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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Conscience and Character

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Abstract

Beginning with the public controversy over matters of conscience between William Gladstone and John Henry Newman in the nineteenth century, this article explores the significance of 'conscience' for moral theology in the Anglican tradition. Noting the genealogy of Newman's thought and his debt to the eighteenth-century divine, Bishop Butler, the lecture also brings this tradition of thinking into conversation with more recent reflection about conscience in Roman Catholic moral theology. While 'freedom of conscience' is often emphasized in contemporary moral reflection, the lecture notes that 'the obligations of conscience' are also significant in the thought of Newman and others. The article considers the recent intervention on 'Episcopacy and Conscience' by the Faith and Order Commission of the Church of England, before ending with a series of questions about the place of moral formation in seminary education in the Anglican Communion: how might Newman's thinking about conscience animate our understanding of the spiritual and moral formation offered to ordinands?

Keywords: Butler; character; conscience; episcopacy; ethics; ministry formation; moral theology; Newman

Introduction

This article begins and ends with a provocation.[1] The first provocation dates from 1874, when the British Prime Minister, William Gladstone, a noted high churchman within the Church of England, published a pamphlet entitled *The Vatican Decrees in their Bearing on Civil Allegiance: A Political Expostulation.* In 1873, Gladstone's government introduced a bill in Parliament for the extension of University Education in Ireland. It was a bold attempt at a comprehensive settlement. Gladstone sought to address the inequity of a system in which the Anglican foundation of Trinity College Dublin benefited from government support, while the

[1]A form of this article was first delivered by the author as the *Francis X. Cheney Lecture in Pastoral Theology* at Yale Divinity School on 9 October 2024, which is the Feast of St John Henry Newman in the Roman calendar, and the date on which Newman was received into the Roman Catholic Church in 1845. While an Anglican may hesitate to mark this particular festival, one can observe that on this day at least Newman was both an Anglican and a Roman Catholic.

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small Catholic University established in Dublin in 1851 struggled financially without any government recognition at all. Admittedly, Trinity College Dublin admitted both Anglican and non-Anglican students to its degrees, but only Anglicans could be members of its Faculty.

The plan was to expand the University of Dublin and establish a state-funded Irish National University, with a number of constituent colleges, including Trinity College Dublin, the Queen's Colleges of Belfast and Cork, the Presbyterian Magee College in Derry City, and the Catholic University in Dublin. Gladstone proposed that the National University would have a secular foundation, while enabling the constituent colleges to teach theology according to their respective traditions. The subject, however, would be examined by the University for the purpose of awarding a degree. Although Gladstone thought he was furthering the cause of Catholic emancipation, the proposal was strongly opposed by the Roman Catholic hierarchy. The Irish Catholic bishops objected to Gladstone's bill on the grounds that it did not provide a charter and endowments for the Catholic University of Ireland. It also raised the prospect of mixed Protestant-Catholic education.[2] The bill was eventually defeated, and Gladstone resigned (although Disraeli, the Leader of the Opposition, refused to form a government, and so Gladstone soldiered on). When Gladstone's government eventually fell the following year, he retreated to his country estate. His patience had been exhausted. He poured out his frustration in this tract, attributing his fall to the intransigence of the Irish bishops and, perhaps more surprisingly, their acquiescence to the dogma of papal infallibility, promulgated at the First Vatican Council in 1870.

Gladstone's tract was provocative. He clearly blamed the Roman Catholic hierarchy for his defeat. He asserted 'that Rome requires a convert, . . . to forfeit his moral and mental freedom, and to place his loyalty and civil duty at the mercy of another'.[3] Gladstone presented the following challenge: 'England is entitled to ask and to know in what way the obedience required by the Pope and the Council of the Vatican is to be reconciled with the integrity of Civil Allegiance'.[4] Many members of the Roman Catholic hierarchy took offence at Gladstone's tract. A few months later, Henry Manning, the Archbishop of Westminster, responded, repudiating the claims that Gladstone had made and taking issue with the 'aggressions of the civil power'.[5] Henry Manning was a former Anglican clergyman. He had reason to take offence at Gladstone's provocation. He was a convert. But there was another celebrated convert who also chose to respond to Gladstone: St John Henry Newman.

The bare outline of Newman's life is well-rehearsed. Born in 1801, Newman was baptized as a member of the Church of England. He went up to Oxford in 1817 and was elected to a Fellowship at Oriel College in 1822. In 1824, 200 years ago, he was ordained as a Deacon by the Bishop of Oxford, serving his title as the curate of

[2]For further discussion of William Gladstone's bill, see Emmet J. Larkin, *The Roman Catholic Church and the Home Rule Movement in Ireland, 1870-1874* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1990), pp. 157–173.

[3]William E. Gladstone, *The Vatican Decrees in their Bearing on Civil Allegiance: A Political Expostulation* (London: John Murray, 1874), p. 11.

[4]William E. Gladstone, *The Vatican Decrees in their Bearing on Civil Allegiance: A Political Expostulation* (London: John Murray, 1874), p. 31.

[5]Henry E. Manning, *The Vatican Decrees in their Bearing on Civil Allegiance* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1875), p. 97.

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St Clement's Church. He was ordained a priest the following year. He became the Vicar of the University Church of St Mary the Virgin in 1828 and served in that capacity until 1843. During his tenure, Newman became one of the leaders of the Oxford Movement. Along with John Keble, Edward Pusey and others, he sought to animate the Catholic revival of the Church of England. It is probably fair to say that Newman not only enjoyed controversy. He positively revelled in it. But as time continued, as he lost friends and became increasingly isolated, condemned by University authorities and members of the Anglican hierarchy, he tired of controversy. He resigned as Vicar of the University Church in 1843 and withdrew to the village of Littlemore, where he had established a quasi-religious community. On 9 October 1845, he was received into the Roman Catholic Church.

Following his reception into the Roman Catholic Church, Newman went to Rome, where he received further training before being ordained as a Roman Catholic priest in 1847. He returned to England and founded an English Oratory in Birmingham. He was created a cardinal by Pope Leo XIII in 1879 and died on 11 August 1890. Beatified in 2010, he was canonized by Pope Francis in 2019. In 2025, St John Henry Newman was declared a Doctor of the Universal Church by Pope Leo XIV. He was also named as co-patron of the Church's educational mission alongside St Thomas Aquinas. In an extraordinarily gracious way, the current Pope has acknowledged the significance not only of Newman's writings as a Roman Catholic but also the Anglican patrimony of his thought. In this article, I propose to highlight two aspects of his thought: the first relates to *conscience* and draws on the theological contributions of Anglican as well as Catholic thinkers, the second relates to *character* and highlights his thinking as an educationalist, particularly in the field of higher education. His reflections are significant for Anglicans as well as Roman Catholics. Both *conscience* and *character* throw into sharp relief some of the issues that theological educators often grapple with in the field of seminary education and the spiritual formation of seminarians.

