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CARDINAL NEWMAN AND SAINT ALPHONSUS  
AN UNLIKELY MEETING OF MINDS

PART ONE: THE MARIAN QUESTION. 1. – *Newman and Marian devotion*; 1.1. – *Newman's thought in the period 1841-1845*; 1.2. – *A question of development*; 1.3. – *Mariology revisited*; 1.4. – *The Marian question revisited in later life*; PART TWO: CONSIDERATIONS ON TRUTH AND EQUIVOCATION. 2.1. – *What Kingsley wrote that annoyed Newman*; 2.2. – *Kingsley's references to Alphonsus and Newman's response*; 2.3. – *Newman on the authority of Alphonsus in moral theology*; 2.4. – *Newman, Alphonsus and the theological tradition on equivocation and lies*; *Conclusion*

It was an improbable theological choice when the Oxford-trained Englishman John Henry Newman (1801-1890) studied some writings of the Neapolitan Alphonsus de Liguori (1696-1787). On two important issues, at different stages in his life, this is precisely what Newman did. The two have some characteristics in common: both were voluminous letter-writers, controversial in their own day and the subjects of significant analysis after their death. Their differences are also notable, ranging from educational background to pastoral concerns. The focus of this article is specific: why did Newman take the views Alphonsus seriously, and what can we learn about ecclesial authority in theological debates as a result?<sup>1</sup>

PART ONE: THE MARIAN QUESTION

Newman did not approach religious questions in a systematic way or within pre-given categories.<sup>2</sup> The autobiographical

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<sup>1</sup> For access to their respective libraries, I am very grateful to Sister Irene Felder FSO of the International Centre of Newman Friends in Rome and Dom Senan Furlong OSB of Glenstal Abbey in Ireland. Their courteous welcome and professional guidance made my research so much more pleasurable.

<sup>2</sup> John Henry NEWMAN, *Apologia pro vita sua, being a history of his religious opinions*, Longmans-Green-Reader-Dyer, London 1880 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), 198.

texture of his writing, and the general context of the two issues studied here, suggest a chronological approach. Newman engaged with theology in the turmoil of his own journey from Anglican clergyman to Roman Catholic Cardinal. Though deeply personal, the theological positions of Newman always presuppose an engagement with religious authorities that is typical of a truth-seeker. It was the ecclesial authority accorded to Alphonsus that explains why Newman came to consider Alphonsus as having importance in the first place.

### 1. – Newman and Marian devotion

As the young Anglican Vicar of Saint Mary the Virgin in Oxford, from 1828, Newman shared his church's perplexities about Roman Catholic Mariology. There was the typical protestant fear of idolatry:

I could not go to Rome, while she suffered honours to be paid to the Virgin Mary and the Saints which I thought incompatible with the Supreme, Incommunicable Glory of the One Infinite and Eternal.<sup>3</sup>

This was his great *crux* with regard to Catholicism. The pivotal difficulty was the assessment of Marian devotional practices rather than Marian doctrine as such. Newman had to encounter the charge posed by Protestants that Catholics idolatrously worshipped the Virgin as a Goddess. On the doctrinal questions, even in his Anglican phase, Newman was close to mainstream Catholic doctrine:

Who can estimate the holiness and perfection of her who was chosen to be the mother of Christ ... We must have the transcendent purity of her whom the created spirit condescended to with his miraculous presence ...<sup>4</sup>

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(hereafter Newman, *Apologia*). For assessments of the theological method of Newman, confer Thomas J. NORRIS, *Newman and his theological method*, Brill, Leiden 1977 and John H. WALGRAVE, *Newman the theologian*, Chapman, London 1960.

<sup>3</sup> NEWMAN, *Apologia*, 148

<sup>4</sup> John Henry NEWMAN, *Fifteen Sermons preached before the University of Oxford between 1826 and 1843*, Rivingtons, London 1872 (3<sup>rd</sup> edition), 313.

It was the devotional perplexity that came to the fore during the period of Newman's entry to the Roman communion.

1.1. – *Newman's thought in the period 1841-1845*

After the publication of *Tract 90* (1841)<sup>5</sup> Newman was forced to clarify his religious allegiance that culminated with his reception into the Roman Catholic Church in 1845. It was during this period that Newman began to seriously ponder some texts of Alphonsus. He was aware of Saint Alphonsus earlier, but he had only read misleading extracts from the polemical literature of the epoch.

In this four-year period, there are distinct stages in Newman's own recollection that are relevant to the state of his mind in his consideration of the texts of Alphonsus.

For the second four years (i.e. 1839 -1843) I wished to benefit the Church of England without prejudice to the Church of Rome ...

