theme is more fully developed in Newman’s reflections on what he refers to as the “illative” sense in his *Essay in aid of a Grammar of Assent*).⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Newman, *Essay*, 191.

⁵¹ For these two citations, see Dulles, *John Henry Newman*, 75.

⁵² McCarren, “Development of Doctrine,” 126–27.

⁵³ Newman, *Essay*, 190. Cf. Dulles, *John Henry Newman*, 75; McCarren, “Development of Doctrine,” 126.

⁵⁴ Newman, *Essay*, 189.

⁵⁵ Newman, *Essay*, 190–92. Cf. Newman, “Sermon XV,” §6.

⁵⁶ See Merrigan, *Clear Heads and Holy Hearts*, 205–28; and especially, 229: “In his analysis of the illative sense in [*An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*], Newman is primarily concerned with its operation in the minds of individual Christians. As Newman describes it, the illative sense is able, on the basis of a complex process of largely implicit reasoning involving the whole person, to discern the upshot of a series of converging probabilities, and to facilitate the mind’s unconditional assent to a proposition apprehended as an object of real experience. . . . The object of this chapter is to demonstrate that the same basic polar structure discernible in Newman’s vision of the

Moreover, for Newman, this process involves the natural illumination of the “idea” in the mind: “An idea under one or other of its aspects grows in the mind by remaining there; it becomes familiar and distinct and is viewed in its relations.”⁵⁷ Furthermore, while this development is at least somewhat “subconscious” for Newman, the vicissitudes of life engender the activation of the conscious processes of the mind and the forthright response to challenges posed to the idea.⁵⁸ Applied to an individual, Newman describes the process thus: “A body of thought is gradually formed without his recognizing what is going on within him,” but when “external circumstances elicit into formal statements the thoughts which are coming into being in the depths of his mind,” not only will the Christian person be required “to begin to defend them,” but this in turn will lead to “the further process [which] must take place, of analyzing his statements and ascertaining their dependence one on another.”⁵⁹ Thus—and this is key—while the apostles would find themselves in the unique position of possessing the complete faith habitually, with all of its complexities and depth, albeit it *in semine*, it would fall to their successors and to the later Christian “community” to explicate what they held, and to enable the growth of the doctrinal “seed” into the “tree” of doctrine.⁶⁰ Finally, then, Newman holds that this growth from seed to tree proceeds along “logical” lines, and this will illustrate whether the development is good or not: “A doctrine, then, professed in its mature years by a philosophy or religion, is likely to be a true development, not a corruption, in proportion as it seems to be the *logical issue* of its original teaching.”⁶¹

NOTE 5: “ANTICIPATION OF ITS FUTURE”

Newman calls his fifth note the “Anticipation of its [the doctrine’s] Future.”⁶² This note, quite simply, is the idea that, because human reasoning remains “the same in all ages,” instantiations of “advanced teaching [may] very early

operation of the illative sense in the individual is present in his vision of the process of dogmatic definition in the Church. In other words, Newman’s analysis of cognitional activity is applicable not only to the individual believer, but to the whole community of believers. One might express the same thought by saying that Newman’s theological reflections, whether these have as their object the assent of faith on the part of the individual or the determination of the object of faith on the part of the Church, employ the same basic model of cognitional activity, a model characterized by its distinctly polar character.”

⁵⁷ Newman, *Essay*, 190.

⁵⁸ Newman, *Essay*, 190.

⁵⁹ Newman, *Essay*, 190.

⁶⁰ Newman, *Essay*, 190–92.

⁶¹ Newman, *Essay*, 195.

⁶² Newman, *Essay*, 195.

occur, which in the historical course are not found till a late day.”⁶³ As Newman says, it is thus the case that a sign of authenticity of a development will be that the late doctrine will have a “*definite anticipation* at an early period in the history of the idea to which it belongs.”⁶⁴

NOTE 6: “CONSERVATIVE ACTION UPON ITS PAST”

As is well known, the role of the Supreme Court in the United States of America is to interpret the Constitution of the United States. When the Supreme Court makes a legal decision, it decides between varying interpretations of the Constitution which need to be settled one way or the other. At certain times in history, however, these decisions radically reinterpret former decisions and sometimes lead to a 180-degree shift in opinion. An example of such a shift can be seen in the overturning of the 1896 ruling in *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, which allowed for segregation between blacks and whites in public schools, by the 1954 ruling in *Brown vs. the Board of Education*, which declared such segregation unconstitutional. This 180-degree shift from *Plessy* to *Brown* is a radical development, which, if segregation were a religious doctrine, would seem to be a corruption of said doctrine, and not a true development. It would not be a true development precisely because the shift between *Plessy* and *Brown* did not *preserve*, but rather utterly *reversed*, what came before it.⁶⁵