Newman's Response

Like Manning, Newman responded to Gladstone's provocation. He did so in a rather lengthy letter addressed to the Duke of Norfolk, a prominent lay Roman Catholic.[6] Newman's response to Gladstone was significant for a number of reasons: first, Newman had already entered into a very public dispute in 1864 with Charles Kingsley, an Anglican clergyman who had been the Regius Professor of Modern History in Cambridge. In a book review, Kingsley had said that 'Truth, for its own sake, had never been a virtue with the Roman clergy. Father Newman informs us that it need not, and on the whole ought not to be'.[7] Newman's integrity was impugned, and this provoked the publication of his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*.[8]

[6]John H. Newman, *A Letter Addressed to His Grace the Duke of Norfolk on Occasion of Mr. Gladstone's Recent Expostulation* (London: Pickering, 1875).

[7]Charles Kingsley, 'Froude's History of England, vols. vii. and viii'., *Macmillan's Magazine* 51 (January 1864), p. 217.

[8]John H. Newman, *Apologia pro vita sua: Being a Reply to a Pamphlet Entitled 'What, then, does Dr. Newman mean?'* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts and Green, 1864).

Newman defended his honesty, and this work did much to rehabilitate his reputation. Secondly, Newman had been surprisingly silent in the face of the definition of papal infallibility at the First Vatican Council. He was cautious about the claims of those who fiercely defended the doctrine of papal infallibility, which had been defined at the First Vatican Council, and had kept his own counsel.

This was partly because he had been viewed with some suspicion by the Roman Catholic hierarchy in the course of his ministry. As the Oxford philosopher Anthony Kenny once observed, Newman was 'a man who spent the first half of his life trying to persuade the Church of England to be more like the Church of Rome, and the second half of his life wishing that Roman Catholics were more like Anglicans'.[9] The judgement may be unfair, but Kenny's remarks reflect a sentiment that was present among some of Newman's contemporaries. Privately, Newman had some anxiety about the wisdom of the definition of papal infallibility, but as R.J. Marr points out, 'Newman saw a strategic opportunity to enter the public debate surrounding papal infallibility, for by responding to Gladstone's charges he could not only address popular concerns regarding the trustworthiness of Catholics as political subjects, but also offer a critique of the neo-ultramontane position without attacking it adherents directly'.[10]

From the very beginning of Newman's response to Gladstone, it is clear that he sees the matter principally in terms of conscience:

> The main question which Mr. Gladstone has started I consider to be this:—Can Catholics be trustworthy subjects of the State? has not a foreign Power a hold over their consciences such, that it may at any time be used to the serious perplexity and injury of the civil government under which they live? ....[11]

Newman asserts that Gladstone's bill was problematic because the Irish Bishops had sought to establish, as early as 1847, a distinctively Catholic institution. Indeed, Newman himself had served briefly as Rector of that institution, producing a series of lectures which eventually were published under the title *The Idea of a University*. The Irish Bishops wanted to retain the distinctiveness of a Catholic institution, with its own endowment and access to state funding. This was the reason why they refused Gladstone's offer. The purpose of Newman's argument was to attribute a consistent position to the Irish Bishops from 1847 onwards. It had nothing to do with the Vatican decree about papal infallibility in 1871. They wanted their own University, and they wanted the public purse to pay for it. This Gladstone was unwilling to allow.

While Newman sought to defend the integrity of the Irish Bishops, he also recognized that the definition of papal infallibility had caused some misunderstanding amongst the British public about the role of the papacy and 'the moral and

[9]Anthony Kenny, 'Cardinal of Conscience: A Review of John Cornwell, *Newman's Unquiet Grave*', *Times Literary Supplement* 5600 (2010), p. 3.

[10]Ryan J. Marr, 'Infallibility' in Frederick D. Aquino and Benjamin J. King (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of John Henry Newman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 347.

[11]John H. Newman, *A Letter Addressed to the Duke of Norfolk on Occasion of Mr Gladstone's Recent Expostulation* (London: Pickering, 1875), p. 179.

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mental freedom' of the Catholic convert. It is in this context that Newman writes about conscience. He notes that 'there are extreme cases in which Conscience may come into collision with the word of a Pope',[12] but insists that conscience 'is to be followed in spite of that word'.[13] Referencing St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas, as well as the Fourth Lateran Council, Newman argues that God

> is of a certain character, which, expressed in human language, we call ethical. He has the attributes of justice, truth, wisdom, sanctity, benevolence and mercy, as eternal characteristics in His nature, the very Law of His being, identical with Himself; and next, when He became Creator, He implanted this Law, which is Himself, in the intelligence of all His rational creatures. The Divine Law, then, is the rule of ethical truth, the standard of right and wrong, a sovereign, irreversible, absolute authority in the presence of men and Angels.[14]

To speak of conscience is to speak of 'the voice of God in the nature and heart of man, as distinct from the voice of Revelation'.[15] Newman noted that this was common to all Christian denominations, which 'speak of a principle planted within us, before we have had any training, although training and experience are necessary for its strength, growth, and due formation'.[16] This is a constituent element of the mind as well as an 'internal witness of both the existence and the law of God'.[17] Conscience is 'the aboriginal Vicar of Christ'. It is an innate quality possessed by every single human being.[18] Conscience is central to Newman's understanding of ethics, and yet, rather inconveniently, as Newman goes on to acknowledge, Pope Pius IX had published an encyclical *Quanta cura* in 1864, condemning liberty of conscience, which repeated a similar observation by Pope Gregory XVI in his encyclical *Mirari vos,* issued in 1832. Newman argues that both Popes are condemning the popular misconception of conscience, and draws a distinction between 'the Catholic sense of the word "conscience"'[19] and 'a counterfeit . . . the right of self-will'.[20] This is what the Popes had condemned. Nevertheless, the chapter on Conscience is made famous by one parting shot at the very end, when Newman says: 'Certainly, if I am obliged to bring religion into after-dinner toasts, . . . I shall

[12]John H. Newman, *A Letter Addressed to the Duke of Norfolk on Occasion of Mr Gladstone's Recent Expostulation* (London: Pickering, 1875), p. 246.
[13]*Ibid.*
[14]*Ibid.*
[15]*Ibid.*
[16]John H. Newman, *A Letter Addressed to the Duke of Norfolk on Occasion of Mr Gladstone's Recent Expostulation* (London: Pickering, 1875), p. 248. My emphasis.
[17]*Ibid.*
[18]John H. Newman, *A Letter Addressed to the Duke of Norfolk on Occasion of Mr Gladstone's Recent Expostulation* (London: Pickering, 1875), pp. 248–249.
[19]John H. Newman, *A Letter Addressed to the Duke of Norfolk on Occasion of Mr Gladstone's Recent Expostulation* (London: Pickering, 1875), p. 252.
[20]John H. Newman, *A Letter Addressed to the Duke of Norfolk on Occasion of Mr Gladstone's Recent Expostulation* (London: Pickering, 1875), p. 250.

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drink – to the Pope, if you please – still, to Conscience first, and to the Pope afterwards'.[21] That was Newman's riposte to Gladstone's provocation.