At the beginning of ... Michaelmas 1843 I began to despair of the Church of England ... what I wrote and did was influenced by a mere wish not to injure it, and not by the wish to benefit from it ...<sup>6</sup>

Newman was fortunate that it was a gentle-hearted and erudite Irishman, Charles Russell (1810 –1880)<sup>7</sup>, then a Professor at Saint Patrick's College Maynooth, who guided his introduction to the writings of Alphonsus. Russell had taken the initiative in writing to Newman on another topic (transubstantiation) and when the Marian question came to the forefront for Newman, it was Russell who suggested the reading programme for him. Though the Redemptorists were not in Ireland at that time (they came a decade later), the writings of Alphonsus were becoming widely known after his canonization in 1839. Their publication, in popular format, was sponsored by one of Rus-

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<sup>5</sup> The broad history of the *Tracts for the Times* is chronicled by Ian Ker in *John Henry Newman. A Biography*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1988, 54-100.

<sup>6</sup> NEWMAN, *Apologia*, 186.

<sup>7</sup> Russell's life and distinguished career is presented by Ambrose MACCAULAY, *Dr. Russell of Maynooth*, Darton Longman and Todd, London 1983.

sell's colleagues at Maynooth, the distinguished scientist Nicholas Callan (1799-1864).<sup>8</sup> The tribute which Newman pays to Russell is fulsome:

He had, perhaps, more to do with my conversion than anyone else ... he sent me at different times several letters; he was always gentle, mild, unobtrusive, uncontroversial.<sup>9</sup>

Newman's impression of Russell is confirmed by a letter which Newman wrote to Russell's nephew;

I agree entirely with what you say about Dr. Russell. He is certainly a pattern man and struck me before I was a Catholic as no other Catholic did.<sup>10</sup>

Aware of Newman's desire to clarify his appraisal of Catholic doctrine and devotion to the Virgin Mary, Russell had sent Callan's translation of the Sermons of Saint Alphonsus in 1842. Newman was greatly helped by these:

I wish only that your Church were more known among us by such writings. You will not interest us in her, till we see her, not in politics, but in her true functions of exhorting, teaching and guiding.<sup>11</sup>

Newman asked Russell for clarification on one point: were these sermons selected in a way that some things Alphonsus

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<sup>8</sup> Father Nicholas Callan is an important figure in the development of electrical science, especially the induction coil. Less well-known is his contribution to making Saint Alphonsus available within popular Catholicism: with the help of the Presentation Sisters in Maynooth, Callan arranged for the translation, printing and distribution of sixteen works of Alphonsus from the early 1840s. Confer Monsignor P. J. McLAUGHLIN, *Nicholas Callan. Priest Scientist*, Clonmore and Reynolds, Dublin 1965.

<sup>9</sup> NEWMAN, *Apologia*, 194.

<sup>10</sup> *The Letters and Dairies of John Henry Newman*, Edited by C. S. Dessain and T. Gornall, Vol. IX, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1975, 251, Letter of Newman to M. Russell, 18<sup>th</sup> March 1875. This massive project of collecting and editing Newman's correspondence, begun in 1978, has had a number of editors for the 32 volumes published. For convenience, I refer more simply to Newman, *Letters and Diaries*, followed by the volume number, page number, the correspondents, and the date.

<sup>11</sup> NEWMAN, *Letters and Diaries*, Vol. IX, 155, Newman to C. Russell, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1842.

wrote were deliberately deleted in order to 'hide' essential points of catholic doctrine? Russell was able to assure him that this was not the case.<sup>12</sup> One minor omission was a reference by Alphonsus to Queen Elizabeth which was considered inappropriate for an audience in Ireland. The main omission was from the sermon for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany<sup>13</sup> which does not include a section from the Italian original<sup>14</sup>. The untranslated passage<sup>15</sup> was explained by Russell to Newman in an acceptable way.

With security on this point, Newman began to clarify his position regarding Catholic Marian devotion and practice. Newman did not study the texts of Alphonsus in order to understand the personal 'mind of Alphonsus', as such. For Newman, Alphonsus was important because he was an authoritative exponent of the official Catholic position. The Church's thinking is what mattered to Newman, not that of individual theologians.

### 1.2. – *A question of development*

It was not only the Marian question that preoccupied Newman at this stage (1841-1845). His path to communion with Rome is charted in the *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* and this is the context within which to place Newman's assessment of the Marian thought of Alphonsus.<sup>16</sup>

Critical for Newman was the coherence of present Church doctrinal teachings with those of the Apostolic and Patristic periods. His consideration of the writings of Alphonsus forwarded to him by Russell calmed his mind. He could find no trace of the

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<sup>12</sup> NEWMAN, *Letters and Diaries*, Vol. IX, 156, C. Russell to Newman, 5<sup>th</sup> December 1842.

<sup>13</sup> *Sermons for all the Sundays of the Year*, translated from the Italian of St. Alphonsus M. Liguori by a Catholic Clergyman, Duffy, Dublin 1860 (5<sup>th</sup> edition), 71-78

<sup>14</sup> ALFONSO MARIA DE LIGUORI, *Opere Ascetiche*, Vol. 3, Marietti, Turin 1847, 569-574.

<sup>15</sup> 'Onde ebbe a dire s. Bernadino da Sienna che tutti obediscono a Maria, ed in certo modo anche Dio. Imperio Virginis omnia famulantur, et ipse Deus'.

<sup>16</sup> John Henry NEWMAN, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, Longmans Green and Co, London 1890, 6<sup>th</sup> edition. First published in 1845. Hereafter, NEWMAN, *Development*.