In his sixth note, “Conservative Action upon Its Past,” Newman is trying to formulate just such a “test” for genuine developments in religious doctrine.⁶⁶ As he writes: “A true development, then, may be described as one which is conservative of the course of antecedent developments being really those antecedents and something besides them.” Furthermore, such a development “illustrates, not obscures, corroborates, not corrects, the body of thought from which it proceeds; and this is its characteristic as contrasted with a corruption.”⁶⁷ Writing from Church history, Newman remarks in his brief introduction to this note that we can see this note exemplified in the Church Fathers and especially in Leo and Vincent of Lérins: “Such too is the theory of the Fathers as regards the doctrines fixed by Councils, as is instanced in the language of St. Leo. ‘To be seeking for what has been disclosed, to reconsider what has been finished, to tear up what has been laid down, what is this but to be unthankful for what is gained?’” In addition,

⁶³ Newman, *Essay*, 195 and 196.

⁶⁴ Newman, *Essay*, 199.

⁶⁵ Newman, *Essay*, 200.

⁶⁶ Newman, *Essay*, 199–200.

⁶⁷ For these two citations, see Newman, *Essay*, 200.

according to Vincent of Lérins, Newman continues: "Vincentius, . . . in like manner, speaks of the development of Christian doctrine, as *profectus fidei non permutatio*. And so as regards the Jewish Law, our Lord said that He came 'not to destroy, but to fulfill.'" ⁶⁸

NOTE SEVEN: "CHRONIC VIGOUR"

Newman begins his description of his final note, "Chronic Vigour," with an analogy to a Stoic motto regarding the duration and quality of pain: "*Si gravis, brevis; si longus levis*; is the Stoical topic of consolation under pain; and of a number of disorders it can be said, The worse, the shorter." And then he points to what he sees as a particular characteristic of true developments versus false corruptions: "Corruption cannot, therefore, be of long standing; and thus *duration* is another test of a faithful development."⁶⁹ As McCarren avers, this difference in duration leads Newman to suggest that "an attempt to dismiss the longstanding peculiarly Catholic beliefs as corruptions would be to postulate a miracle indeed."⁷⁰ In Newman's own short opening description of this note, he elaborates that he sees the history of heresies as an example of how corruptions in true doctrine flicker to and fro before finally falling out of existence: "The course of heresies is always short; it is an intermediate state between life and death, or what is like death; or, if it does not result in death, it is resolved into some new, perhaps opposite course of error, which lays no claim to be connected with it." In addition, he further distinguishes here between "decay" and "corruption" in order to show that this falling into error can be a long process as well: "It is true that decay, which is one form of corruption, is slow; but decay is a state in which there is no violent or vigorous action at all, whether of a conservative or a destructive character."⁷¹ Newman sees examples of such decay and corruption in the history of world religions, including Christianity, and he ends by suggesting that, "while a corruption is distinguished from decay by its energetic action, it is distinguished from a development by its *transitory character*."⁷²

⁶⁸ For these two citations, see Newman, *Essay*, 201. Cf. McCarren, "Development of Doctrine," 127.

⁶⁹ Newman, *Essay*, 203.

⁷⁰ McCarren, "Development of Doctrine," 127.

⁷¹ For these two citations, see Newman, *Essay*, 204.

⁷² Newman, *Essay*, 205: "And then, at length, perhaps, [the corrupt systems] go off suddenly and die out under the first rough influence from without. Such are the superstitions which pervade a population; . . . such was the established paganism of classical times, which was the fit subject of persecution, for its first breath made it crumble and disappear. Such apparently is the state of the Nestorian and Monophysite communions; such might have been the condition of Christianity had it been absorbed by the

Conclusion of the Analysis of Newman's Notes

As we have seen, Newman's notes are by no means "systematic" proofs for the truth of a doctrine's development, but rather signs which point to the possibility that one can believe in the Church of Rome "in parallel cases where the investigation had not been pursued."⁷³ Before leaving our brief study of Newman's theory and moving on to our application of his seven notes, let us remind ourselves of what those notes are:

1. *Preservation of Type*: The same "type" of the Church's apostolic faith must always be preserved in her doctrines throughout the millennia;
2. *Continuity of Principles*: The Church's founding "principles," the engines of her doctrines, must remain the same throughout her history, along with the doctrines they produce;
3. *Power of Assimilation*: The Church can integrate intellectual and/or practical elements from outside of her faith and structure for the discernment of the development of doctrine without any harm to herself;
4. *Logical Sequence*: All true doctrinal developments will be the "logical" outgrowth of that which preceded them in the tradition;
5. *Anticipation of Its Future*: Anything the Church teaches in the present will be anticipated in the past;
6. *Conservative Action upon Its Past*: All true doctrinal developments will "conserve" what was taught in the past, even if that "conservation" elaborates upon the past teaching;

feudalism of the middle ages; such too is that Protestantism, or (as it sometimes calls itself) attachment to the Establishment, which is not unfrequently [*sic*] the boast of the respectable and wealthy among ourselves."

⁷³ Newman, *Essay*, 32. Cf. McCarren, "Development of Doctrine," 128: "One can cautiously suggest guidelines for [the notes'] application. With the *Essay* Newman was concerned primarily to confirm that the Roman Catholic Church as such could plausibly claim to embody authentic developments of doctrine, though it remains true that only some of the 'notes' apply to particular doctrines. In addition, the 'notes' for the most part must be applied together; it is hard to assess the applicability of just one or more of them to a doctrine or to the Church. . . . The 'notes' serve to dispel accusations that Roman Catholic doctrines are additions compromising the pristine apostolic deposit of faith. With the assistance of the 'notes' one can defend the plausibility of distinctively Catholic doctrines. Moreover, Newman's presentation of the 'notes' was not highly systematic. He did acknowledge them in 1878 to be 'seven out of various Notes, which may be assigned, of fidelity in the development of an idea.' His impending reception into the Roman Catholic Church prompted him to rush the book to its conclusion, leaving it 'unfinished,' such that he moved progressively from a protracted exposition of the first 'note' to a cursory outline of the seventh."

7. *Chronic Vigour*: A sign of an authentic development can be seen in that it will increase the vitality and endurance of the Church, not decrease them.⁷⁴

I. The Ordination of Women as Priests and Bishops under Newman's Microscope

Introduction to the Application of Newman's Notes

Having discussed what Newman's theory of doctrinal development entails, let us proceed now to apply Newman's seven notes to the postulate that women can and should be ordained to the ministerial priesthood and/or to the episcopate. Naturally, this treatment is altogether cursory, and by no means meant to be exhaustive. To be fair, I am not an expert on this question as such, and this short survey will not engage with the now voluminous secondary literature on this topic. Nonetheless, the good news for us is that Newman's notes do not require expertise: they require only an ability to look at the basic facts of doctrinal history and see if the speculative position under examination passes Newman's tests for continuity or not. I offer this treatment especially in the context of this National Reunion of the Pontifical North American College to show how pastors of souls, such as yourselves, can use Newman's notes to defend controversial and definitive teachings, especially if and when they are called into question during our present synodal journey.

NOTE 1: "PRESERVATION OF TYPE"

With regard to the first note, "preservation of type," it is important to begin with the most ancient example we have in the Church's tradition, namely, the scriptural witness. I would like to propose that the New Testament record of Christ's selection of only men to join the ranks of the apostles is abundantly clear⁷⁵ (for instance, even when Mary, the Mother of God herself and

⁷⁴ Newman, *Essay*, 206: "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. To guarantee its own substantial unity, it must be seen to be one in type, one in its system of principles, one in its unitive power towards externals, one in its logical consecutiveness, one in the witness of its early phases to its later, one in the protection which its later extends to its earlier, and one in its union of vigour with continuance, that is, in its tenacity."

⁷⁵ Raymond E. Brown, S.S., "Episkopē and Episkopos: The New Testament Evidence," *Theological Studies* 41, no. 2 (1980): 323–24. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §1577, cited in Sara Butler, M.S.B.T., *The Catholic Priesthood and Women: A Guide to the Teaching of the Church* (Chicago: Hillenbrand, 2007), 14: "The Lord Jesus

St. Mary Magdalene are chosen witnesses of the resurrection, and thus meet that criterion to be numbered among the Twelve, they are not).⁷⁶ According to the resurrection accounts, Christ did not commission his Mother or the Magdalene to go out to all the world and baptize the nations, nor to forgive sins with his power, as he did with the apostles (see John 20:23 and Matt 18:18).⁷⁷ As Raymond Brown puts it:

