

NEWMAN AND THE INTERPRETATION OF INSPIRED SCRIPTURE

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[The author argues that the relative neglect in recent biblical scholarship regarding Newman's understanding of Scripture during his Anglican years in favor of his late, controversial works has led to broad, sweeping statements of his thought during that period. Tracing a short history of recent scholarship and, drawing from two key works of Newman published in 1838, the author illustrates how a close textual reading, one sensitive to historical methodology, offers a more accurate portrait of Newman's lifelong engagement with Scripture and the doctrine of inspiration.]

THE PLACE OF JOHN HENRY NEWMAN (1801–90) in the history of Christianity stands tall not only for his writings and leadership as a member of the Oxford Movement within the Anglican Church during the 1830s, but for the public character of his conversion to the Roman Catholic Church in 1845 and his subsequent involvement in several controversies, most notably one with Charles Kingsley leading to the publication of Newman's famous autobiography, *Apologia pro Vita Sua* (1864). One of the controversies that Newman faced, on the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture, is particularly interesting for its function as a microcosm of the larger issues facing Christian thinkers in his day. The rise of historical criticism in the 19th century brought change to many churches, where previously it had remained on the margins of orthodox thinking during the heyday of the Enlightenment. Yet, change was in the air, and continental ideas were slowly emerging on British soil. Certainly, S. T. Coleridge's posthumously published *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* (1840), which denied the plenary inspiration of Scripture, marked a significant stage in the altered landscape. However, in England, the tide of liberalism was likely felt strongest with the publication of *Essays and Reviews* in 1860, which so scandalized the nation that 11,000 clergymen signed a statement supporting

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the inspiration of Scripture. In such a charged environment of transition, it comes as no surprise that Newman's publication of two short apologetic works, "On the Inspiration of Scripture" (1884), brought allegations of Modernism by those who questioned his orthodoxy as a Roman Catholic.

Today, it is Newman's late writings on the doctrine of inspiration that have largely dominated studies on his understanding of Scripture. My article arises from the relative neglect of Newman's conception of the interpretation of Scripture during his years as an Anglican. More specifically, I argue that scholarship on these years has been reduced to largely broad sweeping, systematic statements when in fact a more historically accurate portrait necessitates a detailed analysis of each work.

The first part of this article offers a brief review of scholarship about studies on Newman and Scripture during the latter half of the 20th century. My research shows that the influence of a single monograph written in 1953 set the course for all subsequent studies on Newman and Scripture, even though the work in question came under significant criticism. The second part of my study turns to two key works published in 1838 in order to make a distinction between the way scholars have characterized his works and what a close analysis of the literature actually reveals. First, this section examines Newman's *Lectures on the Doctrine of Justification* (March 1838). Here, Newman, in a brief section of the text, argues on the basis of a patristic distinction between a *sign* and a *thing* that historical criticism alone is insufficient for the uncovering of spiritual truth. Then, the article explores Newman's *Tract 85* of the *Tracts for the Times*, entitled "Lectures on the Scripture Proofs of the Doctrine of the Church" (May-August 1838); in this tract, Newman employs some of the insights of modern criticism to illustrate that Scripture alone is an insufficient basis for Christian doctrine. By examining these two works, one gains a more accurate portrait of how Newman understood Scripture and the place of critical methodologies in these momentous years and one recognizes the need for future reevaluation of the period.

20TH-CENTURY NEWMAN STUDIES ON SCRIPTURE

Surprisingly, the amount of critical scholarship on Newman's conception of Scripture and related doctrines is relatively meager. During the latter half of the 20th century, one finds that the first major study of Newman and Scripture remains the standard on the subject today. Further, one finds that scholars have emphasized, almost to the exclusion of his earlier works, Newman's work on inspiration subsequent to his entrance into the Roman Catholic Church.

Without doubt, the standard study of Newman and Scripture remains

Jaak Seynaeve's *Cardinal Newman's Doctrine on Holy Scripture* (1953).¹ After a brief introductory chapter that places Newman's doctrines of the Bible in their historical setting, Seynaeve focuses specifically on the doctrine of inspiration. Here, he is almost exclusively concerned with two works from Newman's Roman Catholic years: the "Inspiration Papers" of 1861–1863² and "On the Inspiration of Scripture" which appeared publicly in 1884.³

The second part of Seynaeve's study addresses more generally Newman's hermeneutics. As opposed to the first part, where each document was placed within a carefully grounded historical setting, Seynaeve does not write an account that chronologically examines the development and changes in Newman's hermeneutics by tracing individual texts, sermons, and lectures; rather, while treating mostly Anglican works, the author reduces the period to a broadly systematic and thematic account. On one hand, in this section he reveals a thorough knowledge of material from all phases of Newman's life and displays a unique ability to weave passages together for a single thematic account. On the other hand, this method often becomes problematic as it admits to little, if any, development in