'Mariolatry' which his earlier reading of extracts of Alphonsus had suggested.

It took more time for Newman to understand the devotional practices encouraged by Italians, Alphonsus included.

Such devotional manifestation has been my great *crux* as regards Catholicism. I say frankly that I do not enter into them now. I trust that I do not love her the less because I cannot enter into them. They may be fully explained and defended; but sentiment and taste do not run with logic: they are suitable for Italy but they are not suitable for England.<sup>17</sup>

### 1.3. – *Mariology revisited*

By the time he was received into the Catholic Church (October 1845), Newman was at ease with Catholic Marian doctrine and accepted that devotional differences in practice did not compromise this basic doctrinal position which, crucially for Newman, was in a linear development since Patristic times. For Newman, the decision to become a Catholic was a religious duty of conscience. Newman distrusted pure reason, and his journey to take a decision of conscience to enter the Catholic Church had followed, first, a path of probability:

(But) speaking historically of what I held in 1843-4, I say that I believed in a God on a ground of probability, that I believed in Christianity on a probability, and that I believed in Catholicism on a probability, and that these three grounds of probability, distinct from each other of course in subject matter, were still all of them, one and the same in the nature of proof, as being probabilities ...<sup>18</sup>

For Newman, with his delicate appreciation of the duty of conscience, probability was never going to be enough to justify a request for admission to communion with the Catholic Church. It is likely that Newman was attracted by the emphasis on conscience in Saint Alphonsus and that this was a factor in resolving his doubts on Marian questions before his formal entry into the Catholic Church.

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<sup>17</sup> NEWMAN, *Apologia*, 195.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

I had a great dislike of paper logic. For myself, it was not logic that carried me on ... it is the concrete being that reasons: pass a number of years and I find my mind in a new place: how? the whole man moves: paper logic is but the record of it. All the logic in the world would not have made me move faster towards Rome than I did.<sup>19</sup>

If the 'Oriental Common Room stank of logic'<sup>20</sup> the theology of Saint Alphonsus did not, and this helped in Newman's journey towards Rome.

#### 1.4. – *The Marian question revisited in later life*

Newman had avoided controversy with his early Oxford companions after his conversion but when E. B. Pusey, a man he admired, published the *Eirenicon* in 1864, Newman felt compelled to reply. This reply confirms Newman's understanding of and ease with the Marian theology of Alphonsus. Newman was hurt by his friend's dredging up of common Protestant biases against the Virgin. There is an Alphonsian tone to Newman's answer to Pusey's objections:

Mary is our Mother by divine appointment given us from the Cross ... She need not hear us by any innate power, or any personal gift, but by His manifestation to her of the prayers we make to her ... he who charges us with making Mary a divinity is thereby denying the divinity of Jesus.<sup>21</sup>

The continuing influence of Alphonsus on Newman's mind is confirmed, by his remarks on Marian devotion:

I begin by making a distinction which will go far to remove good part of the difficulty of my undertaking, as it presents itself to ordinary inquirers – the distinction between faith and devotion. I fully grant that devotion towards the Blessed Virgin has increased among Catholics with the progress of centuries. I do not allow that doctrine concerning her has undergone a growth, for I believe that it has been in substance one and the same from

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> John Henry NEWMAN, *Difficulties felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching*, Burns Oates and Company, London 1894, 433. Hereafter, NEWMAN, *Difficulties*.

the beginning... Faith and devotion are as distinct in fact as they are in idea. We cannot indeed be devout without faith, but we may believe without feeling devotion.<sup>22</sup>

The significance of this statement is heightened by recalling that Newman was writing in the decade after the proclamation of the Immaculate Conception as a dogma (1854). The doctrinal appropriateness of this Magisterial decision was confirmed for Newman through his extensive knowledge of Patristic writing and the 1854 decision of the Roman Magisterium was not problematic for him.<sup>23</sup>

What Alphonsus helped Newman to understand in the years of the conversion journey (1841-45) stayed with him into the later years:

The faith is everywhere one and the same, but a large liberty is accorded to private judgment and inclination as regards matters of devotion.<sup>24</sup>

The primacy of the salvific role of Jesus is not questioned by Catholics in their proper devotion to Mary, and Newman references Alphonsus in this regard:

This truth, exemplified in history, might also be abundantly illustrated ... from the lives and writings of holy men in modern times. Two of them, St. Alfonso Liguori and Blessed Paul of the Cross, for all their notorious devotion to the Mother, have shown their supreme love of her divine Son in the names which they have given to their respective Congregations, viz. that 'of the Redeemer' and that 'of the Cross and Passion'<sup>25</sup>.

Newman repeatedly affirms that it was 'the Fathers made me a Catholic'. What he learned from Alphonsus was not Marian doctrine but how to evaluate popular expressions of Marian piety. Marian devotion in the Catholic Church does not follow the laws of abstract logic but represents the affections of the heart of a believing Catholic.

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 377.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 433 ff.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 380.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 441.