All the Gospels portray a group of the Twelve existing during Jesus' ministry, and 1 Cor 15:5 implies that they were in existence by the time of the Resurrection appearances. Therefore there is little reason to doubt that Jesus chose the Twelve. Why did he do this? We have only one saying attributed to Jesus himself about the purpose of the Twelve: he had chosen them to sit on (twelve) thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Mt 19:28; Lk 22:28–30). The idea seems to have been that in the renewed Israel which Jesus was proclaiming there were to be twelve *men*, just as there were twelve sons of Jacob/Israel at the beginnings of the original Israel.⁷⁸

Moreover, this is true even after the fall of Judas. The apostles certainly could have replaced Judas with the Mother of God or with the Magdalene, had they

chose men (*viri*) to form the college of the twelve apostles, and the apostles did the same when they chose collaborators to succeed them in their ministry. The college of bishops, with whom the priests are united in the priesthood, makes the college of the twelve an ever-present and ever-active reality until Christ's return. The Church recognizes herself to be bound by this choice made by the Lord himself. For this reason the ordination of women is not possible."

⁷⁶ Butler notes that we should in no way see this as an apostolic affront to the Mother of God, nor to any of the other preminent female saints in the apostolic era or afterwards. See *The Catholic Priesthood and Women*, 15: "The Blessed Virgin's dignity was not compromised because she was not called to apostolic office and the ministerial priesthood; neither does the non-admission of other women to priestly ordination tell against their dignity. As female saints throughout the history of the Church bear witness, women share in the apostolic mission of the whole people of God and exemplify the holiness of the faithful to which the ministerial priesthood is ordered. In this context, the Pope [John Paul II in *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*] recalls the admonition of *Inter Insigniores* (art. 6) that the highest place in the kingdom of heaven belongs not to the ministers but to the saints."

⁷⁷ Brown, "*Episkopē* and *Episkopos*," 324: "In particular, during the ministry of Jesus Mt 10:5–6 has the Twelve being sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and after the Resurrection Mt 28:16–20 has them (minus Judas) being told to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them."

⁷⁸ Brown, "*Episkopē* and *Episkopos*," 323–24 (emphasis mine).

thought it appropriate to do so when they prepared to draw lots, but they did not do so; instead, by lots, they chose St. Matthias (Acts 1:15–26). And indeed, as the Church grew and spread, the apostles also did not set women apart to exercise *episkopē*, the oversight of the new churches they set up.⁷⁹

Of course, one could argue that Jesus and the apostles were simply too conditioned by their patriarchal context to envision women either in the apostolic role or in the nascent episcopate,⁸⁰ but we need to be careful because we are talking about the incarnate God of Israel after all (who personally knew all things as their Creator, both those in heaven and those on earth, and who was not merely a creature of his time), and we are also dealing with the apostles, who, as Newman holds, and as we too must hold, possessed the fullness of the faith in a habitual way, and who were under the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit for the formation of the early Church and its structures.

However, what if the Lord and the apostles were simply acting “economically,” choosing only men for the apostolic and episcopal roles given the tenor of their times, and given their knowledge that women would not have been accepted as apostles and *episkopoi* (bishops) by their surrounding culture in that period?⁸¹ To this question, I would argue that, if that were the case, the only way we could possibly know of the Lord’s “economic” intention, or of the apostolic application of the Lord’s intention, would be in how the sacred Tradition of the Church interpreted what they did and why. There is no way to know of the Lord’s hidden intentions except through the guidance of the Holy Spirit as the Tradition unfolds. Since the constant teaching of the Church’s doctrine and practice—that is to say, the universal magisterium—is unambiguous from that time on that women cannot be set apart as successors of the apostles, we must argue that the original “type” of the apostolic witness, received from the Lord himself, precludes the ordination of women as bishops. For Newman, of course, that “type” must be preserved.

⁷⁹ For a treatment of the meaning of *episkopē*, see Brown, “*Episkopē* and *Episkopos*,” 322–23.

⁸⁰ See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), *Inter Insigniores* (1976), §4 (cited in Butler, *The Catholic Priesthood and Women*, 50–51): “No one however has ever proved—and it is clearly impossible to prove—that [Jesus’s] attitude is inspired only by social and cultural reasons. As we have seen, an examination of the Gospels shows on the contrary that Jesus broke with the prejudices of his time, by widely contravening the discriminations practiced with regard to women. One therefore cannot maintain that, by not calling women to enter the group of the Apostles, Jesus was simply letting himself be guided by reasons of expediency.”

