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An Odd Couple? A First Glance at Chesterton and Newman

I. Introduction

WHY ARE CHESTERTON and Newman so linked in the minds of people who know anything about either of the two figures? On the surface, a few similarities are obvious. Both came from what might be called middle-class families. The two seemed natural leaders, even as children—Newman forming his Spy Club and Chesterton, with E. C. Bentley, the famous Junior Debating Club. They were also omnivorous readers who devoured much of the classics. Though Newman's tutors claimed Newman was only a moderately good classicist, he was later regarded as quite a skilled composer of Latin. Similarly, though Chesterton's study of Latin under the famous A. E. Housman ended at the suggestion of none other than Housman, Chesterton's friend, that wild Dominican distributist, Fr. Vincent McNabb, would compare him to Thomas More: the two men, said McNabb, were cockneys whose lack of technical knowledge of the classical languages was more than made up for by an instinctual knowledge of what the words *should* mean.¹ Both Chesterton and Newman were Englishmen to the core who, nevertheless, found in

the Roman Catholic Church—to the dismay and horror of many an Englishman—the “pillar and foundation of the truth” spoken of by St. Paul in his first letter to Timothy. Neither were the two shy about writing controversially about religion either before or after their voyages across the Tiber. Both also excelled in a variety of fields not limited to religious controversy. Much of Newman’s poetry is still well regarded, his “*Dream of Gerontius*” likely to live on forever, not least in the musical setting given it by Edward Elgar. His hymn “Lead kindly, light” seems similarly enshrined both in the literary canons and the hymnbooks. Chesterton’s poetry, still being discovered in scribbles on the backs of envelopes or published in obscure newspapers and journals, also has its gems. In an interview late in his career, Graham Greene, upon being asked what poetry he read, responded that he still went back again and again to “The Ballad of the White Horse.”² And of course, Newman and Chesterton both found only a modest success as novelists.

But any list of their similarities is nearly overwhelmed by the flood of differences that one encounters in a first look. They seem truly an odd couple. Chesterton was manifestly fat. The driver responsible for him when he lived in South Bend, Indiana, and lectured at Notre Dame in 1930 recalled later that he thought Chesterton nearer to four hundred pounds than three hundred. Newman was thin. Chesterton went to a trade school and entered the world of journalism and publishing. Newman was an Oxonian quite comfortable in the common room of Oriel College. Though neither Chesterton nor Newman had any offspring, Chesterton was a married layman while Newman was a celibate cleric. In fact, Newman recorded that from the age of seventeen he was convinced that his own particular vocation would demand freedom from the demands of a wife and family, however much they were attractive to him.³ Like that earlier Oxford reformer John Wesley, Newman encouraged many of his own friends to remain single—and sometimes showed disappointment when they did not. Chesterton, on the other hand, included in his youthful notebook lines containing his hopes for a young boy:

Sunlight in a child's hair
It is like the kiss of Christ upon all children
I blessed the child: and hoped the blessing
 would go with him
And never leave him;
And turn first into a toy, and then into a game
 And then into a friend.
And as he grew up, into friends
And then into a woman.⁴

Newman played the violin well and had a mind for music and mathematics. Chesterton loved to sing or hum, but his friends could rarely detect any actual tune in the mix. And his habits with money seem to reveal a sort of pure ignorance about mathematics. Newman was the consummate Victorian correspondent whose letters and diaries would fill thirty-one volumes. Chesterton wrote a ballade ending with the line, “I write no letters to the men I love” (Ward, 440). Chesterton wrote hymns to wine and beer while the fastidious young Newman wrote home to his father from Oxford, “I really think, if anyone should ask me what qualifications were necessary for Trinity College, I should say there was only one,—Drink, drink, drink.”⁵ Newman was somewhat fussy, and if not a clothes-horse, at least a neat dresser. Chesterton once reported to breakfast with two ties on and explained that this showed he paid “too much attention” to his attire (Ward, 534). Chesterton paid little attention to his health and died at sixty-two; Newman, perpetually convinced that he was nearing his end, expired at the age of eighty-nine.