¹ Jaak Seynaeve, *Cardinal Newman's Doctrine on Holy Scripture According to His Published Works and Previously Unedited Manuscripts* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1953). Seynaeve wrote this monograph as a dissertation at Louvain during a time when it appeared that no relatively untouched aspects of Newman's thought remained to be studied. As he noted in his Preface, he was surprised that research still remained to be done on this vital aspect of Newman's thought: "Nearly every important aspect of Newman's life and work has been amply discussed and examined Indeed, save for what has been written concerning the Articles of 1884 on the inspiration of Holy Scripture, no work has explicitly dealt with Newman's biblical thought. It is surprising that his hermeneutics and his method of exegesis have never been investigated" (x). Seynaeve was at least partially influenced by one of the few other works on Newman and Scripture to appear during this period by Humphrey J. T. Johnson, "Leo XIII, Cardinal Newman and the Inerrancy of Scripture," *Downside Review* 69 (1950–1951) 411–27. See also, Seynaeve's shorter article on the late inspiration writings: "La Doctrine du Cardinal Newman sur l'inspiration d'après les articles de 1884," *Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses* 25 (1949) 356–82.

² These papers, while controversial for their time, deal more extensively with the "fact" of divine inspiration than his later public work. These early papers from the 1860s had remained, until Seynaeve's study, unpublished and unexamined by scholars (the author includes this primary source in the Fourth Appendix, pp. 53–144).

³ These late articles seem to limit the doctrine of inspiration to scriptural teachings on faith and morals. It is these articles that led to Newman's widespread condemnation in many Roman Catholic manuals of theology, some of which even claimed that Pope Leo XIII's *Providentissimus Deus* (1893) was an implicit condemnation of Cardinal Newman (*Newman's Doctrine on Holy Scripture* 153). Unlike the earlier articles from the 1860s, Seynaeve did not reproduce the 1884 articles in the Appendices.

Newman's thought and inadequately explores the implications of apparent contradictions to larger themes. For example, Seynaeve argues that Newman's concept of biblical interpretation maintains chronological unity having "remained to a large extent the same" during his life, but later excludes an important aspect of the Sacramental Principle, "as regards the literal and mystical sense," as a Catholic development.⁴ Additionally, working from the presumption of consistency of thought, Seynaeve often unflinchingly quotes Newman with little regard for contextual difference. As a result, it is no surprise that Seynaeve offers little historical context for the appearance of an important anomaly in Newman's thought: after an extended treatment of the continuity of the two testaments and the importance of the typological and allegorical senses of Scripture, Seynaeve notes with surprise Newman's appropriation of Hooker's dictum on the priority of the literal construction, but only concludes "this leads us to the further conclusion that he was not so much alien to that sense as some authors assume."⁵ In all, Seynaeve's study is rightly an authoritative work for its breadth and remains the standard examination of Newman and Scripture to this day; yet, its systematic methodology and lack of historical context on Newman's hermeneutics significantly impedes its decisiveness on several counts.

Years later, relatively few new works had appeared on the subject⁶ until Holmes and Murray edited Newman's two 1884 articles "On the Inspiration of Scripture."⁷ This edition contains both of Newman's articles with notes by the editors as well as three excellent introductory essays. The first article by Holmes, "The inspiration of Scripture in Newman's writings up to 1884," works extensively from Seynaeve's foundational scholarship, but also includes sources and research not included in the 1953 study that significantly chasten its claims.⁸ The second essay in this edition, written by

⁴ Ibid. 200, 235.

⁵ Ibid. 280–81.

⁶ Only Newman's late views on inspiration are treated in "The Bible in the Roman Catholic Church from Trent to the Present Day," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible, 3: The West from the Reformation to the Present Day*, ed. S. L. Greenslade (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1963) 227–33. Another work during this period is H. Francis Davis, "Newman and the Theology of the Living Word," *Newman Studien* 6 (1964) 167–77.

⁷ John Henry Newman, *On the Inspiration of Scripture*, ed. J. Derek Holmes and Robert Murray (Washington: Corpus, 1967).