The Genealogy of Newman's Thought

One of the remarkable things about Newman's writings on conscience is that they remained surprisingly consistent before and after his journey to Rome. Reading his University Sermons, preached at St Mary's, there is a similar accent on the importance of conscience. In a University Sermon delivered in 1830,[22] Newman writes that 'it is obvious that Conscience is the essential principle and sanction of Religion in the mind. Conscience implies a relation between the soul and a something exterior, and that, moreover, superior to itself; a relation to an excellence which it does not possess, and to a tribunal over which it has no power'.[23] He returns to this theme in another University Sermon[24], where he attributes the capacity of conscience, through 'an *implicit* act of reasoning' to 'detect moral truth wherever it lies hid, . . .'.[25] The 'Testimony of Conscience' is a theme that he also visits in his *Parochial and Plain Sermons*.[26]

Jane Garnett has written eloquently about the enormous debt owed by Newman to the eighteenth-century Anglican divine, Bishop Butler, in his writings on conscience.[27] Butler himself stood in a long line of Anglican theologians, who drew on a rich vein of Christian reflection on conscience. Following the English Reformation, particularly when the medieval practice of producing moral manuals for the use of priests in the confessional effectively lapsed, reflection on the workings of conscience became particularly prominent in the writings of a number of Anglican

[21]John H. Newman, *A Letter Addressed to the Duke of Norfolk on Occasion of Mr Gladstone's Recent Expostulation* (London: Pickering, 1875), p. 261.

[22]'Sermon II. The Influence of Natural and Revealed Religion Respectively' published in John H. Newman (ed), *Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford between A.D. 1826 and 1843.* Third edition. (London: Rivingtons, 1872), pp. 16–36.

[23]John H. Newman, *Fifteen Sermons preached before the University of Oxford between A.D. 1826 and 1843.* Third edition. (London: Rivingtons, 1872), p. 18.

[24]'Sermon IV. The Usurpations of Reason' published in John H. Newman, (ed), *Fifteen Sermons Preached Before the University of Oxford between A.D. 1826 and 1843.* Third edition. (London: Rivingtons, 1872), pp. 54–74.

[25]John H. Newman, *Fifteen Sermons Preached Before the University of Oxford between A.D. 1826 and 1843.* Third edition. (London: Rivingtons, 1872), p. 66.

[26]John H. Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons,* No. 17.

[27]See Jane Garnett, 'Joseph Butler' in Frederick D. Aquino and Benjamin J. King (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of John Henry Newman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 135–153. Donald Mackinnon also comments on Newman's debt to Butler in his introduction to *Newman's University Sermons:* 'Newman's debt to Butler in his *Sermons* is then the most obvious of all. Indeed in the sixth sermon (*On Justice as a Principle of Divine Governance*) the close conformity of his teaching to that contained in Butler's *Dissertation,* where benevolence is only allowed to be the whole of human virtue 'within the bounds of justice and veracity' stands out immediately' (Donald M. MacKinnon in *Newman's University Sermons: Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford 1826-43 by John Henry Newman; with Introductory Essays by D. M. MacKinnon and J. D. Holmes* (London: SPCK), p. 15). This has also proved a fruitful line of investigation for Peter Sedgwick, who acknowledges Newman's debt to Butler, while at the same time recognizing Newman's criticisms of him (cf. Peter H. Sedgwick, *The Development of Anglican Moral Theology, 1680-1950* (Leiden: Brill), pp. 205–220.

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Divines. They included people like Richard Hooker, Robert Sanderson, Jeremy Taylor and William Law. In his study of ascetical theology, Martin Thornton argued that while these moralists drew on scholastic categories and described conscience in terms closely akin to those used by St Thomas Aquinas, their writings had a very different purpose from the legalist medieval case-books. These were not manuals for confessors: 'the Caroline works were directed towards the training of the individual conscience by both personal study and spiritual direction'.[28]

But it is to Butler, in the eighteenth century, that we owe a key development in Anglican reflection about the nature of conscience. For Butler, conscience is a reasoning or reflective principle that operates both prospectively and retrospectively. The distinction is important as earlier thinkers tended to put more emphasis on the retrospective function of conscience. In Butler's view, conscience could also guide moral action as well as reflect on past actions. He ascribes to conscience 'a unique authority far above any of the passions'.[29] He assumes that all human beings have an innate sense of right and wrong, and that the many ways of describing a sense of right and wrong all point to one and the same capacity: 'Conscience, moral Reason, moral sense, or divine Reason . . . as a Sentiment of the Understanding, or as a Perception of the Heart'.[30] This point is elaborated by Butler in his published sermons: conscience was intrinsic to humanity, and had a supreme authority over all the other principles and passions. Most importantly, it was divinely instituted. In his clear and concise summary, Richard Sorabji notes that in his third sermon, Butler argues that conscience has authority 'from being our natural guide, the guides assigned us by the author of our nature. The authority means not that it will be obeyed, but that it ought to be obeyed'.[31] In his sixth sermon preached at the Rolls Chapel, Butler alludes to Conscience as 'the voice of God within us'[32] In his tenth sermon, he describes it as that '*Candle of the Lord within,* which is to direct our steps'.[33] Note, the prospective accent of those words.

Newman acknowledges his debt to Butler in *The Grammar of Assent,* where we find similar observations. Newman speaks of 'Conscience as a voice . . . and moreover a voice, or the echo of a voice, imperative and constraining, like no other dictate in the whole of our experience'.[34] Jane Garnett points out that the works of Bishop Butler were specifically prescribed for study in Oxford when Newman was studying there. Newman refers to reading Butler in his diaries. We know that he

[28]Martin Thornton, *English Spirituality: An Outline of Ascetical Theology according to the English Pastoral Tradition* (Oxford: Cowley, 1986), p. 245.

[29]Richard Sorabji, *Moral Conscience through the Ages; Fifth Century BCE to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 169.

[30]Joseph Butler, *Dissertation of the Nature of Virtue,* 1, in D. McNaughton (ed.), *Joseph Butler: Fifteen Sermons & Other Writings on Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 135.

[31]Rrichard Sorabji, *Moral Conscience through the Ages; Fifth Century BCE to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 170.

[32]Joseph Butler, *Fifteen Sermons,* 6.7, in D. McNaughton (ed.), *Joseph Butler: Fifteen Sermons & Other Writings on Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 57.

[33]Joseph Butler, *Fifteen Sermons,* 10.16, in D. McNaughton (ed.), *Joseph Butler: Fifteen Sermons & Other Writings on Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 91.

[34]John H. Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent,* (ed.) I.T. Ker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 74–75.

borrowed a copy of Butler's Sermons from Oriel Library in 1827 and 1829.[35] In correspondence much later in his life, Newman suggests that his theological works would only be of limited interest: 'I very much doubt whether my volumes are fit for any but English men. Without of course comparing myself with Bishop Butler, I may say that I am of his school, and see what little account he is, how little known, on the Continent'.[36] We should perhaps not underestimate the significance of this influence for the purposes of the argument set out at the beginning of this article. Gladstone had himself edited a multi-volume edition of Bishop Butler's works. But while Newman has sometimes been described as the 'Doctor of Conscience'[37] in discussing his distinctive contribution to Roman Catholic theology, it is instructive to note Newman's debt to this Anglican divine.

For all Butler's emphasis on this innate moral sense of divine origin, there is also a curious tension in Newman's thought. Like Butler, Newman wants to acknowledge and affirm that conscience is *innate*, but at the same time, he also wants to insist that it is something that is *formed*. On one level, this is unremarkable. We find similar observations in the writings of Thomas Aquinas, which he perhaps elucidates in distinguishing between *synderesis* as the ground of practical reason, 'naturally instilled in us' which 'pushes us towards the good and murmurs against evil', and *conscientia* or conscience, which is its practical outworking. This distinction enables Thomas to explore whether an erroneous conscience binds us. As Mark Jordan notes, 'his reply startles some people, because he holds that if something appears to you as bad (even when it is good), then to choose it is to choose the bad – which violates the fundamental principle of reasoned action. In other words, to choose against your conscience violates your reason – and so nullifies the only ground for reasoned action'.[38] Newman makes a similar argument in his letter to the Duke of Norfolk, but he also notes that in considering this question, Aquinas goes on to ask whether an erroneous conscience excuses bad choices. In response, Aquinas introduces the topic of moral formation.