The Letter to Pusey after the latter's publication of the *Eirenicon* represents Newman's most complete synthesis on Marian doctrine and devotion. Though the references to Alphonsus are few, this may in fact be a confirmation of how Alphonsian thought had entered Newman's Marian theology. Pusey, it seemed to Newman, had forgotten that the central act of Catholic worship is the Mass and the reception of the Body and Blood of Christ. 'The Mass is a return to Calvary and Mary is scarcely named in it'.<sup>26</sup>

There is a contrast in the references to Alphonsus by Newman in the 1840's and during the 1860s. During the conversion period, the figure and thought of Alphonsus looms large for Newman as emblematic of Protestant difficulties with the Roman Catholic doctrine and devotion. By the 1860s, the references to Alphonsus are fewer. Consequently, we can infer that he was broadly in agreement with Alphonsus on the Marian question, though he retained his doubts about some devotions allowed in the Catholic Church. A letter to his lifelong friend, Russell, in the aftermath of the *Eirenicon* exchange confirms this:

I suppose you have seen Pusey's recent book. What do you think of his quotations from de Salazar, de M. Oswald etc. about the Virgin? Are they not startling and unusual?<sup>27</sup>

In his reply, Russell explained how he, too, could not accept 'those words and phrases which imply a *share in the redemption*' (emphasis in original).<sup>28</sup> The writings of Alphonsus were a significant aid to Newman when he was looking towards the Roman Catholic Church 'from the outside'. That these insights remained with him is confirmed by his exchange with Pusey when Newman was 'on the inside' of the Catholic Church. Alphonsus helped Newman to appreciate devotional practices to the Virgin, but obviously not every one of them. Newman, like Alphonsus before him, was careful not to stray from the centrality of the Redeeming Christ in the considerations on Marian devotion.

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>27</sup> NEWMAN, *Letters and Diaries*, Vol. XXII, 117, Newman to C. Russell, 4<sup>th</sup> December 1865.

<sup>28</sup> NEWMAN, *Letters and Diaries*, Vol. XXII, 117, C. Russell to Newman, 6<sup>th</sup> December 1865.

## PART TWO: CONSIDERATIONS ON TRUTH AND EQUIVOCATION

When Charles Kingsley (1819-1875) published a pamphlet *What then does Dr. Newman mean?* in 1864, it was a literary sensation, more because of the social-religious significance of the author than any outstanding merit of the work.<sup>29</sup> The Pamphlet is historically important because it was the immediate stimulus for Newman in publishing the *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*. This is the context in which Newman's second important contact with the writings of Saint Alphonsus occurred.

2.1. – *What Kingsley wrote that annoyed Newman*

Parts of Kingsley's pamphlet are vitriolic *ad hominem* assertions<sup>30</sup> though there is a core accusation that buttresses the work.

Truth, for its own sake, had never been a virtue for the Roman clergy. Father Newman informs us that it need not, and on the whole, ought not to be.<sup>31</sup>

Kingsley's allegation is that Newman subscribes to a version of the truth that exists only to benefit the Roman Catholic Church. He accepts Newman's *bona fide* about the importance of truth:<sup>32</sup> however, this counts for nothing when the cause is the advancement of the Roman Catholic religion:

What he (Newman) has persuaded himself to believe about Saint Walburga's oil, Saint Sturme's nose, Saint Januarius' blood,

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<sup>29</sup> Reverend Charles Kingsley (1819-1875) was an Anglican priest, social reformer and novelist. He was appointed Chaplain to Queen Victoria in 1859, as Regius Professor of History in the University of Cambridge a year later, and from 1861 was a private Tutor to the Prince of Wales.

<sup>30</sup> Kingsley, though often socially progressive, tended to be racist in his attitudes to Catholics in general and Irish ones in particular. In an 1860 letter to his wife he describes the Irish as 'white chimpanzees'. He acknowledged that Newman was an intelligent Englishman who had, unfortunately, allowed his acute mind to be sullied by contact with Roman Catholic priests and the wild Irish.

<sup>31</sup> Charles KINGSLEY, "What then does Dr. Newman mean?" *A reply to a pamphlet lately published by Dr. Newman*, Macmillan, London 1864, 2. Hereafter, KINGSLEY, *A Reply*.

<sup>32</sup> KINGSLEY, *A Reply*, 23

and the winking Madonna's eyes ... Simple credulity, the child of skepticism ... He has divided the truth so thoroughly that really there is very little of it left.<sup>33</sup>

The implication of playing loose with the truth stung Newman. From his Church of England days, Newman was familiar with the accusation by Protestants that Roman Catholic clergy (particularly Jesuits) were capable of verbal subterfuges to protect their own interests. Newman knew the writings on mental reservation by Robert Southwell SJ (c. 1561-1595) and Henry Garnet SJ (1555-1606) defending their right to bring the sacraments to recusant Catholics, while refusing to acknowledge where and how they had done this. The question was not an academic one for them: when arrested, interrogated and tortured, Southwell and Garnet practiced mental reservation not to save themselves – their execution was a forgone conclusion – but to protect their fellow Catholics.<sup>34</sup> The implication that he, too, was now to be counted among the untrustworthy upholders of mental reservation did not sit easily with Newman.