⁸ Holmes is especially critical of Seynaeve's transcription of Newman's "disordered" notes from the 1860s; before citing one transcription error, Holmes claims, "[t]he student is directed to Seynaeve's work, but with a warning: not only is the transcription unreliable, but also the editor, in his zeal to reconstruct what he regards as an unknown book by Newman (for which he has composed a title and sub-headings), seems to have missed the extent to which the notes are a record of dialectical thinking, not yet brought to conclusion" (*On the Inspiration of Scripture*

both Holmes and Murray, treats the genesis and reception of the 1884 articles. Finally, Murray closes the Introduction with a final essay on “Newman’s place in the development of the Catholic doctrine of inspiration.” In this essay, Murray sets up an *apologia* for Newman by setting his work in the context of Trent, Vatican I, and Vatican II’s *Dei Verbum* to illustrate Newman’s ultimate ecclesial endorsement. Through this edition and the introductory essays, Newman’s idea of inspiration was clarified and further defended in the wake of Vatican II.

Holmes later wrote two other studies on Newman and Scripture. In 1969, he published an article entitled “Von Hügel’s Letter to Ryder on Biblical Inspiration and Inerrancy” that traced the communications between Newman and von Hügel and von Hügel and Ryder.⁹ Two years later, Holmes published “Newman’s Attitude towards Historical Criticism and Biblical Inspiration.”¹⁰ In this work, Holmes focuses his attention specifically on the issue of historical criticism; but, unlike previous works that synthesized Newman’s thought, Holmes attempts to offer illustrations that support the claim that Newman was increasingly open to the results of scientific and historical criticism as his life progressed. Yet, while Holmes’s historical work is commendable, he predominantly examines works from the 1860s forward. Furthermore, the brief attention he does give to *Tract 85*, about two paragraphs, intimates that Newman’s awareness of the historical problems on the surface of the biblical text reveals an openness to higher criticism that would become manifest in his late writings on inspiration.¹¹ Notably, this interpretation significantly differs from that of Seynaeve who emphasized Newman’s relative ignorance of higher criticism during the Anglican period.¹²

19 n.1). Later, Holmes reedited these papers in *The Theological Papers of John Henry Newman on Biblical Inspiration and on Infallibility* (New York: Oxford University, 1979).

⁹ J. Derek Holmes, “Von Hügel’s Letter to Ryder on Biblical Inspiration and Inerrancy,” *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 38 (1969) 153–65. Holmes wrote to demonstrate the possibility for a “calm and even enlightened atmosphere” of communication between those divided today on those subjects that had once sparked the Modernist crisis.

¹⁰ “Newman’s Attitude towards Historical Criticism and Biblical Inspiration,” *Downside Review* 89 (1971) 22–37.

¹¹ Holmes notes, “the argument [of *Tract 85*] demonstrates or illustrates Newman’s confident awareness of the difficulties, limitations, and human elements in the sacred writings” (“Newman’s Attitude,” 23).

¹² He claims that “it was only towards the end of his life that he completely understood the critico-literal method of biblical interpretation” (*Newman’s Doctrine on Holy Scripture* 201). Elsewhere, citing F. McGrath’s claim in “The Conversion” that “neither in Newman’s writing nor correspondence prior to his conversion is there displayed the *slightest* preoccupation with Bible criticism” (in *A*

Another major monograph on Newman's understanding of Scripture in the latter half of the 20th century is Louis Allen's *John Henry Newman and the Abbé Jager: A Controversy on Scripture and Tradition (1834–1836)* (1975).¹³ One of the most significant aspects of this study of several letters Newman wrote on the topic of Scripture is that Allen takes seriously the need to treat specific works of Newman within the Anglican period without fading into broad-scope generalizations or systematic treatments not primarily rooted in historically and chronologically situated primary works. However, until 1997, no new studies on Newman's understanding of Scripture or inspiration appeared, though several minor articles contributed to a more refined analysis of the historical situation.¹⁴ More surprising was the growing consensus that the Tractarian view of Scripture required no further study:

There is neither space, nor, I believe, need to enlarge upon the subject of the Tractarian doctrine of the Bible. For it is well known that influences from contemporary Romanticism in combination with the study of the Fathers, not least those of the Alexandrian school, led the Tractarians not only to "a symbolic or sacra-

Tribute to Newman [Dublin, 1945] 61 [italics in original]), Seynaeve comments "though substantially true, is too extreme in its wording" (327 n.).

¹³ Louis Allen, *John Henry Newman and the Abbé Jager: A Controversy on Scripture and Tradition (1834–1836)* (New York: Oxford University, 1975). Not unlike the profound surprise illustrated by Seynaeve in 1953 upon finding the scarce scholarly work on Newman and inspiration, Allen's study begins similarly: "The purpose of this book is to present, for the first time in English, a substantial piece of Newman's controversial writings, which occupies a crucial position in his intellectual history. It is surprising that the work has not been done before" (1).