⁸¹ For this insight, I am indebted to my friend Dr. Tikhon Pino, assistant director of the Pappas Patristics Institute at the Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology (Brookline, MA), in a telephone conversation he and I had on June 16, 2022.

That being said, if one were to accept these points and yet say that, while perhaps women cannot be ordained to the highest degree of holy orders as successors of the apostles, as bishops, perhaps they *can* be ordained to the second degree, as presbyters, once again the scriptural witness would militate against such a view being part of the original “type” of the Church’s apostolic faith. Firstly, there is actually little distinction in the New Testament itself between *episkopos* (bishop) and *presbyteros* (elder/presbyter), and often the terms are used interchangeably (in modern scholarship, they are often referred to as one reality: “presbyter-bishops”).⁸² In fact, in the Tradition, it takes a while for a hard and fast distinction between these two degrees of holy orders to develop. But secondly, the fact remains that women were *not* set apart as presbyters in the apostolic era, nor anytime thereafter. Recall too that the Scriptures *do not* hesitate to speak of women in ecclesiastical ministry, as St. Paul clearly refers to the ministry of at least one “deaconess,” namely, Phoebe (see Romans 16:1–2).⁸³ As such, while we know that Phoebe, along with other women, did receive some share in some form of *diakonia* in the apostolic era, and indeed for centuries thereafter in the early Church, they certainly did not receive or exercise the presbyteral or episcopal roles. (As an aside, I do not personally think that our doctrinal history is flexible enough to allow for the ordination of women to the diaconate *either*. And the reason is simple: We understand the diaconate *now* to be the first degree of the *one* sacrament of holy orders, to which only males can be admitted. If we were to say that women can in fact receive the first degree of holy orders, how can we possibly forbid them access to the other degrees? Women can either receive the *one* sacrament of holy orders, and therefore *all* the degrees of that sacrament, or they cannot receive any of them. Since I do not believe our tradition can admit women to the *one* sacrament of holy orders at all, I hold that they cannot be ordained deacons, in the strict sense. In my view, then, whatever Phoebe and the other “deaconesses” of the early Church had was not, in fact, holy orders, but perhaps something analogous to an “instituted ministry,” much like our modern-day instituted lectors and acolytes [which, of course, as of very recently, are ministries now open to women as well].)⁸⁴ Thus, I would argue that the original “type” we

⁸² Brown, “*Episkopē* and *Episkopos*,” 326.

⁸³ Romans 16:1–2: “I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is also a minister [i.e., *diakonos*, in the accusative case here in the Greek text, *diakonon*] of the church at Cenchreae, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the holy ones, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a benefactor to many and to me as well” (New American Bible).

⁸⁴ For the change in Canon Law allowing women to be instituted as lectors and acolytes,

must preserve throughout our doctrinal history must be in accord with the scriptural and apostolic witness on this question, and with the way that the Tradition has unfolded up until the present, which excludes the ordination of women to the episcopate or to the presbyterate.

NOTE 2: "CONTINUITY OF PRINCIPLES"

Moving on to the second note, "Continuity of Principles," I would argue that two doctrinal principles are the engines behind the authoritative teaching that women cannot be ordained to the presbyterate or episcopate: (1) Christ's choice of only men for the apostolic role (and by extension, for the episcopal and presbyteral roles as well); and (2) the symbolism of the male-only priesthood and episcopate as participating in Christ's male role as bridegroom to the Church, his bride (a female role), and of the priest and bishop acting *in persona Christi capitis ecclesiae* (in the person of Christ, the head of the Church) on behalf of Christ's bride.⁸⁵ If these two principles must be the engines that drive this doctrine throughout its history, then it is difficult to see how we could change these principles and yet maintain faithful to the continuity of the doctrine that flows from them. As Newman teaches, both the principles undergirding the teaching and the doctrine itself must remain in continuity. If we were to change either of these principles, would the doctrine that results from such a change remain faithful to the biblical witness and the Church's Tradition? The answer seems to me to be a resounding "no."

NOTE 3: "POWER OF ASSIMILATION"

As we have seen, Newman's third note, the "Power of Assimilation," is the idea that the Church can come into contact with intellectual theories and other elements outside of its faith and structure and can assimilate them to its own uses without breaking apart in the process. Perhaps, then, if we were to take the intellectual contributions of the diverse modern feminist movements into the Church's doctrinal discernment, we might be able to change

see Pope Francis's 2021 *motu proprio Spiritus Domini*. It is notable that Pope Francis teaches that this disciplinary change pertains to the ramifications of our theology of baptism, and not to our theology of orders: "A doctrinal development has taken place in recent years . . . based on the common condition of being baptized and the royal priesthood received in the Sacrament of Baptism; [these ministries] are essentially distinct from the ordained ministry received in the Sacrament of Orders."