## 2.2. – *Kingsley's references to Alphonsus and Newman's response*

One of Kingsley's lines of argument against Newman was that he had taken his post-conversion theory of truth-telling from Saint Alphonsus:

... now that Dr. Newman has become ... a convert to the economic view of St. Alfonso de Liguori and his compeers, I am henceforth in doubt and fear, as much as an honest man can be, concerning every word Dr. Newman may write. How can I tell that I will not be the dupe of some cunning equivocation, one of three kinds laid down as permissible by the blessed Alfonso de Liguori and his pupils even when confirmed with an oath because 'then we do not deceive our neighbour but allow him to deceive himself'.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Excerpts taken from KINGSLEY, *A Reply*, 23-28.

<sup>34</sup> The references to the histories of Southwell and Garnet are standard in presentations on the history of mental reservations. Confer <http://www.liquisearch.com/mentalisrestrictio>, consulted April 11th 2017.

<sup>35</sup> KINGSLEY, *A Reply*, 25-26.

Kingsley finds it hard to credit that such an educated person as Newman could be so misled:

I hope that he, educated as an English gentleman and an Oxford scholar, is at variance with the notions formally allowed by the most popular and influential Doctor of his Church.<sup>36</sup>

In reply, Newman is direct:

St. Alfonso Liguori then, it cannot be denied, lays down that an equivocation (that is, a play upon words, in which one sense is taken by the speaker, and another sense intended by him for the hearer) is allowable, if there is a just cause, and may even be confirmed by an oath. I will give my opinion on this as plainly as any Protestant can wish: and therefore I avow at once in this department of morality, much as I admire the high points of the Italian character, I like the English rule of conduct better: but, in saying so, I am not, as will shortly be seen, saying anything disrespectful to St. Alfonso, who was a lover of truth, and whose intercession I trust I shall not lose, though, on the matter under consideration, I follow other guidance in preference to his.<sup>37</sup>

Two questions flow from this. Did Newman understand the position of Alphonsus correctly? What is the difference between the 'English rule of conduct' and 'the Italian character'?

While Newman does not give an exegetical examination of the Alphonsian text,<sup>38</sup> it is clear that he was familiar with it and understood its import. Newman was not a systematic theologian, and he felt especially uncomfortable in dealing with moral theology. To validate that he understood Alphonsus correctly, he sought advice from a moral theologian whom he had known for some time, John Maguire.<sup>39</sup> The letter says much about New-

<sup>36</sup> KINGSLEY, *A Reply*, 28.

<sup>37</sup> NEWMAN, *Apologia*, 273.

<sup>38</sup> The text of Alphonsus considered by Newman is: LIGORIO, Sancti Alphonsi Mariae de, *Theologia Moralis*, cura et studio Leonardi Gaudé, ex Typografia Vaticana, Rome 1905, Vol. 1, Liber 3, Tract. 2, dubium 1V, Hereafter LIGORIO, *Theologia Moralis*. Newman's reference (Lib. 4 Tr. 2) would be correct in the editions of Alphonsus available in his time, such as *Theologia Moralis S. Alphonsi de Liguori*, curavit M. Heilig, Adrian le Clère, Paris 1852. which could have been the one used by Newman.

<sup>39</sup> Maguire (1801-1865) was a Professor at St. Edmunds, Ware and had

man's sensitivity, his anxiety not to damage the reputation of Alphonsus, and the conspiratorial world in which the debate took place. I quote part of a long letter:

I am telling no one at all that I am writing to you ... may I ask your assistance in answering the difficult question about equivocation? St. Alfonso says (Theol. Mor. Lib. 4. Tr. 2) that *ex iusta causa certum et commune* (m.n. italics in original) est apud omnes quod licite est uti aequivocatione'. Now to what does the certum et commune lead one? ... Your answers to these questions will throw light on the whole subject ... would you let me, with no one knowing it but the printer, send you the slips of this part?<sup>40</sup>

The eight questions posed by Newman to Maguire are a reprise of cases given by Alphonsus. He puts the main issues (what does equivocation mean, can a lie be ever lawful, can mental reservations be absolved) as practical issues of the day. The background to Newman's questions include a discussion on how *aequivocatio* should be translated in English: 'equivocation' carried an odious meaning in the English language, and casuists were harshly treated even before they presented their case.<sup>41</sup> In Newman's use of St. Alphonsus there is, consequently, an in-built tension at the start. 'Equivocation', in general English usage, meant that one could hardly be treated seriously on questions of truth: 'aequivocatio', for Alphonsus is the major approved author for moral theology within the church of the time. The concern for Newman, however, was how *binding* was the teaching of Alphonsus on the particular question of equivocation and mental reservation. Maguire calmed Newman's qualms, caught as he was between a rock and a hard place: English usage of 'equivocation' in public meant one thing, casuist resolution of cases involving *aequivocatio* presumed theological categories not known in the public forum:

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known Newman for nearly 30 years.

<sup>40</sup> NEWMAN, *Letters and Diaries*, Vol. XXI, Newman to Maguire, 18<sup>th</sup> May 1864, 109.