¹⁴ In 1984, John Stephenson wrote a useful study ("Authority in English Theology from the Oxford Movement to the Present," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 48 [1984] 265–77) that, while not limited to the works of Newman, sets up the historical context of the Oxford Movement and relates the view of Scripture held by the Tractarian leaders—especially Pusey, whose early studies of German Protestantism and liberal views later gave way until, as Stephenson claims: "Pusey developed into the foremost English nineteenth-century advocate of plenary inspiration and absolute inerrancy" (270). In 1986, two other relevant works appeared. The first, Balthasar Fischer's "Eine Predigt Johann Henry Newmans aus dem Jahre 1840 zur Frage des christlichen Psalmenverständnisses," in *Freude an der Weisung des Herrn: Beiträge zur Theologie der Psalmen, Festgabe zum 70. Geburtstag von Heinrich Gross*, ed. Ernst Haag, *Stuttgarter biblische Beiträge* 13 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1986) 69–79, analyzed an 1840 sermon on the Psalms entitled "Conditions of the Members of the Christian Empire" and explored Newman's use of a patristically influenced, typological reading of Scripture. The second, an essay by Alf Härdelin on "The Sacraments in the Tractarian Spiritual Universe," in *Tradition Renewed: The Oxford Movement Conference Papers*, ed. Geoffrey Rowell (Allison Park, Penn.: Pickwick, 1986) 78–95, offered a study of the sacraments in light of the Oxford Movement leaders' use of spiritual exegesis.

mental view of nature”, according to which the visible world can be regarded as “an index or token of the invisible”, but also to a sacramental view of the Scriptures.¹⁵

As this study points out, though some suggested Newman’s early understanding of biblical interpretation had been analyzed, a critical and historical account of Newman’s writings on Scripture during the Tractarian period still remained to be completed when Francis McGrath’s *John Henry Newman: Universal Revelation* was published in 1997.¹⁶

In many ways, McGrath’s account of the doctrine of revelation sheds significant light on Newman’s understanding of both revelation and Scripture by drawing from sermons, letters, and other archival papers that illuminate Newman’s views. For example, McGrath emphasizes Newman’s early acquaintance with modern criticism through the influence of Henry Hart Milman¹⁷ and through his attendance in 1823 and 1826 of private lectures on “exegetical criticism” and “historical research” by Charles Lloyd, Regius Professor of Divinity.¹⁸ McGrath, like Seynaeve, also emphasizes the sacramental quality of Scriptural inspiration whereby God uses “the unique talent, temperament, and background of each author” noting Newman’s own claim that “[a]n inspired Prophet exists before his inspiration; he is a man as other men; he has a human mind, human thoughts, human knowledge. Inspiration does not create, does not destroy his human nature; it adds to it. It raises him in religious thought and knowledge above himself. He is breathed into and filled with a power greater than what nature has given him; but nature is still there.”¹⁹ Thus, while not directly written about Newman’s view of Scripture inspiration and interpretation, McGrath’s study does advance the discussion as it relates to revelation.

However, as James Gaffney correctly pointed out in his book review in *Theological Studies*, the largely expository method of the study rather than a closely argued analysis of individual works, leaves Newman’s understanding of Scripture still relatively untouched.²⁰ In particular, Gaffney noted that “the book’s distinctive portion, and the one that closely fits its title, occupies only 70 pages, six chapters, of Part I”²¹ and that “[i]t would be a

¹⁵ “The Sacraments in the Tractarian Spiritual Universe” 81–82. In making this claim, Härdelin cites the work of Seynaeve (1953) and Davis (1964), but fails even to mention the critique of Seynaeve’s dissertation offered by Holmes.

¹⁶ Francis McGrath, *John Henry Newman: Universal Revelation* (Macon: Mercer University, 1997).

¹⁷ Ibid. 76–77.

¹⁸ Ibid. 38.

¹⁹ Ibid. 137–38; see also 141–42.

²⁰ James Gaffney, review of *John Henry Newman: Universal Revelation*, by Francis McGrath, in *Theological Studies* 59 (1998) 519–20.

²¹ Ibid. 519.

better book if its first part were expanded and its latter portion omitted.”²² Much like Seynaeve’s founding study of Newman and Scripture, McGrath’s monograph sets out on a historical path only to be derailed in Part II by a systematic study of issues including the development of doctrine and inspiration. Moreover, one cannot help but fear that the broad-stroke pattern of McGrath’s historical work will only serve to bolster the misconception that Newman’s idea of Scripture and interpretation has been adequately treated.²³

This overview of scholarship reveals that Jaak Seynaeve’s dissertation, *Cardinal Newman’s Doctrine on Holy Scripture*, still stands as the authority on Newman’s view of Scripture. Broadly considered, it is a well-documented and far-reaching analysis on a number of significant theological issues surrounding Newman’s thoughts regarding inspiration and interpretation. Nevertheless, its use of a systematic methodology instead of a close historical and developmental model limits its precision at significant points. Furthermore, subsequent scholarship, especially the work of Holmes and Murray, offered a strong critique of Seynaeve’s work that cannot be ignored.²⁴ In all, Seynaeve and subsequent scholars have, in my judgment, largely reduced the function of Scripture in Newman’s Anglican period to systematic explanations of Newman’s hermeneutics. Moreover, the most recent attempt to analyze this period of Newman’s thought fails to scrutinize adequately individual works and runs the risk of lulling scholars into the belief that our portrait of Newman’s understanding of Scripture and interpretation is complete.