With the size (no pun intended) and diversity of these two magnificent lives, one could play this little game for hours with much amusement and even a bit of enlightenment. But to stay thus on the surface of these two lives would also be a betrayal. Ultimately, though it seems as if a side-by-side comparison reveals more difference than similarity, a plunge into the depths of their lives, thought, and work reveals why it is that the mention of one so often evokes the other. In the end, the differences so easily and amusingly re-

counted can be summed up under the title of “style,” or perhaps “temperament.” What they share is what I want to call “vision.”

II. Style

Perhaps it is the images that fix in our mind the surface notions of the two. The physically great Chesterton immediately winning over the crowd at the Oxford Union Society with his opening declaration, “I am not a cat burglar” (Ward, 559). Or perhaps it is Chesterton declining to sit in a friend’s wicker chair for fear he might “modify” it (*Ibid.*, 266). We all have our favorites. Mine is the time the Chestertons are on vacation and H. G. Wells comes to invite them to dinner. As they are talking, Wells’s son Frank quietly leaves the room and Wells, looking around worriedly, exclaims, “Where’s Frank? Good God, Gilbert, you’re sitting on him” (*ibid.*, 377). Whether Chesterton is making the joke himself or merely on the receiving end, there is an ability to imitate the angels and take himself, so to speak, lightly. This quality is truly hard to imagine in Newman. Famously sensitive to slights and feeling snubbed, Newman often felt himself to be a perennial “scapegoat.”⁶ His long-standing misunderstandings with Edward Hawkins, Richard Whateley, Fr. Faber, Manning, and many others are so well known as to make him seem a prickly character, despite his many deeply held intimacies. While Chesterton is rarely autobiographical in a direct way (and some have complained that the only thing missing in *The Autobiography of G. K. Chesterton* is the man himself), Newman was self-conscious in a way that might seem to some eccentric or even unbalanced. We can see Newman’s own awareness of the difficulty of one who has this sort of temperament in one of his Anglican sermons: “Let a man consider . . . how difficult it is to define things, how impracticable it is to convey to another any complicated or any deep or refined feeling, how inconsistent and how self contradictory his own feelings seem when put into words, how he subjects himself in consequence to misunderstanding, or ridicule, or triumphant criticism.”⁷ Newman was

a man who felt himself alone but who nevertheless was trying to make himself clear to others—to speak, in the phrase of St. Francis de Sales that later became Newman’s cardinalatial motto, heart to heart (*cor ad cor loquitur*). The aloneness and self-consciousness were most certainly lodged in Newman’s nature. Despite his Spy Club activities, the later testimony of his school chums includes memories of a boy sitting on the side of games, reading or daydreaming. In his later years these traits were accentuated by the fact that, whether he was paranoid or not, there actually were conspiracies against him, coming as often as not from inside the Catholic Church as outside. Manning attempted to keep Newman’s influence at a minimum by keeping him from the episcopacy. Chesterton himself wrote of Newman,

He had far more quarrels after he had gone over to Rome. But, though he had far more quarrels, he had far fewer compromises: and he was of that temper which is tortured more by compromise than by quarrel. He was a man at once of abnormal energy and abnormal sensibility: nobody without that combination could have written the *Apologia*. If he sometimes seemed to skin his enemies alive, it was because he himself lacked a skin.⁸

But this lack of a skin, if natural, was something accentuated by his own spiritual journey.

Somewhat like Chesterton, Newman’s own upbringing was not particularly devout (though more so than the genial Unitarianism of the Chestertons). But at age fifteen, under the influence of the Reverend Walter Mayers, an Anglican of evangelical Calvinist views, Newman experienced a conversion to what he called “a definite creed” by which he “received into my intellect impressions of dogma.” This conversion experience included a belief that it would last into eternal glory, a sort of immediate confirmation of his own predestination. Of this belief Newman wrote, “I retained it till the age of twenty-one, when it gradually faded away; but I believe that

