

JOHN SHARP

THE APOSTOLATE  
OF THE PEN IN THE ENGLISH PROVINCE  
IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

In 1894 John Magnier, the Irish Consultor-General, made an extraordinary visitation of the English Province. Among the disturbing trends he detected was a growing criticism, based he believed on ignorance, of the theological and spiritual ideas and works of St Alphonsus, who was 'no longer loved, nor looked up to as a guide with the veneration and boundless affection of earlier days... worshippers of Newman rather than of Our Holy Father are found in the Province'. In the context of dangerous ideas 'that are creeping in among a certain and daily increasing number of fathers', Magnier further observed, and cited as evidence, the fact that 'intellectual essays, dissertations, newspaper articles, or what just sounds like them, are beginning to appear and to be approved'<sup>1</sup>. Although he was right to highlight an increasing lack of conviction in the relevance of the missionary apostolate among some of the English fathers, there are reasons to believe that Magnier's strictures were exaggerated and alarmist, reflecting his Celtic prejudices and distaste for intellectual novelty<sup>2</sup>. Nevertheless, his views express a narrowness of outlook that was shared by a great many, if not the majority, of Redemptorist superiors, an outlook that stemmed from the Redemptorists' own self-image.

The Redemptorists were not, of course, an intellectual order; their training and lifestyle were geared to the missionary apostolate,

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<sup>1</sup> Archives of the London Province [hereafter, ALP], MS 'Additional Notes on the Missions in the English Province, written by the Visitor 1894'.

<sup>2</sup> General Archives, Rome [hereafter, AGR], XLVII, Bennett to Douglas, 14 June 1896, mentions that many of the older fathers distrusted Magnier's judgment and that his visitation had not been sufficiently thorough.

to the production and sustenance of uncomplicated preachers of the Eternal Truths. To be a loyal Redemptorist was to be a contemporary Alphonsus, fired with his zeal for the salvation of souls, imbued with his apostolic single-mindedness. His works were deemed to be a compendium of all that was necessary for a Redemptorist in his religious life and work; they provided a boundlessly rich mine of theological, spiritual and practical wisdom, which every Redemptorist was meant to imbibe, and in them was distilled the essence of what it meant to be a member of his Institute. Not only was every Redemptorist always to be reading one of the saint's works, but he also received constant exhortations from his superiors on every aspect of his vocation and ministry, culled and derived from, or based on the words of, Alphonsus. The intention was not merely that the disciples would be soaked in the master's ideas, but that by studying his works, they would be led to acquire his virtues and be so much of one mind with him as to adopt his methods. This explains Magnier's fears about the growing ignorance of Alphonsus's works and its deleterious effect upon the apostolic labours of the English Province. For him, as for others, the spirit of the Congregation lay in an almost literal fidelity to the founder. Just as every Redemptorist was warned to shun the desire for wanton innovation in the missionary methods, technique and pulpit oratory perfected by St Alphonsus, so he was to avoid any intellectual activity, speculation or enterprise that the saint had not directly sanctioned or engaged in himself. It is interesting that when the General Chapter of 1894 directly sanctioned an apostolate of the pen for the first time, it was conceived in terms of the explanation, diffusion and defence of sacred doctrine, 'especially that handed down to us by St Alphonsus' ('praeprimis illam quam S. Alphonsus nobis tradidit')<sup>3</sup>.

The consequences of this attitude need hardly be spelt out. It meant that theological studies within the Congregation were subservient to the end of the Institute and were heavily dependent on St Alphonsus. Branches of academic learning that were not directly related to the primary charge of missions and retreats were not encouraged. The narrowness of intellectual interest caused one English Redemptorist to leave the Congregation for the Benedictines in 1891, repelled by the impregnation of 'the apostolic spirit and «Redemptorist simplicity», under which I class chiefly the prevalent dis-

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<sup>3</sup> *Codex Regularum et Constitutionum Congregationis SS. Redemptoris necnon Statutorum a Capitulis Generalibus annis 1764, 1855, 1894* (Rome, 1896), p. 618, n. 2132.

teem for esoteric knowledge and speculative subjects...'<sup>4</sup>. The rigid limits of approved intellectual enquiry are further indicated by the strict proscription of reading material available to members of the English Province: with the exceptions of the *Tablet*, *Journal de Bruxelles*, *Le Monde* and *L'Armonia* of Turin, all newspapers were forbidden, especially the *Weekly Register* and any other so-called C[atholic] paper which has principles contrary to those of the Holy See even in as much as regards the temporal dominion'<sup>5</sup>. Since it was out of such a conservative and limited intellectual climate that any literary apostolate was to emerge, and by which it was heavily shaped, it comes as no surprise to learn that the English Province produced no theologian of originality or note throughout the nineteenth century.