Newman may not address this issue directly in his letter to the Duke of Norfolk, but he does address the question of moral formation at some length in his lectures on the *Idea of a University*. Described as one of the most quoted but least read books in English literature, Newman's classic work has proved influential in all sorts of ways. The purpose of a University was to ensure that those educated there had 'a cultivated intellect, a delicate taste, a candid, equitable, dispassionate mind'.[39] But for our purposes, we should note that it is in this context that he speaks of 'the reproaches of conscience',[40] of 'the imperative and obligatory force of conscience',[41]

[35]Jane Garnett, 'Joseph Butler' in Frederick D. Aquino and Benjamin J. King (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of John Henry Newman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 136.

[36]John H. Newman, *Letters and Diaries, xxix.* 207. Quoted by Jane Garnett, 'Joseph Butler' in Frederick D. Aquino and Benjamin J. King (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of John Henry Newman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 150.

[37]Cf. Drew Morgan, 'John Henry Newman – Doctor of Conscience: Doctor of the Church?, *Newman Studies Journal 4.1* (2007), pp. 5–23.

[38]Personal communication: 19 August 2024.

[39]John H. Newman, *The Idea of a University,* (ed.) I.T. Ker (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 120.

[40]John H. Newman, *The Idea of a University,* (ed.) I.T. Ker (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 65.

[41]John H. Newman, *The Idea of a University,* (ed.) I.T. Ker (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 183.

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of conscience 'implanted in the breast by nature'[42] and yet at the same time, he laments the way in which conscience is also misunderstood. For some, it is 'not the word of a lawgiver, as it ought to be, but the dictate of their own minds and nothing more . . . It is because they do not look out of themselves, because they do not look through and beyond their own minds to their Maker, but are engrossed in notions of what is due to themselves, to their own dignity and their own consistency. The conscience has become a mere self-respect'.[43] He argues against the eighteenth-century philosopher, Lord Shaftesbury, who, according to Newman, appears to reduce conscience to little more than an aesthetic judgement, a mere sentiment. For Newman, Shaftesbury's treatment of conscience is, if not an 'intellectual counterfeit',[44] pretty 'superficial'. Newman contrasts this 'counterfeit' conscience with that formed by Christian virtue:

> St Paul, as I have said, gives us a pattern of evangelical perfection; he draws the Christian character in its most graceful form, and its most beautiful hues. He discourses of that charity which is patient and meek, humble and single-minded, ... He tells us to prefer each the other before himself, to give way to each other, to abstain from rude words and evil speech, to avoid self-conceit, to be calm and grave, to be cheerful and happy, to observe peace with all men, truth and justice, courtesy and gentleness, all that is modest, amiable, virtuous, and of good repute.[45]

While the world is content 'with setting right the surface of things; the Church aims at regenerating the very depths of the heart'.[46] This is why our conscience, our moral consciousness, needs to be formed, even though the authority of conscience is sacrosanct.

The Character of Conscience

If conscience featured in a public dispute between Gladstone and Newman towards the end of the nineteenth century, the events of the twentieth century have done nothing to diminish the significance of conscience. The Jesuit moral theologian, James Keenan SJ, argues that conscience became much more prominent in the thinking of moral theologians in the light of the Second World War: 'European theologians, appalled by the widespread participation of Catholics in unimaginably heinous conduct during the war, developed a robust promotion of the call of conscience for all Catholics'.[47] The intervention of prominent German moral theologians, who believed that Catholicism had created a curious passivity in the laity which had left them unprepared for the rise of Fascism, led to the celebrated paragraph 16 of *Gaudium et spes,* the pastoral constitution on Catholic social

[42]John H. Newman, *The Idea of a University,* (ed.) I.T. Ker (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 191.
[43]John H. Newman, *The Idea of a University,* (ed.) I.T. Ker (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 192.
[44]John H. Newman, *The Idea of a University,* (ed.) I.T. Ker (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 202.
[45]John H. Newman, *The Idea of a University,* (ed.) I.T. Ker (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 203.
[46]*Ibid.*
[47]James F. Keenan, 'Redeeming Conscience', *Theological Studies 76.1* (2015), p. 133.

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teaching, which was promulgated by the Second Vatican Council in 1965: 'In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience. Always summoning him to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience, when necessary, speaks to his heart: do this, shun that'.[48]

Keenan also points out that this accent on conscience was less prominent in the United States between the end of the Second World War and the Second Vatican Council. But conscience emerged as a key point of contention in the preparatory work that led to the publication of *Humanae vitae,* Paul VI's encyclical on birth control, published in 1968. Keenan makes the point that appeals to conscience emerged in the United States both during the Vietnam War and in the shadows of *Humanae vitae.* These were two moments when conscience as an act materialized: 'in the personal appeals by young men drafted into an undeclared war and in the claims of married couples exasperated by a church leadership unable to meet their needs for change'.[49]

Newman's quotation about drinking to conscience before drinking to the Pope has sometimes been the object of criticism: it 'has been quoted countless times by Catholics who wished to disobey the Pope without leaving the Roman Church'.[50] Newman, however, was certainly alert to this possibility. In his *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk,* he remarks:

> When men advocate the rights of conscience, they in no sense mean the rights of the Creator, nor the duty to Him, in thought and deed, of the creature; but the right of thinking, speaking, writing, and acting, according to their judgement or their humour, without any thought of God at all. They do not even pretend to go by any moral rule, but they demand, what they think is an Englishman's prerogative, to be his own master in all things, and to profess what he pleases, asking no one's leave, and accounting priest or preacher, speaker or writer, unutterably impertinent, who dares to say a word against his going to perdition if he like it, in his own way.[51]

Newman drew a distinction between conscience 'properly understood' and conscience 'popularly understood'. This perhaps goes to the heart of some of the contemporary disputes about the character of conscience.[52] But one of the issues for Newman is that because, like Butler, his understanding of conscience emphasizes the personal autonomy of the individual, it very easily becomes a way of giving Christians freedom to exercise prerogatives, even compelling ones against the law, whether that be civil or ecclesiastical. It becomes a way of opting out. Keenan points out that reflection on conscience in post-war Europe had a rather different

[48]Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (Vatican, 1965), p. 16.

[49]James F. Keenan, 'Redeeming Conscience', *Theological Studies 76.1* (2015), p. 134.

[50]Anthony Kenny, 'Cardinal of Conscience: A Review of John Cornwell, *Newman's Unquiet Grave*', *Times Literary Supplement 5600* (2010), p. 4.

[51]John H. Newman, *The Idea of a University,* (ed.) Ian T. Ker (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 58.

[52]Note the important discussion from a more conservative perspective in Matthew Levering, *The Abuse of Conscience: A Century of Catholic Moral Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021).