AN EXAMINATION OF TWO ANGLICAN WORKS

I have argued that scholarship during the latter half of the 20th century failed to make significant historical and developmental distinctions when assessing Newman’s understanding of Scripture and interpretation during

²² Ibid. 520.

²³ It is regrettable that McGrath’s notes entirely neglect the opportunity to dialogue with Seynaeve’s seminal study as well as the subsequent criticisms of that work.

²⁴ This critique is salient. As I have noted, Seynaeve argued that Newman’s views “remained to a large extent the same” over the course of his life but that “it was only towards the end of his life that he completely understood the critico-literal method of biblical interpretation” (*Newman’s Doctrine on Holy Scripture* 200-1). By contrast, Holmes rightly challenged Seynaeve’s claim by pointing to *Tract 85* [in “Newman’s Attitude towards Historical Criticism”]. Moreover, Holmes’s critique of Seynaeve’s transcription and analysis of the inspiration papers dating from 1861 to 1863 deserves further attention. Yet, Holmes’s claim that Newman’s Anglican period may reveal openness to higher criticism may also overstate the case, as our analysis of *Lectures on the Doctrine of Justification* in what follows reveals.

his Anglican period. My purpose now is not to try to rectify this problem by tracing the development of Newman's doctrine of inspiration and hermeneutics of Scripture throughout his Anglican years. Such a project would require a detailed monograph recovering not only Newman's theological and ecclesial milieu but also his major prose writings as well as the letters, sermons, and notes. Rather, I examine one facet of what could become a larger portrait of Newman's development by exploring his disposition toward critical biblical exegesis in two of Newman's works in 1838.

In March 1838, Newman published a series of talks entitled *Lectures on the Doctrine of Justification* (March 1838).²⁵ In this work, he attempted to devote his thoughts on the *via media* recently explored in his 1837 *Lectures on the Prophetic Office* more particularly by clarifying the central issue that divided Luther and the Roman Catholics at the Reformation, as Gilley explains: "Newman's book is his greatest attempt to deploy the method of the Anglican *Via Media* to a particular theological subject, and to undercut the debate between Protestant and Papist by recalling both to the faith of the Bible and Fathers of the undivided Church before the Reformation and Counter-Reformation divided it."²⁶ As Newman's method often proceeded, he first lined up alternative positions from either side of the debate before offering his own way. Against the Protestant view of justification, Newman believed that Luther's conception of imputation failed to effect a real freedom for the sinner because it left the justified person who hungers after God's grace wholly unable to act faithfully in love.²⁷ But, while the Roman Catholic position of infused grace left the Christian in a state of real righteousness, it often led to the popular error of treating grace as a "possession" to be gained. In one sense, the question revolved around the moral law. The differences between these approaches, Newman believed, can be compared to the views held by Augustine and Luther: "The main point in dispute is this; whether or not the Moral Law can in its substance be obeyed and kept by the regenerate. Augustine says, that whereas we are by nature condemned by the Law, we are enabled by the grace of God to

²⁵ Biographical information on Newman's *Lectures on Justification* (1838; reprint: Westminster, Md: Christian Classics, 1966) is derived predominantly from two sources: Sheridan Gilley, *Newman and His Age* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1990) 165–69 and Ian Ker, *John Henry Newman: A Biography* (New York: Oxford University, 1988) 150–57.

²⁶ Gilley, *Newman and His Age* 165.