<sup>41</sup> Maguire reminded Newman of what he had said in a discussion at the beginning of 'On consulting the faithful in matters of Doctrine' in *The Rambler*, July 1859, 202.

I cannot withhold myself from saying that you will have done many of the clergy a great service by disturbing a drowsy unreflecting acquiescence in certain dicta and by bringing to the standard of right and truth the authority of works which for some years past have been exalted unduly, and with injurious consequences.<sup>42</sup>

Newman was never particularly interested in academic theological debates: his attentiveness to theological questions was personal, though always within a respect for ecclesial authority. These two levels converge in an explicit way in Newman's consideration of the *authority* of Alphonsus:

It would answer no purpose, and I would be departing from the line of writing that I have been observing all along, if I entered into any formal discussion on this question (m.n. Alphonsus and equivocation): what I shall do here, as I have done in the foregoing pages, is to give my own testimony on the matter in question, and there to leave it.<sup>43</sup>

Newman felt free to differ with Alphonsus on a particular question, but he was anxious not to undermine church authority/approval by so doing.

On the second question, the difference between English and Italian conduct and character, Newman accepted that these were noticeable though, on the question of equivocation, lies and mental reservations, the English tradition had some 'Italian' exponents, such as Taylor, Milton, Paley and Johnston: 'men of different schools of thought, distinctly say that, under extraordinary circumstances, it is allowable to tell a lie'.<sup>44</sup> The nonacceptance by Newman of the views of Alphonsus on this question was not English bias against Italians, but a matter of principle.

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<sup>42</sup> NEWMAN, *Letters and Diaries*, Vol. XXI, 110, Maguire to Newman, 20<sup>th</sup> June 1864. The letter refers to a public exchange where Newman was complimented for his honesty in helping clergy think questions through rather than show a supine attitude to presumed authorities.

<sup>43</sup> NEWMAN, *Apologia*, 271.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

### 2.3. – Newman on the authority of Alphonsus in moral theology

From his first serious contact with his writings in the 1840s, Newman retained a lifelong admiration for the person, sanctity and learning of Alphonsus. Commenting on the legal case lost by Alphonsus which so dramatically changed his life-direction, Newman writes in near-lyrical tones about the saint's personal honesty and integrity.<sup>45</sup> The steps in Newman's argument whereby he allows freedom of opinion on some views of Alphonsus is penned with the care of an author who does not wish to offend a person for whom he had affection.

Central to Newman's presentation is a detailed analysis of the Sacred Penitentiary's response to a question posed by the Archbishop of Besancon '*De auctoritate B. Alphonsi de Ligorio in re morali*' in July 1831.<sup>46</sup>

It is supposed by Protestants that, because St. Alfonso's writings have had such a high commendation bestowed on them by authority, therefore, they have been invested with a quasi-infallibility. This has arisen in good measure from Protestants not knowing the force of theological terms.<sup>47</sup>

Using the theological notes of gradation, Newman structures his argument carefully. The Roman document is a legal one ('*nihil censura dignum*') and should be interpreted 'with due regard to the mind of the Holy See concerning the approbation of the writings of the servants of God *ad effectum canonizationis*'.<sup>48</sup> Alphonsus was proclaimed *Beatus* in 1816 and Roman decrees of a legal nature should not be interpreted loosely. No doubt, some admirers of Alphonsus were extending the legal decision of the Sacred Penitentiary in a wider sense, but not Newman.

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<sup>45</sup> NEWMAN, *Apologia*, 277.

<sup>46</sup> H. DENZINGER, *Enchiridion Symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, edizione bilingue a cura di P. Hünermann, EDB, Bologna 1991, 2725-2727.

<sup>47</sup> NEWMAN, *Apologia*, 352.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 352.

It can never be said that a doctrine of a servant of God is *approved* by the Holy See, but at most it can[only] be said that it is not disproved (non reprobatum) ... It is therefore clear that the approbation of the works of the Holy Bishop touches not the truth of every proposition, adds nothing to them, nor even gives to them by consequences a degree of intrinsic probability ...<sup>49</sup>

Having explained the theological weight of *censura*, Newman adds a telling remark, quoting the Roman Document itself, that anyone who follows other opinions of approved authors are not 'to be reprehended'<sup>50</sup>. If Rome did not impose the views of Alphonsus as obligatory, then neither would Newman. This is his position on the authority of Alphonsus, and it allows him to add comments on casuistry, a science Newman did not much admire.

The text of Alphonsus referred to by Newman<sup>51</sup> is predominantly casuistic. More than twenty cases that involve amphibology, mental restriction, equivocation in swearing oaths, giving witness in court, confirming contracts are discussed in the variety of human situations typical of an Alphonsian text. Newman was not at ease in discussing them:

Casuistry is a noble science, but it is not one to which I am led, neither by abilities nor by my turn of mind. Independently, then, of the difficulties of the subject, and the necessity before forming an opinion ... I am very unwilling to say a word here on Lying and Equivocation. But I consider myself bound to speak: and therefore in this strait, I can do nothing better, even for my own relief, than submit myself to the judgment of the Church, and to the consent, so far as in this matter there be a consent, of the Schola Theologorum.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 353.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 354.