Instead, the Redemptorists were happy to bask in the light of the reflected glory of Alphonsus, the diffusion of whose works among the faithful was regarded 'as a sacred charge by his sons'<sup>6</sup>. Translations of the saint's works into English appeared at regular intervals from 1833, ten years before the introduction of the Congregation into the country, as part of the great wave of devotional and instructional works that issued from Catholic printers in England and Ireland, typifying a new confidence and renewed spirit among Catholics after Emancipation<sup>7</sup>. In 1854 an ambitious project was undertaken to translate all of Alphonsus's works into English, under the editorship of R. A. Coffin, C.S.S.R. The projected series received the blessing and approval of Pius IX, and was welcomed as

a great work; nothing less than the introduction among us, or rather the making us thoroughly acquainted with a saint whose name is connected with so much that every Catholic holds dear... we can look forward confidently to the time when every Englishman will be able to contemplate the devotional system of the saint in all its completeness<sup>8</sup>.

Regarded as one of the primary legacies made by Coffin to English Catholicism in the nineteenth century<sup>9</sup>, the dissemination of

<sup>4</sup> AGR, Pr[ovincia] An[gliae], XI (Urquhart), 'Matters of Counsel'.

<sup>5</sup> Domestic Archives, Limerick, El, Douglas to Plunkett, 13 April 1861.

<sup>6</sup> ALP, MS 'Chronology of My Life by George Stebbing', p. 189.

<sup>7</sup> A full list can be found in M. de Meulemeester, C.S.S.R., *Bibliographie Générale des Écrivains Rédemptoristes*, 3 vols (Louvain, 1933-39), I, 221-34.

<sup>8</sup> H.E.Manning, 'St Alphonsus and the Christian Remembrancer', *Dublin Review*, 37 (1854), 326-55, p. 326n.

<sup>9</sup> *Tablet*, 11 April 1885, p. 583.

the works was intended to facilitate the spread of sound doctrine and to encourage the faithful to avail themselves of the richness of Catholic devotional life, 'which is a special feature of those countries where persecution has never forced the faithful to restrain themselves from giving the most full, outward expression to feelings which animate and are the life of every Catholic soul'<sup>10</sup>.

In the event, only six volumes, containing twenty-seven of the saint's ascetical works, had appeared by 1868, when the series was terminated<sup>11</sup>. This was largely because they were too expensive for the people for whom they were intended<sup>12</sup>, a criticism that was extended to other publications of the Province some years later:

The great mistake about the publications of our Province is that they are not cheap enough. The people who would buy and value the works of St Alphonsus and his sons are, as a rule, poor people, not the middle class. Cheap popular editions could be sold to any amount on our Missions without the Fathers having anything to do with the sale<sup>13</sup>.

When a translation of a further series of *Select Works* was undertaken by John Magnier at the end of the century, care was taken that they should be reasonably priced, and they appeared in *Duffy's Penny Catholic Library*.

The scandalized reaction of Protestants to the appearance of an increasing number of Alphonsus's works, and the diatribes against his moral theology that passed into the standard anti-Catholic polemics of such bodies as the Protestant Alliance and the Reformation Society, called forth little reaction from the Redemptorists as far as the printed page was concerned<sup>14</sup>. Occasionally, the cudgels were taken up in defence of the Church and to answer such accusations as that Alphonsus had perverted Scripture in applying passages to

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<sup>10</sup> Coffin, in the preface of his translation of L. Blosius, *The Oratory of the Faithful Soul* (London, 1848), p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> *The Works of St Alphonsus Maria de Liguori*, newly translated and edited by R. A. Coffin, 6 vols (London, 1854-68); I, *The Christian Virtues* (1854); II, *The Mysteries of the Faith: The Incarnation* (1854); III, *The Mysteries of the Faith: The Holy Eucharist* (1855); IV, *The Eternal Truths* (1857); V, *The Mysteries of the Faith: The Redemption* (1861); VI, *The Glories of Mary* (1852; new edition, 1868).