²⁷ For more on Newman, Luther, and the *Lectures on Justification*, see Scott Murray, "Luther in Newman's 'Lectures on Justification,'" *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 54 (1990) 155–78; Alister E. McGrath, "John Henry Newman's 'Lectures on Justification': The High Church Misrepresentation of Luther," *Churchman* 97 (1983) 112–22; Richard John Neuhaus, "Newman, Luther, and the Unity of Christians," *Pro Ecclesia* 6 (1997) 277–88; Peter Toon, "A Critical Review of John Henry Newman's Doctrine of Justification," *Churchman* 94 (1980) 335–44.

perform it unto our justification; Luther that whereas we are condemned by the Law, Christ has Himself performed it unto our justification.”²⁸ For Newman, the solution to the problem lay in a third perspective that, while quite similar to the Roman position, still pointed out what he saw as Roman Catholic corruption, namely “imparted righteousness.” By approaching the doctrine of justification under the heading of imparted righteousness, Newman is able to include sanctification under the heading of justification: “The word of justification is the substantive living Word of God, entering the soul, illuminating and cleansing it, as fire brightens and purifies material substances. The first blessing runs into the second as its necessary limit . . . And the one cannot be separated from the other.”²⁹

In light of this brief summary of Newman’s argument in the *Lectures on Justification*, one may question where Scripture fits into this work. At first glance it is not surprising that expository accounts of Newman and Scripture have largely passed over this work. However, the fifth lecture on the “Misuse of the Term Just or Righteous” contains an entire section on scriptural interpretation which reveals much of Newman’s thoughts on biblical criticism at that time.³⁰ More specifically, the section on Scripture reveals Newman’s reliance on a patristic conception of *words* and *things*, an implicit argument against the rise of historical criticism, and the primacy of the rule of antiquity.

Among the most obvious aspects of Newman’s treatment of Scripture in *Lectures on Justification* is his heavy reliance on patristic thought. This patristic influence is most apparent in his insistence on recognizing the analogy between words (or *signs*) and things. Here he seems especially indebted to Augustine’s classic treatment of interpretation in *De doctrina christiana*. Newman suggests that when an interpreter comes to the Epistles of Paul to determine the true meaning of justification, one should not be misled by the many senses that a single word can have. Rather, the interpreter should look beyond the sign to the thing itself that is signified: “Our duty is to be intent on things, not on names and terms; to associate words with their objects, instead of measuring them by their definitions.”³¹ Furthermore, this project of identification is directly connected to the necessity for spiritual discernment: “Our business is, if so be, to fix that one real sense before our mind’s eye, not to loiter or lose our way in the outward text of Scripture, but to get through and beyond the letter into the spirit . . . to speak as having eyes, and as if to those who have eyes, not as groping our way in the dark.”³² In this way, Newman emphasizes the difference between words and things.

²⁸ *Lectures on Justification* 58.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 118–29.

³² *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.* 154.

³¹ *Ibid.* 121.

Also implicit within this section, in my view, is a poignant critique of the ascendancy of historical criticism. In this short passage, one is struck that he mentions four times that the interpreter should not be governed by the *context* of a passage of Scripture alone. The first time, Newman claims that “[o]f course, to consult the context in which a word occurs is a great advance towards the true interpretation, but it is not enough. In Scripture, as elsewhere, words stand for certain objects, and are used with reference to those objects, and must be explained by them.”³³ Already evident is Newman’s continued use of the distinction between a sign and a thing here; but more importantly, one may begin to see how the signification of words lends itself to Newman’s critique. The second time Newman mentions context in this passage, he is far more explicit: “Therefore, I say, we shall never arrive at its real and complete meaning, by its particular context; which generally comes in contact with but two or three points, or one aspect of it.”³⁴ But, one may ask, what does Newman mean here? He explains that many under “the bondage of modern systems” interpret according to a theory and, as a result, “[t]he words of Scripture are robbed of their hidden treasures, and frittered away among a multitude of meanings as uncertain, meagre, and discordant.”³⁵ Newman maintains that the interpreter will not become lost in the many senses in which a word is used. Rather, the exegete will “fix that one real sense before our mind’s eye, not to loiter or lose our way in the outward text of Scripture, but to get through and beyond the letter into the spirit.”³⁶ The third time he mentions context, it immediately follows a discussion of how some readers fail to grasp by the words of Scripture what was actually meant (e.g., by that “abstract word justified”). Here Newman writes that each one who argues a contradictory doctrine does so from Scripture, and “certainly such objections would tell against our proof, if we professed to argue merely from the context; they might prove we were bad reasoners; but is there not also a further question, and one more to the point, not what the sacred text *may* mean [from context], but what it *does* mean?”³⁷ One finds that Newman’s emphasis seems to imply the single theological meaning that resonates throughout Scripture due primarily to the inspiration of the divine author. Finally, context comes up once again on the following page when Newman claims that a knowledge of Paul’s contrasts, arguments, and climaxes limits interpretation to the level of the sign. This, then, is insufficient for the ascertainment of truth. Instead, Newman asserts that one must look to the Church Fathers for guidance: “I will go further,” he claims, “not only is the context insufficient for the interpretation of Scripture terms and phrases,

³³ Ibid. 119–20.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid. 122.