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emphasis. The purpose was to awaken a sense that moral agency needed to be collectively accountable. The locus of that competency was the Christian conscience, which placed 'before Christians the mindfulness that ultimately they could be a people judged and hopefully redeemed by God'.[53] Newman's throwaway line has perhaps resulted in an emphasis on 'freedom of conscience' rather than on the 'obligations of conscience'.

Drawing on the insights of Elizabeth Sweeny Block and Elizabeth Vasko, Keenan notes that conscience can be used as a very effective way of 'opting out' of social responsibility. Elizabeth Sweeny Block argued that we need 'to reimagine or refocus conscience, emphasizing action and engagement with the other as equal in importance to the self-knowledge and self-reflection typically associated with conscience'.[54] Rather than putting all the emphasis on individual autonomy, conscience is reorientated to pay attention to the other. As Block puts it, 'Conscience can and ought to be that which pulls us out of self-concern and into the work of protecting the other. Conscience must call us into action and hold us responsible for the harms that threaten life'.[55] In other words, it needs to move beyond autonomy and introspection. And such a profound attention to the other may help to interrogate the prejudices we may have internalized, which a reflexive and autonomous form of conscience sometimes serves to reinforce. Although we have perhaps moved some distance from Newman's own reflections on conscience, it may be worth repeating the passage from the *Idea of a University* when he talks about Paul's pattern of evangelical perfection: 'He tells us to prefer each *the other* before himself, *to give way to each other*, . . . , to avoid self-conceit . . . '.[56] We submit to the pangs of conscience in acknowledging our failure to attend to the other, our failure to love, our capacity to hurt. All these things become the occasions of remorse, and in accepting our guilt and our responsibility, we recognize the obligations of conscience, our accountability to the other.

The Obligations of Conscience

The novelist, Marilynne Robinson, has some powerful things to say about freedom of conscience, but she is also alert to the ways in which reflexive or introspective forms of conscience can sometimes be used as a way of reinforcing prejudice. She notes that 'beyond the capacity to appraise one's own actions and motives by a standard that seems, at least, to stand outside momentary impulse or longer-term self-interest and to tell against oneself, conscience is remarkably chimerical'.[57] She notes the inconsistencies of moral judgments in different cultures:

[53]John F. Keenan, 'Redeeming Conscience', *Theological Studies 76.1* (2015), p. 135.

[54]John F. Keenan, *The Moral Life* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2023), p. 57.

[55]Elisabeth S. Block, 'A Call to Action: Global Moral Crises and the Inadequacy of Inherited Approaches to Conscience', *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics 37.2* (2017), p. 93. Cf. Elisabeth S. Block, 'White Privilege and the Erroneous Conscience: Rethinking Moral Culpability and Ignorance', *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics 39.2* (2019), pp. 357–374.

[56]John H. Newman, *The Idea of a University* (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1889), p. 203.

[57]Marilynne Robinson, 'What is Freedom of Conscience?' in M. Robinson, (ed.), *What Are We Doing Here? Essays* (London: Virago, 2018), p. 4.

> We have learned that effective imprisonment at forced labor of unwed mothers, or of young women deemed likely to stray, was practiced until a few decades ago in a Western country, Ireland, despite the many violations of human rights this entailed. One might expect it to have ended in any previous century, if consciences were burdened by it. Americans have just awakened to the fact that we have imprisoned a vast part of our own populations with slight cause, stigmatizing them at best and depriving them of the possibility of a normal, fruitful lie. Conscience can be slow to awake, even to abuses that are deeply contrary to declared values – for example, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.[58]

Robinson suggests that 'it is not always easy to tell a slumbering conscience from one that is weighing consequences'.[59] In much the same vein as Elizabeth Sweeny Block and Elizabeth Vasko, Robinson is wrestling with the question about whether it is possible to shift debates about 'freedom of conscience' and an accent on individual autonomy to a view of conscience which is more socially responsible. An accent on the 'obligations of conscience' rather than 'freedom of conscience' may serve to pull 'us out of self-concern and into the work of protecting the other'.[60]

In 2025, in response to the *Living in Love and Faith* process within the Church of England, its Faith and Order Commission published a report, which included a section on 'Episcopacy and Conscience'.[61] According to the Commission's chair, the report was written in response 'to the disagreements not only within the House of Bishops, but within individual bishops, many of whom are grappling with the tensions created by their personal views on human sexuality and the range of those represented amongst their flocks'.[62] While it is difficult to articulate exactly what the 'disagreements within individual bishops' might be, other than to lament the fact that this was rather poorly phrased, it is instructive to note that at various points in the course of this interminable debate, people have adopted a range of different stances, each appealing to conscience. Inevitably, Bishops must wrestle with seeking to follow their conscience while acknowledging profound disagreements within the church. This perhaps provides a ready example of an instance where we might see the transition from 'a slumbering conscience' to 'one that is weighing the consequences' of making 'pastoral provision *in a time of uncertainty*'.[63] The report contains a useful appendix on 'Unity and disagreement in the history of the Church

[58] *Ibid.*

[59] *Ibid.*

[60] Elisabeth S. Block, 'A Call to Action: Global Moral Crises and the Inadequacy of Inherited Approaches to Conscience', *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics 37.2* (2017), p. 93.

[61] Faith and Order Commission, *Theological Reflections Responding to Queries from the General Synod and House of Bishops in Relation to Living in Love and Faith* (GS Misc, 1406). In this defence of 'collegiate conscience', there is perhaps an echo of Hastings Rashdall's musings on 'collective conscience' in H. Rashdall, *Conscience and Christ: Six Lectures on Christian Ethics* (London: Duckworth, 1916).

[62] Robert Innes, Chair of the Faith and Order Commission in *Theological Reflections responding to Queries from the General Synod and House of Bishops in Relation to Living in Love and Faith* (GS Misc, 1406), p. 1.

[63] Faith and Order Commission, *Theological Reflections Responding to Queries from the General Synod and House of Bishops in Relation to Living in Love and Faith* (GS Misc, 1406), p. 47.

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of England', which covers conformity, latitude and conscience,[64] and which explores the clergy conscience exemptions granted in relation to divorce and remarriage, prohibited degrees of kindred and affinity and the ordination of women. There is also discussion of similar exemptions enshrined in more recent provisions for the admission of children and adults to communion before confirmation, rites for transgender persons and *Prayers of Love and Faith.* All of this attests to the importance and significance of conscience in Anglican moral theology.

The Commission's paper sought to explore the ideas of individual conscience and 'collegiate conscience' in episcopal ministry. This was motivated in part by the perception that different approaches by Diocesan Bishops in relation to the discipline of LGBTQ+ clergy had resulted in 'an uneven approach across the Church of England', which had led to 'a "postcode lottery", with some pastorally very difficult situations created for lay readers and clergy moving from one diocese to another'.[65] Thus, the section on 'Episcopacy and Conscience' begins with the question: 'Can conscience be collegiate?' From the beginning of the paper, the tacit assumption is that it can be. The writers begin by exploring what 'conscience' means, examining the history, field of meaning and usage of the word in English, and the way in which the term has been employed historically in the Church of England. It draws on the *Book of Common Prayer 1662* and the Elizabethan *Homilies* to note that conscience delineates 'an individual's internal conviction of sin or righteousness'.[66] It quotes the puritan divine William Perkins, 'one of the earliest in the Church of England to consider "cases of conscience"',[67] and suggests that the prominence of the term in the mid-seventeenth century was no accident – the authors note that appeals to conscience are characteristic of 'internal religious disagreements'.[68] Rather surprisingly, the historical survey ends with Thomas Hobbes, who suggests that '[a] man's conscience and his judgment is the same thing, and as the judgment, so the conscience may also be erroneous'.[69] It notes that 'conscience tends to be used in this way where each side in the Church's internal disagreements perceives its rightness to be supported by the *authority of conscience*'.[70] And yet, in spite of the fact that Joseph Butler wrote extensively about the 'authority of conscience', there is not one reference in the document to the way in which Butler sought in response to Hobbes to rehabilitate conscience in Anglican moral theology.