<sup>12</sup> AGR, PrAn, VII, 'Mémoire confidentiel sur l'histoire des premières fondations en Angleterre et en Irlande, par P. Buggenoms, avec notes du P. Douglas', p. 61.

<sup>13</sup> AGR, XLVII, MacDonald to Douglas, 21 February 1883.

<sup>14</sup> For the Protestant reaction to Alphonsus's work, see my article, 'The Influence of St Alphonsus Liguori in Nineteenth-Century Britain', *Downside Review*, 101 (1983), 60-76.

Mary which properly had as their subject her Son<sup>15</sup>. Wisely, perhaps, such aggressive polemic, which served merely to exacerbate differences and enrage Protestant sensibilities, as well as hinder the work of the missions, was generally avoided, and the works of Alphonsus were allowed to perform their task without apology or explanation.

Redemptorist silence on this matter should not be taken to imply indifference, for in Thomas Edward Bridgett (1829-1899) the Redemptorists had a polemicist of great subtlety and a confessional historian of much ability, for whom the study of history provided 'a commentary written by the hand of God on His own revelation'<sup>16</sup>. There was never for him any idea that historical studies would reveal anything but the truth of Catholicism. The impetus behind his own conversion was historical, and he always retained the feel for Catholicism as an historical religion<sup>17</sup>. At the time of his reception into the Church, he had a vision of the Church of the Middle Ages, 'with which I believed the modern Church to be identified, and that the Church of the Middle Ages was the legitimate development of the Apostolic Church'<sup>18</sup>. This vision he never lost, and it was the inspiration of his researches, which were in the medieval and Reformation eras. The medieval centuries he always regarded as the centuries of faith, darkened by the Reformation and all that issued from it, whereby true religion had declined. He was always at pains to demonstrate the continuity between the Catholicism of former ages and its contemporary manifestation. His researches were dictated by his interests, first aroused when he was an Anglican, and doubtless were influenced by the need to counter the interpretation and use made of the Middle Ages by Anglo-Catholic 'medievalists'. In contradistinction with them, he saw no essential conflict between the native spiritual tradition and contemporary Ultramontane Catho-

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<sup>15</sup> J. Magnier, 'The Rev. Thomas Edward Bridgett, C.S.S.R.', *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, Fourth Series, 5 (1899), 305-18, p. 315 says that Bridgett wrote *The Art of Lying as practised by the writers of anti-Catholic tracts* (London, 1898) to 'expose the villainous tracts circulated by Protestants against the Catholic Church, and in particular against our holy father'.

<sup>16</sup> T. E. Bridgett, *History of the Holy Eucharist in Great Britain*, 2 vols (London, 1881), I, 2.

<sup>17</sup> While reading the works of Bishop John Fisher as an undergraduate at St John's College, Cambridge, Bridgett 'received a deep impression of the violence and malice of the Reformers, and a gentle drawing towards the defenders of the old faith, which all subsequent studies increased', Bridgett, *Life of Blessed John Fisher* (London, 1888), p. x. A full list of Bridgett's publications can be found in Meulemeester, *Bibliographie Générale*, II, 5-4.

<sup>18</sup> *Life of Blessed John Fisher*, p. 15.

licism, of which his order was a champion, but regarded the latter as a legitimate development of the former. So, for instance, he conceived his book on medieval English devotion to the Blessed Virgin as 'a supplement to St Alphonsus's *Glories of Mary*', to demonstrate that Alphonsus said nothing of Mary that could not find echoes in the native spiritual tradition, and how that tradition reinforced and nuanced Alphonsus's interpretation<sup>19</sup>. The intention was to provide incontrovertible proof in the past of Catholic belief and practice in the present.