³⁴ Ibid. 120.

³⁶ Ibid. 121.

but a right knowledge of these [the Fathers] is necessary for interpreting that context.”³⁸ Ultimately, it is the rule of faith and the primacy of antiquity to which the exegete should turn for the proper interpretation of a passage rather than the means of modern biblical criticism, which often yield numerous, contradictory interpretations due to their focus on the level of signs alone.

In this way, Newman made use of two related aspects of biblical interpretation to bring the reader to a recognition of the rule of antiquity. The importance of the Vincentian Canon for the Tractarians was a fact. Here, it is the rule of antiquity that is of particular importance for Newman’s understanding of the words of Scripture. If biblical context alone is the reader’s guide, Newman explains that words may signify many things; but, in fact, the spiritually discerning interpreter sees that the words of Scripture are best interpreted with the “dictionary” of the Fathers in hand: “If no word is to be taken to mean more than its logical definition, we shall never get beyond abstract knowledge, for it cannot possibly carry its own explanation with it. They who wish to dispense with Antiquity, should, in consistency, go further, and attempt to learn a language without a dictionary.”³⁹ Thus, without the Fathers, one is left stranded, reading words without a guide to their meaning.⁴⁰

Newman’s thoughts on Scripture form just one part of a much larger discussion of the true meaning of justification. Yet, its importance in an assessment of Newman’s relationship to modern interpretation cannot be underestimated. Modern interpreters, in Newman’s view, came to Scripture with programmatic methodologies that “distort the sense” of the text by focusing on one passage alone apart from the entire canon and by neglecting the authority of the early Church. Returning to recent scholarship, one finds that Seynaeve and McGrath are partly correct, for Newman here displays exactly the sacramental view of Scripture that they describe. But, far from demonstrating a neglect for modern criticism by favoring patristic exegetical models, that is, by writing without any concern for the gradual seepage of “higher” criticism into his country, the *Lectures on Justification* convey an offensive posture toward modern exegetical method. Having recovered this, we must now briefly turn to the argument of *Tract 85* in order to assess Holmes’s observation that Newman displays

³⁸ Ibid. 123.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ One interesting line of thought, not explored here, would be to relate this discussion of Newman and Scripture to those studies that place Newman within a common tradition of language stemming from Coleridge through the Victorians. For more on this, see John Coulson, *Newman and the Common Tradition: A Study of the Church and Society* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970) and Stephen Prickett, *Romanticism and Religion: The Tradition of Coleridge and Wordsworth in the Victorian Church* (New York: Cambridge University, 1976).

an early awareness of the problems within the biblical text that contributes to his late openness to the fruit of historical criticism.

A few months after the publication of *Lectures on Justification*, Newman once again gave another series of lectures in the Adam de Brome chapel at St. Mary's. Of these twelve lectures, offered between May and August 1838, eight were selected and published as *Tract 85* in the *Tracts for the Times* and entitled, "Lectures on the Scripture Proofs of the Doctrine of the Church."⁴¹ Notably, whereas the *Lectures on Justification* contains an implicit argument against the reductionism of historical method, in *Tract 85* Newman creatively uses the fruit of modern methodology as the basis for his argumentation.

The lectures aim to found the claim that the principle of *sola scriptura* as applied by many Anglicans in the previous century would inevitably lead to atheism. Newman cites those who wish for "more adequate and explicit *Scripture proof*" for the doctrines of the Church and responds that, while doctrine rests on Scripture, it is not fully to be found there: "all those who try to go by Scripture only, fall away from the Church and her doctrines, to one or other sect or party, as if showing that whatever is or is not scriptural, at least the Church, by consent of all men, is not so."⁴² In order to demonstrate this claim, Newman distinguishes between three explanations for the relationship between doctrine and Scripture. First, there are those who believe that Scripture offers definite religious information; Newman cites the Latitudinarians whom he characterizes in this way.⁴³ Second, there are those whom Newman believes to claim that doctrine is given, but that it is not found in Scripture; this he maintains is the position of the Roman Catholics. Finally, Newman describes the Tractarian view as one that asserts that "though there is a true creed or system (whatever it is), yet it is not on the surface of Scripture, but contained in a latent form within it, and to be maintained only by indirect arguments, by comparison of texts, by inferences from what is said plainly, and by overcoming or resigning oneself to difficulties."⁴⁴ Out of this fundamental distinction—that the one who looks to Scripture as the sole source of doctrine is as equally misguided as the one who claims doctrine is drawn wholly from without—Newman adopts his plan to further expound the *via media*.