⁸⁵ In part, I draw these two principles from Butler's analysis of Pope St. Paul VI's letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury, F. Donald Coggan, dated November 30, 1975, as well as her analysis of the 1977 CDF decree on the impossibility of female ordination, *Inter Insigniores* (*The Catholic Priesthood and Women*, 5, 9, 13).

our teaching that only men can be ordained priests and bishops. Indeed, if men and women are inherently equal, and if, in Christ, there is “neither male nor female” (Gal 3:28), then perhaps modern feminism might show us a way forward in this regard.

However, it is important to remember that Newman’s notes are meant to be used together and in harmony with each other,⁸⁶ and one note cannot make or break the analysis of a doctrine’s vitality or corruption. And moreover, one could also argue that not all feminist theories are the same,⁸⁷ and the Church might indeed assimilate some modern feminist views defending the particularity of women and their genius without saying that a historically male ecclesiastical role should be extended to women, as if women are deficient without it. In fact, if we hold that, in order for women to be equal, they need to have exactly the same roles as men in the Church, we need to realize that many Catholic women do not *want* to have such roles extended to them and are insulted by the suggestion. It is as if we are telling them that historically male roles are necessary for their completion or for the expression of their genius, which is evidently absurd. Some theories of modern feminism, in fact, are perfectly comfortable with gender-role differences and celebrate the particularly female roles (such as motherhood) in which men cannot participate at all, except as beneficiaries and as admirers. As such, Newman’s understanding of the “Power of Assimilation” could certainly *vindicate* the doctrine that women cannot be ordained as priests or bishops as indeed taking aspects of modern feminism into consideration without breaking apart in doing so.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ See McCarren, “Development of Doctrine,” 128.

⁸⁷ See Butler, *The Catholic Priesthood and Women*, 24n17: “Because feminism has multiple expressions, it is necessary to specify ‘liberal feminism,’” in order to contrast it with other feminist theories. See also 44n16: “Not all women theologians are ‘feminist’ theologians in this sense [i.e., the liberal sense] (some are called ‘papal feminists’), and not all feminist theologians are women.”

⁸⁸ One example of how the Church has indeed “assimilated” certain feminist theories can be seen in John Paul II’s development of post-conciliar teaching on the genius of women in his apostolic letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*. For an excellent treatment on this topic, see Butler, *The Catholic Priesthood and Women*, 22–24. Butler’s analysis of post-conciliar developments in this regard is apposite for our considerations. See 24: “As these official texts show [i.e., the conciliar and post-conciliar magisterial statements on women], there has been a gradual clarification and development in Catholic social teaching. The earlier concern to protect women’s ‘place’ in the home and their ‘role’ in the family is now augmented by specific attention to women as ‘persons’ having equal rights and equal dignity with men in the social order. From Pope John XXIII forward, the magisterium has increasingly expressed advocacy for women’s full participation in public life and has vigorously denounced whatever would prevent this.”

NOTE 4: "LOGICAL SEQUENCE"

The fourth note, the "Logical Sequence" of the doctrine's unfolding, also militates against a change in the Church's teaching on this matter. Indeed, put simply, how could one argue that a teaching which has remained consistent throughout the entire history of the Church suddenly be reversed completely, the way in which Supreme Court decisions can be reversed? While it is true that doctrines can "proceed one from the other" and perhaps even be "new,"⁸⁹ their novelty must not contradict what preceded them, but rather unfold and clarify what came before. If we were to argue that the postulate that women can and should be ordained priests or bishops is the logical outgrowth of the doctrinal history which preceded it, the burden of proof would be heavy indeed.