Bridgett claimed that he was involved in redressing an imbalance in contemporary historiography and that his task was to bring to light facts about the religious life and history of the Middle Ages which had been lost or distorted and gave a different (more sympathetic) picture of medieval Catholicism than that propagated by most contemporary English, Protestant historians. This intent is why his books tend to be 'storehouses of facts ready for use'<sup>20</sup>. In his purpose he was at one with other Catholic writers of the time. Newman, for instance, complained that Englishmen

drop a thousand years from the world's chronicle, and having steeped them thoroughly in sin and idolatry, would fain drop them in oblivion... they will not recognize what infidels recognize as well as Catholics, the vastness, the grandeur, the splendour, the loveliness of the manifestations of this time-honoured ecclesiastical confederation [viz. the Catholic Church]<sup>21</sup>.

Yet at the same time that he was sure of his task, Bridgett denied that his own purpose was apologetic:

[The book] is not a work of controversy; it is not an apology. It is an historical investigation ... an impartial statement of facts<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Cyril Ryder, C.S.S.R., *Life of Thomas Edward Bridgett* (London, 1906), p. 140. It is worth noting that although the Redemptorists were strict Roman rubricists, they built their churches in Great Britain in the native Gothic style. Similarly, they saw no contradiction between fierce loyalty to the Roman Church and the cultivation of devotion to local saints. Ultramontanism was not blind 'Romanism' so much as the application to the native tradition of what was universal in order to preserve and enhance what was best in the local.

<sup>20</sup> Abbot (later Cardinal) Gasquet in Ryder, *Life of Thomas Edward Bridgett*, p. xix.

<sup>21</sup> J. H. Newman, *Lectures on [the Present Position of] Catholicism in England* (Birmingham, 1851), p. 42.

<sup>22</sup> Bridgett, *Our Lady's Dowry: or How England won and lost that Title* (London, 1875), pp. 1-2. The sub-title was dropped in later editions.

This work is not dogmatic, and I have purposely avoided, wherever it was possible, treating dogmatic questions except from a purely historical point of view<sup>23</sup>.

In fact, the apologetic element is implied throughout his works, not least in the choice of subjects for investigation. Although his method was to appear to be impartial, the apologetic comes from the sheer weight of accumulated facts and from the prospect, which is gradually unfolded, of the ages of faith, when all men were united in harmonious faith and practice, in contrast with the Reformation and all that flowed from it. Occasionally, he lapsed into direct exhortation:

Reader, death is coming on apace for you and me ... Will you risk your salvation on the accuracy of [your forefathers'] criticism of Scripture and the ways of God? Is it not perhaps true that you accept Baptism because the Reformers accepted it, and reject Unction because they rejected it, without having exercised in regard of either rite that independent judgement which is your boast?<sup>24</sup>.

Nor was he inhibited from exhibiting the inconsistencies, illogicalities, muddled thinking and historical blunders of his Protestant antagonists. *The True Story of the Catholic Hierarchy deposed by Queen Elizabeth* was, he admitted, contentious, since he must correct widespread mistakes and historical myths in the work of John Strype, the unreliable seventeenth-century historian, and highlight the falsities in Burghley's *Execution of Justice in England*, written in 1583 by Elizabeth's Lord High Treasurer to justify the persecution of Catholic priests on the charge of high treason<sup>25</sup>. Similarly, in *Blunders and Forgeries: Historical Essays*, written to correct 'misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the Catholic Church, for the most part as regards historical facts', not only did he point out the mistakes and foolish slips of clever and learned authors such as James Gairdner and J. A. Froude in relation to their sources, but he also exposed the malicious and deliberate lies which surrounded the infamous Rood of Boxley and those concocted by Robert Ware at the time of the Popish Plot of Charles II's reign and which had been

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<sup>23</sup> Bridgett, *History of the Holy Eucharist*, III, 113.

<sup>24</sup> Bridgett, *The Ritual of the New Testament* (London, 1873), p. 235.

<sup>25</sup> *The True Story of the Catholic Hierarchy deposed by Queen Elizabeth* (London, 1889, p. ix.

perpetuated by historians into the nineteenth century<sup>26</sup>. Bridgett is often at his best as an historian when exposing the fallacious arguments, the misuse of texts, attacking the shibboleths of contemporary historiography in relation to his chosen period, correcting the false ideas which reflected badly on the Catholic Church, but which had been canonized and taken as true by many people:

At the beginning of the Reformation the history of a thousand years back was ransacked for dirt to fling at the Catholic Church; and from the pages of those writers whose works form the Parker Society's publications, such matters have passed into innumerable modern histories and books of controversy<sup>27</sup>.