⁴¹ *Tracts for the Times*, vol. 5 [Original Pamphlets, 1833–1841; 1st bound edition: London, 1840–1842] (Reprint: New York: AMS, 1969) [subsequently *Tract 85* will be abbreviated *TT85*]. The biographical information on *Tract 85* is drawn from Ker, 160–62; Owen Chadwick, *From Bossuet to Newman: The Idea of Doctrinal Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987) 126–30.

⁴² *Tracts for the Times 85*, 2.

⁴³ For a more historically grounded explanation of Latitudinarianism, see *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University, 1997) 956.

⁴⁴ *Tracts for the Times 85*, 14.

After establishing the error of Latitudinarianism, Newman then takes up two aspects of difficulties in the interpretation of Scripture: difficulties in facts and in doctrine. In his case against the facts of Scripture, Newman draws extensively from his own experience in reading Scripture as well as the results of rationalist, biblical criticism. Newman cites many of the difficulties in treating the narrative as a factual account of historical events. For example, it certainly seems improbable that both Abraham and Isaac had both curiously denied their wives (Abraham twice). Elsewhere, Newman claims that the Books of Samuel and Kings do not seem to match the account of events illustrated in Chronicles. Then, having examined these factual difficulties, Newman turns to the explicit appearance of doctrine, or lack thereof, in Scripture. Here, Newman cites numerous instances where the behavior of people in the Bible is left without moral judgment; how then, he wonders, are readers to understand what is the true praise- or blameworthiness of such actions? Similarly, Newman claims that the “unbiased reader” of the New Testament is left with the impression that the end of the world certainly should have taken place long before his day, and “yet it has not.”⁴⁵ Finally, even the most important doctrines of Christianity such as the divinity of Christ are not outwardly apparent to the reader. Newman’s solution to the problem of Scripture is clear. First, he maintains that the Bible is “a deep book.” It is a text whose meanings are not on the surface as some wish to claim. Instead, the Scriptures are full of mysteries. Second, in the same way that Scripture is mysterious, so too was the early Church in its explanation of the truths of Christianity. In fact, the early Church is, for Newman, a “continuation of the system of those inspired men who wrote the New Testament.”⁴⁶ In all, Newman presents a thoroughgoing argument for the necessity of the interpretation of Scripture through the lens of the early Church. Thus, the Tractarian “middle way” is one that clearly points to the need for an authority other than private or scientific interpretation.

In part, Holmes’s assessment of this document is correct. Newman clearly lays out what can be considered significant issues on the face of the biblical text, and it is likely that this awareness led him to grapple with the doctrine of inspiration in later years. Yet, at this stage, especially when linked to the contemporaneous *Lectures on Justification*, Newman is considerably opposed to the fruitfulness of modern biblical exegesis. Just as the *Lectures on Justification* propose the inadequacy of context to govern the correct interpretation of Scriptural signs, so *Tract 85* proposes that the proper apprehension of Scripture truths requires the light of Tradition.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 59.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 69.

A CRITICAL HISTORICAL METHOD

My study has focused its attention on the relative critical neglect of Newman's Anglican period when assessing the development of his views on Scripture inspiration and interpretation. In order to understand this problem better, I have traced the history of scholarship during the latter half of the 20th century in order to discern the treatment that these years received in recent secondary literature. This overview of scholarship reveals the comparable neglect shown to Newman's view of Scripture by historians and theologians until shortly before Vatican II. In part, this may have been influenced by the commonly held belief, up until the middle of the 20th century, that Newman's doctrine of inspiration was unorthodox, if not heretical. Regardless, the analysis of two primary documents from 1838 reveals that a careful study of Newman's Anglican period may offer a more precise and historically accurate portrait of Newman's early attempts to grapple with modern biblical exegesis, long before his more illustrious works on inspiration.

Notwithstanding this conclusion, I do not wish to suggest that systematic explanations of historical material are inherently flawed. Rather, while such systematic treatments of Newman's understanding of Scripture interpretation have made valuable contributions, the neglect of a historically oriented development of thought for a thematic delineation of his theology has inadvertently allowed scholars to miss the subtle distinctions present within the literature. Moreover, as the second part of my study suggests, attention to these details reveals the portrait of a man, at one point during his life, whose opposition to certain liberalizing tendencies within the Church—particularly modern biblical criticism—was far more resolute than many have believed. In sum, this investigation does not necessarily alter the scholarly assessment of Newman's late writings on inspiration, but its capacity to place these writings in their larger historical and biographical context indicates the true significance of this shift in his theology.⁴⁷

⁴⁷I wish to thank two Marquette University professors, Philip Rossi, S.J., for his comments on an earlier draft of this article, and Paul Misner, who not only commented on this piece but also generously sacrificed portions of his sabbatical to allow me to engage Newman's thought under his tutelage.