With its rather partial reading of the way 'conscience' has been employed historically in the Church of England, '[a]gainst this history, the paper considers the

[64]Faith and Order Commission, *Theological Reflections Responding to Queries from the General Synod and House of Bishops in Relation to Living in Love and Faith* (GS Misc, 1406), pp. 53–70.

[65]Faith and Order Commission, *Theological Reflections Responding to Queries from the General Synod and House of Bishops in Relation to Living in Love and Faith* (GS Misc, 1406), p. 66.

[66]Faith and Order Commission, *Theological Reflections Responding to Queries from the General Synod and House of Bishops in Relation to Living in Love and Faith* (GS Misc, 1406), p. 5.

[67]Faith and Order Commission, *Theological Reflections Responding to Queries from the General Synod and House of Bishops in Relation to Living in Love and Faith* (GS Misc, 1406), p. 72.

[68]*Ibid.*

[69]Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651), quoted in Faith and Order Commission, *Theological Reflections Responding to Queries from the General Synod and House of Bishops in Relation to Living in Love and Faith* (GS Misc, 1406), p. 73.

[70]Faith and Order Commission, *Theological Reflections Responding to Queries from the General Synod and House of Bishops in Relation to Living in Love and Faith* (GS Misc, 1406), p. 5.

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subjective nature of conscience as its promptings are experienced and as it is used by Paul in his consideration of *syneidesis* in 1 Corinthians 8'.[71] Paul acknowledges that discerning the divine will is complex and demands attention to the good of the whole church: 'For Paul, conscience is not an inviolable personal citadel, but requires the generous participation of all in imagining well the troubled conscience of the other'.[72] The paper goes on to argue that 'no individual bishop's conscience is therefore simply personal, as might be the case for an individual making a decision with limited institutional impact. The representative nature of the episcopal calling requires a bishop to carry the consciences and convictions of all those for whom that bishop has oversight'.[73] There is a *relational* quality to the way in which bishops must exercise their conscience. And yet, while this is true (and more might be said about the people served by the bishop as chief pastor and not just about their obligations to other bishops), the clear inference is that, as far as the authors are concerned, this means that the bishop's conscience is bound by collective responsibility. This paper ends with some stark warnings to any bishops, who are 'burdened with a conscience that speaks against the collegiate mind',[74] and who dare to step out of line.

While much of the content is predictable, the greater puzzle lies in the way so much of the rich inheritance of Anglican moral theology is rather casually ignored.[75] The tactical way in which scripture trumps tradition, implicit in the phrase '[a]gainst this history', disregards the profound way in which these historical voices were also seeking faithfully to interpret scripture. While Joseph Butler may be regarded as a great proponent of natural theology, his fifteen sermons draw on a series of biblical texts. Much of Newman's wrestling with 'conscience' shows that the interpretation of scripture plays a central role in his reflections on the character of conscience. Moreover, Newman would almost certainly agree with the observations about St Paul and the *relational* quality of conscience. Indeed, engaging some of these later conversation partners in describing the history of Anglican moral theology might have been helpful to the Commission in presenting a more considered view.

I suggest that there are three problems with the idea of a 'collegiate conscience' or a 'collective conscience': first, the development of this notion draws on a very partial understanding of the place of conscience in the Anglican moral tradition; secondly, both these rather inelegant phrases conflate the authority of conscience with the institutional demand of effective governance and accountability. Bishops have responsibilities to teach the faith, to observe church discipline, to care for their clergy and to fulfil their ordination vows, but it is doubtful that the discharge of these responsibilities will be secured more effectively by the notion of a 'collegiate

[71]*Ibid.*

[72]*Ibid.*

[73]Faith and Order Commission, *Theological Reflections Responding to Queries from the General Synod and House of Bishops in Relation to Living in Love and Faith* (GS Misc, 1406), p. 81.

[74]Faith and Order Commission, *Theological Reflections Responding to Queries from the General Synod and House of Bishops in Relation to Living in Love and Faith* (GS Misc, 1406), p. 82.

[75]For a recent and extremely valuable survey of Anglican moral theology, see P.H. Sedgwick, *The Origins of Anglican Moral Theology* (Boston: Brill, 2019) and P.H. Sedgwick, *The Development of Anglican Moral Theology, 1680-1950* (Boston: Brill, 2024).

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conscience'. Rather than developing a notion of 'collegiate conscience' that is troubled by any form of dissent, it might have been better to reflect on a form of conscience that 'pulls us out of self-concern and into the work of protecting the other',[76] particularly in those situations where the other is more vulnerable and marginalized than ourselves. Such an understanding of conscience would begin by acknowledging the ways in which we are sometimes complicit in oppressing others. I have suggested that James Keenan enables us to move beyond some of the inherited reflexive and autonomous forms of conscience by advocating the adoption of a profound attentiveness to the other. This, in turn, may help to interrogate the prejudices that we may have internalized and that appeals to reflexive and autonomous forms of conscience can sometimes serve to reinforce. As Keenan eloquently puts it, 'the pangs of conscience awaken us to be converted toward a more vulnerable and mutual recognition' of the victims we have harmed, and to recognize 'their dignity that we once so viciously compromised'.[77] This is unsettling. It is troubling. It is perhaps one of the reasons why, in Marilynne Robinson's words, 'conscience can be slow to awake'. Nevertheless, such a conception of conscience in its attentiveness to the other is much closer to Newman's description of St Paul's understanding of evangelical perfection: 'He tells us to prefer each *the other* before himself, *to give way to each other*, . . .'.[78] Inevitably, there is a tension here between 'freedom of conscience' and 'the obligations of conscience'. And yet, it is precisely in exploring this tension that the difficult and demanding task of true discernment lies.

The third problem with the idea of a 'collegiate conscience' is that this conflation of the authority of conscience with institutional loyalty may serve unwittingly to compromise further reforms of safeguarding. In recent years, different provinces of the Anglican Communion have seen the impact of institutional loyalty trumping the obligations of conscience in the treatment of victims and survivors of a number of significant and troubling safeguarding scandals. While those who have promoted the idea of a 'collegiate conscience' might argue that this reflects an institutional commitment to professional safeguarding measures, the reality is that recent history has demonstrated that this has not always been the case. In recent years, a small number of courageous church leaders have stepped out of line to meet with and listen to victims and survivors. In the process, they have become powerful advocates of the need for the wholesale reform of safeguarding within different provinces of the Anglican Communion. Sadly, they are the exception rather than the rule, but the important point is that they have often recognized that the obligations of conscience outweigh institutional loyalty. A more vulnerable recognition of the victims that the church has harmed is possibly one of the reasons why this small number of church leaders is often trusted far more than the majority who hide behind the notion of a 'collegiate conscience'. It is quite simply breathtaking that the Commission did not address this issue in its consideration of Episcopacy and Conscience. Safeguarding is not mentioned once. But it is perhaps no accident that the Commission pays such little attention to the writings of St John Henry Newman on conscience. The tension between the obligations

[76]Elisabeth S. Block, 'A Call to Action: Global Moral Crises and the Inadequacy of Inherited Approaches to Conscience', *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics 37.2* (2017), p. 93.