Such offensive often gives a terseness, vibrancy and compelling character to his writings, which make them exciting to read as well as being informative.

In helping to remove 'the prejudice of ordinary Protestants', his purpose was to vindicate the Catholic faith as historically and providentially the true, indeed only, form of Christianity, to demonstrate that it had grown into what it was intended to be, and to highlight Protestantism in comparison as reduced and starved individualism, insidious in its consequences and destructive of all religious truth<sup>28</sup>. This ideology he set out in *The Ritual of the New Testament*, in which he argued that Christianity is an historical religion, based on an historic revelation, the full significance and meaning of which the Church discovers only in the course of history, and to which she bears witness in every age. The Church's continuing and accumulated tradition is, therefore, not only necessary but essential for a true appreciation and understanding of God's revelation. In his enthusiasm for displaying and explaining tradition, however, Bridgett fell into the same trap as his adversaries, and he was guilty of sweeping generalisations and partisan excess. Thus, he could write that while Thomas More and John Fisher died 'not merely for fidelity to conscience [but also] for the rights of the human conscience to receive religious Truth from God only, through His own appointed channels; and not from human power, to which Truth is

<sup>26</sup> *Blunders and Forgeries: Historical Essays* (London, 1890), p. vii.

<sup>27</sup> *History of the Holy Eucharist*, I, 6.

<sup>28</sup> *The Ritual of the New Testament*, p. 7. In *The Wisdom and Wit of Blessed Thomas More* (London, 1892), p. 22, he wrote of Protestants as *men and women, erring indeed, yet who may be supposed to be in good faith, since they have been brought up in error, and are confirmed in it by inherited traditions. They deserve, therefore, to be treated courteously and respectfully.*



nothing else than State Expediency', the greater number of executed Reformers in *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* died 'for private fancies and enthusiasms'<sup>29</sup>. Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, in Bridgett's estimate, was never sincere but a toadying liar 'to whom oaths were what cards are to the juggler'<sup>30</sup>. Similarly, he ascribed the increase in drunkenness in England to the Reformation and the abolition of the true religion, without which there cannot be any ultimate moral sanctions:

I do not mean to attribute the increase of drunkenness to the positive and explicit doctrines of the new religion... but doctrines were preached which, indirectly and contrary to the intention of the preachers, loosened the bonds of morality. And still more, the sacrament of penance had been removed, without which preaching loses more than half its power, and the belief in the Presence of Jesus Christ in the holy Eucharist had been taken, away, a belief which had been the main impulse to the frequentation of the Sacrament of Penance and the purifying of the conscience<sup>31</sup>.

Although such sentiments mar his work as an historian and temper his denial of polemical intent, it would be wrong to dismiss Bridgett's achievements or to undervalue his influence. Many of his works ran to several editions and were translated into French and German, and such works as *Our Lady's Dowry*, the *History of the Holy Eucharist in Great Britain* and the *Life and Writings of Sir Thomas More* show evidence of much patient and deep research, the value of which is still evident. The two volumes on the Eucharist, for example, were re-issued, with corrections and additional notes by Fr Thurston, S. J., to commemorate the London Eucharistic Congress in 1908, and the work 'still has its uses', according to a modern historian<sup>32</sup>. The life of More was considered by R. W. Chambers to be 'the standard modern *Life* which can never be superseded', and More's latest biographer believes that 'without Bridgett the course of More studies as they would have since developed would have been retarded'<sup>33</sup>. Bridgett's Catholic contemporaries praised his works, which were well received in the Catholic press. The Bishop

<sup>29</sup> *Life of Blessed John Fisher*, pp. 442 and 444.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 277.

<sup>31</sup> Bridgett, *The Discipline of Drink* (London, 1876), p. 176.

<sup>32</sup> J. C. Dickinson, *The Later Middle Ages from the Norman Conquest to the Eve of the Reformation*, An Ecclesiastical History of England (London, 1979), p. 479.