NOTE 5: "ANTICIPATION OF ITS FUTURE"

If it is a sign of the authenticity of a development that the late doctrine will have a "*definite anticipation*" at an early period in the history of the idea to which it belongs,"⁹⁰ then Newman's fifth note, "Anticipation of [a Doctrine's] Future," clearly is against female presbyteral or episcopal ordination. No such incidents exist in the history of the Catholic or Orthodox Churches in either West or East,⁹¹ despite certain apocryphal stories to the contrary (such as the medieval myth of Pope Joan) and despite the recent actions of some schismatic groups (such as the organization calling itself: "Roman Catholic Women Priests").⁹²

NOTE 6: "CONSERVATIVE ACTION UPON ITS PAST"

The sixth note, "Conservative Action upon [the Doctrine's] Past," is the idea that whatever was taught in the Church's past authoritative teaching should be preserved in future doctrinal discernments. As Newman puts it, a true development "illustrates, not obscures, corroborates, not corrects, the body of thought from which it proceeds; and this is its characteristic as contrasted with a corruption."⁹³ If we were to say that women can and should be ordained as priests or bishops, then we would have to show how

⁸⁹ McCarren, "Development of Doctrine," 126–27.

⁹⁰ Newman, *Essay*, 199.

⁹¹ See Butler, *The Catholic Priesthood and Women*, 5: "The tradition of reserving priestly ordination to men has been unbroken in the Churches of East and West, which maintain a sacramental understanding of priesthood."

⁹² See the website Roman Catholic Women Priests, romancatholicwomenpriests.org.

⁹³ Newman, *Essay*, 200.

such a change is not out of step with our previous teaching to the contrary, in order not to fall afoul of Newman's sixth note.

NOTE 7: "CHRONIC VIGOUR"

Finally, Newman teaches in his seventh note, "Chronic Vigour," that heretical teachings lead to the dissolution of the institutions that accept them and portend their ultimate failure. While we cannot look to the Catholic Church for an example of a body that holds that women can be ordained as priests or bishops, nor to the effect such a teaching has had on it, we *can* look to the effect the embracing of said teaching has had on worldwide Anglicanism. And the question I would like to pose in this regard is simple: Has the acceptance of female presbyteral and episcopal ordination led to the flourishing of a unified global Anglican Communion, or has modern Anglicanism been divided by accepting such a teaching? On this point, let us hear the words of Justin Welby, the current Archbishop of Canterbury, who, speaking of the impact both female ordination and the liberalization of Anglican views towards homosexuality are having on the Anglican Communion, stated in 2014: "I think, realistically, we've got to say that despite all efforts there is a possibility that we will not hold together, or not hold together for a while."⁹⁴ Statistically, it seems, the answer is clear, and the Anglican Communion is more divided than ever. We can, therefore, apply Newman's seventh note here in a prognostic way: If the Church were to accept female ordination to the presbyterate and episcopate, we could expect a similar result in our Church as that which has taken place in the Anglican Communion. We could expect the breakdown of ecclesiastical communion; in other words, we could expect schism.

Conclusion of the Application of Newman's Notes

In wrapping up this application of Newman's notes, notice what I have *not* done. Until now, I have made no reference to the definitive decree on the impossibility of the ordination of women to the presbyterate and episcopate promulgated by Pope St. John Paul II on May 22, 1994, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*.⁹⁵ While that decree is not an exercise of the extraordinary and

⁹⁴ Michael Gryboski, "Anglican Communion May Experience Schism, Says Archbishop," *The Christian Post*, CP Church and Ministries, December 10, 2014, christianpost.com/news/anglican-communion-may-experience-schism-says-archbishop.html.

⁹⁵ Pope St. John Paul II, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (1994), §4: "Wherefore, in order that all doubt may be removed regarding a matter of great importance, a matter which pertains to the Church's divine constitution itself, in virtue of my ministry of confirming the

infallible papal magisterium, it is no less binding on all of us for a different reason. That is to say, it confirms precisely what I have attempted to show in this Newmanian analysis: namely, that the constant Tradition of the universal Church on this question, from the apostolic era until the present, is unambiguous. As John Paul II says, the Church has “no authority” to ordain women, because the Church cannot, at will, contradict the Lord’s own will and the apostolic application of his will, nor break with the continuity of her universal magisterium. In *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, John Paul II was not proclaiming anything new, or even answering a *truly* disputed question (even if some people were in doubt about it). Rather, he was simply confirming what the Church has *always known* and *always will know* about this question.⁹⁶ The teaching that women cannot be ordained priests or bishops is not infallible and definitive just because that saintly Pope said it is; it is infallible and definitive because the doctrine and practice of the Church has always taught and lived this truth.⁹⁷

I made no reference to that decree until now for a pastoral reason as well. Many of our faithful, for different reasons, whether understandable or not, *do not* trust in the authoritative decrees of the magisterium. I would suggest

brethren (cf. Lk 22:32) I declare that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church’s faithful.” John Paul II’s apostolic letter was preceded by the CDF’s 1976 *Inter Insigniores*, issued during the pontificate of Pope St. Paul VI (see Butler, *The Catholic Priesthood and Women*, 8).