[77]James F. Keenan, *The Moral Life* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2023), p. 71.

[78]John H. Newman, *The Idea of a University* (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1889), p. 203.

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of conscience and institutional loyalty goes to the very heart of the dispute with William Gladstone, with which this article began: '. . . I shall drink – to the Pope, if you please – still, to Conscience first, and to the Pope afterwards'.[79]

The Formation of Conscience?

But the question remains: can any of this be taught? Newman recognized that although conscience was *innate*, it was also *formed*. In his writings, Newman has much to say about the formation of our moral consciousness. In his University Sermon on 'The Influence of Natural and Revealed Religion Respectively', preached on 13 April 1830, Newman comments specifically on the way in which the conscience can be 'improved' when 'remorse and vague apprehension of evil which the transgression of Conscience occasions' is informed by a 'growing expertness in the science of Morals'.[80] And yet, for Newman, this science was not simply imparted by a few lectures on moral theology.

In his proposals for the Catholic University of Ireland, Newman proposed that this new institution should emulate the tutorial system at the University of Oxford: a tutor given to teaching 'a smaller number at a time, and by the catechetical method, will be able to exert those personal influences, which are of the highest importance in the formation and tone of character among the set of students, as well as to provide that the student shall actually prepare the subject for himself, and not be a mere listener at a lecture'.[81] Indeed, Newman appears to have been rather ambivalent about the effectiveness of lectures in teaching and learning.[82] As Paul Shrimpton notes, for Newman, 'education is an intrinsically *relational* activity. Phrases such as "mind to mind" and "person to person" crop up repeatedly in his writings, anticipating his choice of motto as a cardinal: *Cor ad Cor Loquitur*'.[83] At Oriel College, along with Hurrell Froude and Robert Wilberforce, two of the other College Tutors, Newman had pioneered a pattern of tutorial teaching, which involved the assiduous coaching and mentoring of students.[84] It involved attending

[79]John H. Newman, *A Letter Addressed to the Duke of Norfolk on Occasion of Mr Gladstone's Recent Expostulation* (London: Pickering, 1875), p. 261.

[80]'Sermon II. The Influence of Natural and Revealed Religion Respectively' in John H. Newman (ed.), *Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford between A.D. 1826 and 1843.* Third edition. (London: Rivingtons, 1872), p. 20.

[81]'Report on the Organization of the Catholic University of Ireland', October 1851, in John H. Newman (ed.), *My Campaign in Ireland. Part 1: Catholic University Reports and Other Papers* (Aberdeen: A. King & Co, 1896), p. 85.

[82]See further Newman's comments on Professorial Lectures in the 'Report on the Organization of the Catholic University of Ireland', October 1851, in John H. Newman (ed.), *My Campaign in Ireland. Part 1: Catholic University Reports and Other Papers* (Aberdeen: A. King & Co, 1896), 84. Newman perhaps foreshadows some of the criticisms and reservations articulated in the classic text, D. Bligh, *What's the Use of Lectures?* (Exeter: Intellect, 1998).

[83]Paul Shrimpton, 'Newman's Idea of a Tutor and its Implementation at the Catholic University', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, *112.446* (2023), pp. 160–168.

[84]When Newman became a Tutor at Oriel College, he prayed: 'May I engage in them in the strength of Christ, remembering I am a minister of God, and have a commission to preach the Gospel . . . and that I shall have to answer for the opportunities given me of benefiting those who are under my care' (John H. Newman *Autobiographical Writings*, (ed.) Henry Tristram. (London and New York: Sheed and Ward,

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to their spiritual and moral welfare, as well as their academic progress. He argued that this reflected precisely the kind of pastoral supervision enshrined in the College's seventeenth-century statutes, even though in practice, it had been ignored. Again, this was not without controversy. Edward Hawkins, the Provost of Oriel, thought that Newman was abusing his position in order to gain disciples. Rather recklessly, Hawkins dismissed Newman, Froude and Wilberforce, from their Oriel tutorships in 1830.[85] But in spite of these criticisms, the practice of the younger Oriel tutors provided 'the germ of the modern tutorial system'.[86] Later in Ireland, Newman enlarged on the role of the tutor in his 'Scheme of Rules and Regulations' for the Catholic University in Ireland: '[h]is duty is, certainly the moral, but more directly the intellectual care of his pupils'.[87] The Tutor was to oversee the learning of his charges directly and 'superintend their reading'. He was to be particularly attentive in ascertaining 'their weak points' and 'remedying them'.[88] In the case of the 'more clever and diligent', he is to take a keen interest in their development, exploring 'obscurities of thought, difficulties in philosophy, perplexities of faith'. Thus, 'the Tutor forms the pupil's opinions, and is the friend, perhaps the guide, of his after life'.[89] Towards the end of the section on the role of the Tutor, Newman emphasizes the moral and intellectual formation of the student's character:

> In this idea of a College Tutor, we see that union of intellectual and moral influence, the separation of which is the evil of the age. Men are accustomed to go to the Church for religious training, but to the world for the cultivation both of their hard reason and their susceptible imagination. A Catholic University will but half remedy this evil, if it aims only at professorial, not at private teaching. Where is the private teaching, there will be the real influence.[90]

1957), p. 209. The influence of John Keble on these younger Oriel tutors can perhaps be detected here. When Keble himself became a Tutor of Oriel in 1818, he indicated that for a priest to exercise a tutorial role, it should be regarded 'as an aspect of pastoral care', otherwise 'it might seem questionable whether a clergyman ought to leave a cure of souls for it' (J.T. Coleridge, *Memoir of John Keble* (2nd edition, 2 vol, 1869), i. 73. Both passages are quoted by Michael G. Brock, 'The Oxford of Peel and Gladstone, 1800-1833', Michael G. Brock and Mark C. Curthoys (eds.), *The History of the University of Oxford,* vol vi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 35.

[85]Michael G. Brock, 'The Oxford of Peel and Gladstone, 1800-1833', in Michael G. Brock and Mark C. Curthoys (eds.), *The History of the University of Oxford,* vol vi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 60. A more detailed description of this dispute is provided in Kenneth C. Turpin, 'The Ascendancy of Oriel', *The History of the University of Oxford,in* Michael G. Brock and Mark C. Curthoys (eds.), vol vi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 189–191. No one emerges well from it.

[86]Michael G. Brock, 'The Oxford of Peel and Gladstone, 1800-1833', in Michael G. Brock and Mark C. Curthoys (eds.), *The History of the University of Oxford,* vol vi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 61, quoted in Paul Shrimpton, 'Newman's Idea of a Tutor and its Implementation at the Catholic University', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, *112.446* (2023), p. 161.

[87]'Scheme of Rules and Regulations', April 1856, in John H. Newman, *My Campaign in Ireland. Part 1: Catholic University Reports and Other Papers* (Aberdeen: A. King & Co, 1896), p. 117.