<sup>33</sup> R. W. Chambers, *Thomas More* (London, 1935), p. 403; Richard Marius, *Thomas More* (London, 1985), p. xix.

of Salford, for example, commended *Our Lady's Dowry* in a pastoral letter as 'the most excellent, the most interesting, the most original work of its kind that has ever been published in the English language'<sup>34</sup>. This single work, it was later claimed,

has had more influence, perhaps, than any other of his writings on the renewal of Catholic life in England. It has been several times reprinted, and its effect has been great. It has acted directly on the religious reading it in cloister or cell, on the community gathering in college refectory, and on laymen in their tranquil homes; and also indirectly as giving the inspiration to sermons and addresses without number<sup>35</sup>.

So high was the regard which this work earned Bridgett, that he was invited to preach the sermon in Brompton Oratory on 29 June 1893, the occasion of the solemn renewal of England to our Lady by the Cardinal Archbishop and all the bishops of England and Wales.

The general estimate among Catholics was that Bridgett made an important contribution to the Catholic cause through his writings and the influence they had come to exercise, not only among Catholics, but also among all serious historians. His works were meticulously researched and, even if it is true that his style was 'too free from ornament to be altogether popular'<sup>36</sup>, the information he gathered was of great interest and importance to those interested in English history. *The Times* referred to him as 'one of the most distinguished English members of the Redemptorist Order'<sup>37</sup>, while Cardinal Gasquet placed him 'high in the ranks of historical writers' and hoped that his works would not be neglected, 'but that the precious material he collected with such care, diligence and devotion may be utilised and made popular'<sup>38</sup>.

Given his desire to put history at the service of the Church, it is not surprising that Bridgett took a keen interest in the fortunes of the Catholic Truth Society (founded in 1868, re-established in 1884), for which he wrote several pamphlets, as did several other Redemptorists. The other major figure in the Redemptorists' literary apostolate was Thomas Livius (1828-1902). Like Bridgett, Livius

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in the *Dublin Review*, New Series, 24 (1875), p. 218.

<sup>35</sup> *Irish Catholic*, 18 March 1899.

<sup>36</sup> A Berthe, C.S.S.R., *Life of St Alphonsus de Liguori*, translated by H. Castle, C.S.S.R., 2 vols (Dublin, 1905), II, 701.

<sup>37</sup> *The Times*, 20 February 1899.

<sup>38</sup> Ryder, *Life of Bridgett*, pp. xviii and xix.

was a convert from Anglicanism and his main literary work was historical, although his period was the early Church. With Bridgett, he believed that history was a commentary on God's revelation, and he sought to show that the Catholic Church is both the repository and only interpreter of that revelation. Unlike Bridgett, he held that a strictly historical treatment needed to be supplemented by arguments of a moral and theological nature; he freely admitted that the study of history must draw the student into the province of dogma and thus of polemic.

This is obvious in *St Peter, Bishop of Rome*, in which he set out to prove the fact of St Peter's Roman episcopate and to examine its consequences. Much of the book's historical and archaeological evidence is derived from earlier works, and this is then used to clinch the main argument of the book, the Catholic belief that the Petrine supremacy was intended as a permanent institution by Christ for his Church in the person of his Vicar, the Bishop of Rome. The value of all this was not merely 'to show up the emptiness or fallacy of the Protestant arguments on this question'<sup>39</sup>, nor yet to bring together a mass of useful information<sup>40</sup>, but to put historical study at the service of the contemporary Church in order to show that it rested on sound historical precedent and to confound its antagonists. Thus, St Peter's episcopate is not just a matter of historical interest, but is a living moral fact:

It is ever big with great consequences, momentous to the doctrine, religion, and discipline of the Church, as well as to the political principles and actions of the entire Christian society. Throughout successive ages it has held its place in the minds and hearts of millions of the faithful, — as still with all Catholics at the present day, — not as though it were simply some isolated, material event of past history that happened on a time and once for all, but as an ever-present principle, influential for religious belief and practice<sup>41</sup>.

It was this aspect of the book that gave such pleasure to Newman, to whom the book was dedicated<sup>42</sup>. And it was the belief that a natural and necessary development of the original data of divine

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<sup>39</sup> *Dublin Review*, Third Series, 20 (1888), p. 443.

<sup>40</sup> *The Month*, 63 (1888), p. 132.

<sup>41</sup> T. Livius, *St Peter, Bishop of Rome* (London, 1888), p. xi.