<sup>51</sup> The text referred to by Newman is listed in footnote 38. Alphonsus discusses other aspects of the questions in different sections of the *Theologia Moralis* (for instance: Liber 111, Tract. 11, dubium V '*quae et quanta sit obligatio juramenti promissorii*', and Cap. II, dubium IV '*an in juramento liceat uti aequivocatione*'). Newman was more concerned about the public perception of how 'equivocation' was used in the English language than in presentation of a complex debate in the manuals.

<sup>52</sup> NEWMAN, *Apologia*, 355.

2.4. – Newman, Alphonsus and the theological tradition on equivocation and lies

The differences between Alphonsus and Newman on the question of equivocation, mental reservation and lies, represent differing theological schools of thought. Implied in the interpretation of what Alphonsus allows are standard manual moral categories (material and formal, just cause, right to silence) that can help ‘define’ a lie and ‘justify’ the circumstances in which something which appears to be a lie or an equivocation may not, in fact, be so. Newman does discuss these moral categories.<sup>53</sup> More important are the theological categories within which truth-telling emerged in the Church and which explains why Alphonsus and Newman have two different conventions to rely on.

Both Alphonsus and Newman were aware of the *disciplina arcani* in the early Church which allowed for prudent silence when questioned, inappropriately, about one’s faith.<sup>54</sup> Newman wrote extensively on this in his early work *The Arians of the Fourth Century* (1833) and the fact that he later nuances his views on the *disciplina arcani* is a reflection of the differing theological traditions on truth telling in the catholic tradition. Could the *disciplina arcani*, used imprudently, lead to double-standards on the issue of truth-telling? Newman, by the time he was engaging with the Alphonsian text, thought so:

It may be said that this principle (m.n. disciplina arcani), true in itself, yet is dangerous, because it admits of an easy abuse, and carries men away into what becomes insincerity and cunning. This is undeniable: to do evil that good may come, to consider that the means, whatever they are, justify the end, to sacrifice to expedience, unscrupulousness, recklessness, are grave offences ... it is the abuse of a rule which nature suggests to everyone. Everyone looks out for the ‘mollia tempora fandi’ and for ‘mollia verba’ too.<sup>55</sup>

The historical development of catholic theology on truth-telling has two broad strands, reflecting the dilemma hinted at

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<sup>53</sup> For instance, in the *Apologia*, 269-282.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 343.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 345

by Newman. The Greek Fathers taught that, when there was a *justa causa*, an untruth need not be a lie. Saint Augustine, though hesitantly, came to the view that there can be no just cause for telling an untruth.<sup>56</sup> Newman is more Augustinian in his theology of truth, Alphonsus is nearer to the tradition of the Greek Fathers. It is, essentially, a difference of theological preferences. Newman understood theology as a science that was educated and nourished *preachers*, Alphonsus concentrated on theology as the science that prepared *sacramental practitioners*. Surely, this oversimplifies the matter, but the contrast may help understand why Newman rejected Alphonsus on the theory of equivocation, yet respected the man as a theologian. There is no one obligatory school of theology. Alphonsus wrote on cases of equivocation with confessors in mind: Newman was concerned with the clarity needed by preachers in a culture far removed from the Kingdom of Naples.

Given his choice, Alphonsus was at ease with the distinctions that are a hallmark of casuistry. Newman was not, and he preferred to base himself on *The Catechism of the Council of Trent*, which he quotes at length.<sup>57</sup> The Catechism is direct, and Newman concludes this section by saying “these are the principles on which I have acted before I was a Catholic: these are the principles which, I trust, will be my stay and guide to the end’.<sup>58</sup> Alphonsus was writing for priests who needed guidance *to apply principles*. The difference of theological approach does not decide who was ‘more right’. Which views one follows now will depend, not on the authority of either Alphonsus or Newman, but on how one assesses the issues of truth raised in a ‘post-truth’ society where alternative facts and fake news are proliferating. Alphonsus stresses the theological tradition where ‘truth before God’ is what counts: Newman underlines the tradition where truth is proposed as the cornerstone for the just order of a

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<sup>56</sup> Theologically, the question centers on the intention of the person speaking. Confer Joseph Mausbach, ‘The question of intention with reference to oaths and promises’, <http://www.3nd.edu/maritain/jmc/etext/cmt04b.htm>, consulted April 11th 2017.

<sup>57</sup> NEWMAN, *Apologia*, 280.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 282.

civil society. It is hardly an either-or question, and which tradition one prefers will depend on one's starting point for the theological discourse of morality.