⁹⁶ See *The Catholic Priesthood and Women*, 15: “This judgment itself, however, provoked further discussion and theological dissent. In October 1995, in response to a formal query about the status of *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith replied that its teaching belongs to the deposit of the faith and that it requires a definitive assent ‘since, founded on the written Word of God and from the beginning constantly preserved and applied in the Tradition of the Church, it has been set forth infallibly by the ordinary and universal magisterium.’” For the CDF decree on the authority of *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, see “Doctrinal Congregation, ‘Inadmissibility of Women to Ministerial Priesthood,’” *Origins* 25, no. 24 (1995): 401.

⁹⁷ My argument in this paragraph is not based on Butler’s analysis. However, her own treatment of this same matter is useful to consider here as well; see *The Catholic Priesthood and Women*, 2: “The apostolic letter [*Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*] does not propose this as a new doctrine but claims only to confirm—after a period in which it has been put in question—a teaching ‘preserved by the constant and universal tradition of the Church and firmly taught by the magisterium in its more recent documents.’ From the outset of our examination we should notice the precise focus of this assertion: it concerns *the limits of the Church’s authority over the sacrament of Holy Orders*. What must be ‘definitively held’ is that the Church does not have the authority to ordain women as priests. Catholics may no longer regard this as an open question or publicly advocate for a change in Church practice.”

that, as pastors of souls, it may be beneficial for us *not* to begin our teaching of the faith with arguments from authority, but rather, using Newman's notes, to show *how* arguments from authority are based in the Tradition that is readily available to all of us, and which is both intelligible and coherent. If we can help our faithful to understand the importance of doctrinal history and of our fidelity to the lived Tradition *before* we invoke authority, we may find that we have a more receptive audience.

Permit me to bring this section to a close with a (perhaps slightly polemical) word about the current attempts that we see from some churchmen (such as those involved in the highly problematic *synodaler Weg* [the "synodal path"] of the Catholic Church in Germany) to argue that we can utterly contradict, and reverse completely, the ancient and universally held tradition of the Church on contentious issues. When clerics (of any rank) take it upon themselves to tinker with the Church's Tradition as if it were theirs to change, is this not a clear example of that *clericalism* which Pope Francis so often excoriates? We are not Mormons, after all, for whom "truth" can change with the times from on high by clerical *fiat*. We priests and bishops (and yes, even the pope of Rome himself) are merely *servants* of the living Tradition, and *not* the masters thereof.⁹⁸

II. Conclusion

In this lecture, I have attempted to show that, during the current Synod on Synodality, Newman's seven notes of doctrinal development can assist the magisterium in weighing the truth or falsehood of certain doctrinal *desiderata* on the part of some of the faithful throughout the world, including in this local church of Orange County. While Newman's theory is not the only method we can use in looking at putative doctrinal "developments," it is both useful and ecclesiastically accepted. As we have seen, it is not difficult to apply Newman's notes to any doctrinal postulate under our consideration, and anyone with a modicum of theological knowledge and historical awareness can apply the notes as a private intellectual exercise. In particular, I hope that my admittedly cursory and brief application of these notes to the question of female ordination to the priesthood and episcopate shows that it is easy to argue that such a teaching would do violence to the apostolic faith and to the Church's doctrinal tradition, and would render that particular postulate to be a doctrinal "corruption," to use Newman's words, and

⁹⁸ For the insights in these two paragraphs, I am indebted to a conversation I had with my friend Fr. Henry Stephan, O.P., on June 19, 2022.

certainly no true development. To put it plainly, the doctrine that women cannot be ordained priests and/or bishops is so deeply rooted, so unambiguously constant, and so utterly universal that, if we were to attempt to change it, we must also be aware of the effect such a change would have on our entire system. If we can change *this* teaching, we can basically change *anything*.

In a time such as ours, fraught as it is with so many difficulties, both in secular society and in the Church, it is essential that our Catholic doctrinal teaching be clear, in order for our saving witness to be compelling. Such was the clear message of the majority of our synodal consultees to us here in Orange. In this lecture, then, I hope that I have offered but one tool to assist us in providing a compelling and clear witness to the truth in our common journey back to Our Lord Jesus Christ, the source and reason for our hope.

Thank you very much for your attention.

N.V