<sup>42</sup> *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, edited by Charles Dessain and Thomas Gormal, vol. 31 (1977), p. 247.

revelation was not a perversion, but rather a preserver, of that revelation that lay behind Livius's two books on the Blessed Virgin. Taking as his starting-point the highly-developed doctrines and Marian teaching of the Church, *Mary in the Epistles* attempted to answer those who argued the lack of explicit scriptural authority for such teaching. Livius believed that Scripture did contain much implicit teaching which needed merely to be 'drawn out' according to the intention of the authors and compilers of the canonical books of the New Testament. This was possible and permissible because Mary is 'the norma and type ... of all God's dealings with mankind in the supernatural order ... the very impersonation of divine grace'<sup>43</sup>. The real interest of the work is not the devotional excursus on Mary, although it comprises two-thirds of the book, but in the introductory first part, which reveals Livius's philosophy of history. His fundamental premise is that a study of the Fathers would reveal that the Marian beliefs of the Church were held in their entirety at an early date and must, therefore, have been part of the original 'deposit' of divine revelation, known to the apostles and communicated by them to succeeding generations. In spite of clever, if somewhat tendentious, pleading, Livius falls back on the argument that if the Church has always sanctioned the cultus of Mary, this 'must be contained in the revealed deposit, formed part of the Apostles' teaching, and in their days, at least in a rudimentary form, had a place in the piety of the faithful'<sup>44</sup>. That being so, the New Testament writers had her in mind in all that they wrote, and this can be legitimately 'read off' from the texts. At the end of the day, however, the written word

could never be an adequate organ by itself for imparting to the people generally the due knowledge of the truths of faith, in the sense that the unwritten or oral teaching is<sup>45</sup>.

Consequent upon this statement is the further belief that it is 'the special office of the Church, as the Divine teacher, to continually unfold, develop and illustrate the doctrines contained in the deposit of revelation which she has received from Christ and which the Apostles have delivered to her'<sup>46</sup>. Study of the Fathers and Doc-

<sup>43</sup> Livius, *Mary in the Epistles* (London, 1891), p. 85.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>46</sup> Livius, *The Blessed Virgin in the Fathers of the First Six Centuries* (London, 1893), p. 7.

tors of both East and West, from Justin Martyr to Gregory the Great, would reveal quite clearly that they unanimously held Mary in the same high affection and appreciation as she had been held by Catholics of subsequent ages, and that everything that the Church has at any time defined or sanctioned with regard to the privileges and honour that are her due, is to be found substantially, and at least in principle or germ, in their writings. *The Blessed Virgin in the Fathers of the First Six Centuries* sets out to do this on a massive scale, providing 'an excellent concrete example of what is meant by the «morally universal» consensus of the Fathers'<sup>47</sup>. For Livius, the Fathers provided a deep, intense and lively reflection and corroboration of what he believed were the divine facts of revelation, carried forward in history and receiving their ultimate expression in the Catholicism of his own day.

Livius's works have stood the test of time far less well than Bridgett's. Nevertheless, both men illustrate the readiness to tackle contentious issues and to commend the Catholic faith on the basis of fairly sophisticated, if dated, arguments. Neither engaged in crude polemic; they sought to convert by argument, by the amassing of such a wealth of material and by the sowing of the seeds of intellectual doubt. Yet however distinguished they were, whatever their contribution to the Catholic cause, they do not stand out as typical Redemptorists in their literary aspirations. Both were converts from Anglicanism and benefitted from the 'favouritism' that Coffin was accused of showing to the English, and especially converts, in the Province. Although Bridgett did work on the missions, he was promoted to, and was largely occupied with, administrative posts, while Livius seems never to have had a great taste for missionary work. Magnier's complaints in 1894 about the appearance and approval of literary pieces may have been directed largely against Livius, who had published several articles in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* on speculative subjects and had been a friend and correspondent of Cardinal Newman. Magnier need not have feared, for the number of converts from Anglicanism, who might be tempted to literary or academic aspirations, was small. The majority of subjects had been formed in a different mould and were content with their own apostolate, which had an immediacy and satisfaction that was lacking to anyone engaged in the writing of books and articles; it is that books survive longer than the memorials of men.

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<sup>47</sup> *The Month*, 80 (1894), p. 210.