### *Conclusion*

In the years immediately preceding his entry to the Catholic Church, Newman was strengthened in his resolve by reading some texts of Alphonsus. These did not clarify doctrinal questions for him (on such questions, Newman relied on the Fathers) but they helped him understand that Marian devotional practices allowed by the Church were not, when properly celebrated, detrimental to Catholic faith. One can note, from his conversion in 1845, a growing warmth in Newman for the person of Saint Alphonsus. He visited his tomb, prayed through his intercession in troubled times, and used his example to encourage people who felt misunderstood during life's struggles.<sup>59</sup> There was a reserve, typical of Newman, in this admiration: when the Provincial of the Redemptorists in England, Coffin, suggested that Newman buy more of the works of Alphonsus, Newman did not see the need.<sup>60</sup> The admiration for Alphonsus extended to the Congregation founded by him, though Newman did not spend long considering the thought that he, too, might become a Redemptorist, though he did take time to read the Redemptorist rule during his time as a student at Propaganda in 1847.<sup>61</sup> The combination of appreciation for the theological merit of Alphonsus and 'loyalty' to his person was put to the test in Newman's

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<sup>59</sup> Giovanni VELOCCI, *Newman. Il coraggio della verità*, LEV, Vaticano 2000, 199-214.

<sup>60</sup> NEWMAN, *Letters and Diaries*, Vol. XVI, 61, Newman to R. A. Coffin, 28<sup>th</sup> February 1854. Robert Aston Coffin (1819-1885) knew Newman in his Oxford days, became a convert to Catholicism like him, later joined the Redemptorists of whom he became Provincial and was Bishop of Southwark from 1882 until his death.

<sup>61</sup> NEWMAN, *Letters and Diaries*, Vol. XII, 10, Newman to R. Stanton, 10<sup>th</sup> January 1847. During his time in Rome as a student, Newman was considering his post-ordination vocation, and made some contact with a number of Orders and Congregations. The reference in this letter is a cursory one, without comment, that Newman had made arrangements to be shown the Rule of the Redemptorists.

later life when the debate on equivocation and mental reservation was centre-stage. There is a delicacy in how Newman handles his differences with Alphonsus on this question, reflected in some of his correspondence.<sup>62</sup> Both encounters bring to the forefront the theological significance of Alphonsus for the Church in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>63</sup> and show how Newman's personal style fostered a saner theology during the same period, marked as it was by an Ultramontanism within church politics and disputes between theological schools.<sup>64</sup>

Newman, in his later life, expresses his appreciation of Alphonsus in the balanced way typical of the man:

S. Alfonso wrote his practical directions for the Neapolitans, whom he knew and whom «we do not know. I trust you may safely say, as you so considerably propose to do, that I never accused St. Alfonso of laxity in his moral teaching».<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> NEWMAN, *Letters and Diaries*, Vol. XX111, 10, Newman to Emily Bowles, 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1867. Vol. XV111, 559, Newman to Sir John Acton, 31<sup>st</sup> December 1858.

<sup>63</sup> Beatified in 1831, canonised in 1839 and proclaimed a Doctor of the Church in 1871, the rise of Alphonsus to prominence in church life contrasts with the suspicion with which he was regarded in the years after his death in 1787.

<sup>64</sup> Just as in his own lifetime, some Dominicans continued to portray Alphonsus as a laxist during the period of Newman. He refuted such suggestions: NEWMAN, *Letters and Diaries*, Vol. X1, 303, Newman to J. D. Galgairns, 31<sup>st</sup> December 1846. This letter is written from the Collegio di Propaganda and shows how the maneuvers to have Alphonsus disparaged in Roman circles were of interest to Newman, though he did not share the general attacks on the moral theology of Alphonsus. VELOCCHI, *Newman. Il coraggio della verità*, summarises the contributions, pages 210-213.

<sup>65</sup> NEWMAN, *Letters and Diaries*, Vol. XX111 383, Newman to David Jones S.J., 12<sup>th</sup> December 1867.

SUMMARY

This article summarises two issues on which Cardinal Newman discussed the views of Saint Alphonsus. The first of these was during the latter part of Newman's conversion to Roman Catholicism (1842-1845) and centers on the theological doctrine and devotion to Mary the Mother of God. Newman appreciated that the doctrine of Alphonsus on Mary was thoroughly consistent with Patristic thought, and that the devotional practices appropriate to Italy need not necessarily be those practiced in England. The second issue, in the years following 1864, was the theological explanation of equivocation. Newman does not follow Alphonsus on this, but is able to demonstrate that this does not lessen his esteem for Alphonsus. What the research shows is the importance of Alphonsus as an ecclesial authority in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the legitimacy of different opinions on debated questions.

SUMARIO

Este artículo resume dos cuestiones en las que el cardenal Newman discutió las opiniones de san Alfonso. La primera fue durante la última parte de la conversión de Newman al catolicismo (1842-45) y se centra en la doctrina teológica y la devoción a María, Madre de Dios. Newman apreció que la doctrina de san Alfonso sobre María era absolutamente consistente con el pensamiento patrístico, y que las prácticas devocionales propias de Italia no tenían por qué ser las mismas que se practicaban en Inglaterra. La segunda cuestión, en los años siguientes a 1864, fue la explicación teológica del equívoco. Newman no sigue a san Alfonso en esto, pero puede demostrar que esto no disminuye su estima de san Alfonso. Lo que muestra la investigación es la importancia de san Alfonso como autoridad eclesial en el siglo XIX y la legitimidad de diferentes opiniones sobre las cuestiones debatidas.