[88]'Scheme of Rules and Regulations', April 1856, in John H. Newman, *My Campaign in Ireland. Part 1: Catholic University Reports and Other Papers* (Aberdeen: A. King & Co, 1896), p. 118.

[89]'Scheme of Rules and Regulations', April 1856, in John H. Newman, *My Campaign in Ireland. Part 1: Catholic University Reports and Other Papers* (Aberdeen: A. King & Co, 1896), p. 119.

[90]'Scheme of Rules and Regulations', April 1856, in John H. Newman, *My Campaign in Ireland. Part 1: Catholic University Reports and Other Papers* (Aberdeen: A. King & Co, 1896), p. 120.

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This emphasis on *personal influence* in character formation is foreshadowed in a University Sermon preached by Newman on 22 January 1832, 'Personal Influence, the Means of Propagating the Truth'. Newman argues that truth is most effectively communicated not by abstract arguments or systems, but by persons. Truth is preserved and communicated 'not by books, not by argument, nor by temporal power, but by the personal influence of such men [. . .] who are at once the teachers and patterns of it'.[91] Doctrines may encapsulate the truth, but they rarely convert hearts themselves. People are moved by a personal encounter with those who embody what they believe. The Christian faith advanced in the first three centuries of the early Church not through books or institutions first, but through apostles, martyrs and saints whose lives made the truth credible. The moral and spiritual character of the teacher lends weight to the teaching. Newman contrasts those who attempt 'to discriminate for themselves between little and great breaches of the law of conscience',[92] with sometimes painful consequences, with the one who is faithful 'to his own divinely implanted nature', in whom 'the faint light of truth dawns continually brighter'. While the former, having 'trifled with' their conscience, equivocate, the latter is compelled by the authority of conscience:

> The shadows which at first troubled it, the unreal shapes created by its own twilight-state, vanish; what was uncertain as mere feeling, and could not be distinguished from a fancy except by the commanding urgency of its voice, becomes fixed and definite, and strengthening into principle, it at the same time develops into habit.[93]

In Newman's view, holiness, sincerity and consistency are the qualities that create trust. Where integrity is lacking, truth loses its force. Moreover, this personal influence often works quietly and unintentionally – through tone, habits, patience, kindness and example – rather than explicit instruction or debate. In all this, there is a *relational* quality to the way in which Truth is conveyed. Thus, the formation of conscience is not simply about attending a greater number of lectures about Christian ethics or moral theology. It is not about the sharing of more information. The formation of conscience demands a learning environment which promotes face-to-face encounter, with all the accountability that involves. At the same time, this pattern of formation is basically a spiritual exercise: 'Conscience implies a relation between the soul and a something exterior, and that, moreover, superior to itself; a relation to an excellence which it does not possess, and a tribunal over which it has no power'.[94]

[91]'Personal Influence, the Means of Propagating the Truth', in John H. Newman, *Fifteen Sermons preached before the University of Oxford between A.D. 1826 and 1843.* Third edition. (London: Rivingtons, 1872), pp. 91–92.

[92]'Sermon V. Personal Influence, the Means of Propagating the Truth', in John H. Newman, *Fifteen Sermons preached before the University of Oxford between A.D. 1826 and 1843.* Third edition. (London: Rivingtons, 1872), p. 80.

[93]'Sermon V. Personal Influence, the Means of Propagating the Truth', in John H. Newman, *Fifteen Sermons preached before the University of Oxford between A.D. 1826 and 1843.* Third edition. (London: Rivingtons, 1872), p. 81.

[94]'Sermon II. The Influence of Natural and Revealed Religion Respectively' in John H. Newman (ed.), *Fifteen Sermons preached before the University of Oxford between A.D. 1826 and 1843.* Third edition. (London: Rivingtons, 1872), p. 18.

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This discussion of the formation of conscience in the writings of St John Henry Newman provokes two intriguing questions: how might this animate our understanding of the formation offered in theological education? How might it inform the formation of future ministers and parish priests? We can encourage students to take modules in moral theology, to explore ethical questions in seminars and classes, but Newman challenges us to think about the pattern of formation more broadly. There are two lessons to be drawn from his theological and educational writings: first, Newman emphasizes the *relational* quality of learning. While theological educators may baulk at Newman's high ideals and his expectations of a tutor, his thinking perhaps challenges us to reflect on the patterns of pedagogy that the formation of seminarians demands. The reliance on online lectures, as well as dispersed forms of training, may be valuable responses to the demands for more flexible and cheaper patterns of preparation for ordained ministry, but there is an ever-present danger that the element of face-to-face encounter may be lost. That said, small group teaching does not have to take the form of a tutorial at the University of Oxford: seminar teaching, coaching sessions, peer mentoring, action learning sets, and the flipped classroom can all provide valuable opportunities for the *relational* quality of learning to be explored. A tutorial system works most effectively when it provides not only student support, but also takes a more proactive and developmental approach to the formation of seminarians. This involves elements of coaching and mentoring, which, when done well, inspire a sense of *accountability* in those preparing for ordained ministry. Of course, that accountability works in both directions. There needs to be a rigorous pattern of supervision for tutorial staff, which recognizes that just as the seminarian is accountable for their formation, so tutors are accountable for their oversight of seminarians. But to ensure that the development and progress of individual seminarians can be effectively monitored, the size of theological education institutions matters. While there may be economies of scale and arguments for having fewer and larger training institutions, a seminarian benefits from a learning environment in which they are known and belong to a community, and where they learn from and are accompanied by other seminarians. Whether residential or part-residential, their character needs to emerge. There may be all sorts of benefits in promoting a rich digital learning experience, but the character of the Church's future clergy should not remain hidden behind a computer screen. In the formation of the moral consciousness of seminarians, the *relational* quality of learning cannot be ignored. It is in this context that the obligations of conscience and our obligations to the other are formed.

Secondly, Newman's description of conscience in terms of 'the voice of God in the nature and heart of man',[95] provokes further reflection about the spiritual formation of seminarians and the formation of character. Clergy face all sorts of stresses and strains, temptations and distractions, in their ministry, wherever they are called to serve. To respond to those challenges, clergy need to develop the gifts of discernment, including the regular examination of conscience, whether that is in the confessional or in regular supervision and spiritual direction. One of the perennial frustrations in the world of theological education is that we focus on degree

[95]John H. Newman, *A Letter Addressed to the Duke of Norfolk on Occasion of Mr Gladstone's Recent Expostulation* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1875), p. 246.

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programmes, placements, different patterns of theological reflection, without attending to the rigorous ascetic practices of daily worship, reading scripture, the sacramental life, good spiritual direction, the confession of sin, personal discipline, the works of mercy and developing a rule of life. These elements are rarely accredited or assessed, but they characterize the deep patterns of learning which shape resilient, conscientious and accountable ministers. In developing a pattern of formation, it is not enough to focus on academic attainment and the development of evermore comprehensive degree programmes, however effective these are. Seminarians also need to cultivate the spiritual practices that will help to sustain them and the communities they serve in the face of the many challenges that they will encounter in the course of their ministry. My fear is that too many clergy emerge from heavily curtailed training programmes having been seriously short-changed. But then, I did promise to end, as I had begun, with a note of provocation.

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