it had some influence on my opinions, in the direction of those childish imaginations which I have already mentioned, viz. in confirming me in my mistrust of the reality of material phenomena, and making me rest in the thought of two and two only absolute and luminously self-evident beings, myself and my Creator.”⁹ Newman—in the midst of the strange ferment and self-consciousness of adolescence that, we might note, included a period of attraction to the atheism of Hume and Thomas Paine—was introduced to a form of Christianity that seemed to encourage in him his loneliness and distrust of the world outside his mind, including, to some extent, other people. Salvation for the Evangelical Protestant is a matter between the individual soul and God. For the Evangelical the church is an association of believers whose salvation is independent of each other and from the body of the church. This is not to say that Evangelicalism, either in Newman’s day or ours, is simply individualistic. But it is to say that the relationship between faith and the body of believers, and even body and spirit, is distinctly different (Mark Noll labels it “nearly Gnostic.”)¹⁰ Evangelical Protestantism, and Protestantism in general, can roughly be said to follow St. Augustine alone (if only in part; B. B. Warfield famously said that the Protestant Reformation was the triumph of Augustine’s soteriology over his ecclesiology). St. Augustine’s was a Christianity always colored by Platonism. And this view of the world emphasizes the brokenness and unreality of a world that has been broken by the first parents—facts, we might note, that on their positive side point to a better, truer, more real world beyond. Louis Bouyer and Louis Dupré have described how Newman was marked all his life with a certain Platonism, an emphasis on the reality that is beyond and other than this world.¹¹ This accounts in some ways for his lack of enthusiasm for secular politics. He could seem rather cavalier as he dismissed the political and social reformers of his day: “human nature wants recasting, but Lord Brougham is all for tinkering it.”¹² Newman spent little time tinkering.

Chesterton’s youth was also marked by the questioning of mate-

rial phenomena that Newman experienced. But Chesterton came to this mistrust of the material world in a time in which the Sovereignty of a good God was far from his mind. By the time of his art school days he had, in fact, left behind belief in God:

At a very early age I had thought my way back to thought itself. It is a very dreadful thing to do; for it may lead to thinking that there is nothing but thought. At this time I did not very clearly distinguish between dreaming and waking; not only as a mood, but as a metaphysical doubt, I felt as if everything might be a dream . . . I was simply carrying the scepticism of my time as far as it would go. And I soon found it would go a great deal further than most of the sceptics went. While dull atheists came and explained to me that there was nothing but matter, I listened with a sort of calm horror of detachment, suspecting there was nothing but mind.¹³

Chesterton had all the adolescent ferment, doubt, and atheism that the pre-conversion Newman possessed, but he had far more resources to pursue them. Whereas Newman's family were not devout, as a child he was at least made to know and love the Bible and his catechism. Chesterton's family were at most Unitarians (though he was baptized in the local Anglican parish). And whereas Newman's early education came, for the most part, from practicing (even Evangelical) Anglicans, Chesterton remembered being taught at St. Paul's (Milton's old school) by agnostics, "except one or two eccentric clergymen."¹⁴ Chesterton's time at Slade Art School was no better. He was surrounded by students who followed the path of nihilism, not merely the abstract intellectual sort but in its logical conclusions in the moral sphere. Chesterton himself was to dabble in spiritualism and ponder suicide.

With these limited resources Chesterton was forced, in a way that Newman was not, to deal with real atheism and the despair that comes of it. As he recounted, "with little help from philosophy and no real help from religion, I invented a rudimentary and makeshift

mystical theory of my own.”¹⁵ That theory took the world as positive in a way that Newman’s first Christianity did not. Chesterton believed “that even mere existence, reduced to its primary limits, was extraordinary enough to be exciting. Anything was magnificent as compared to nothing. Even if the very daylight were a dream, it was a day-dream; it was not a nightmare.”¹⁶ Chesterton’s own approach to reality, even before Christian conversion, had already bypassed the darker sides of Christian Platonism. Whereas for the newly Evangelical Newman this world was a world of illusion and potentially a snare, the newly pagan Chesterton could see this world as still infused with a beneficent divinity, whatever that was. When he found himself attracted to Christianity in a serious way, it was to the Anglo-Catholicism of his bride-to-be Frances; the only competition in Chesterton’s mind was the Catholicism of friends like Belloc. In either case, the door by which Chesterton entered Christianity was one that smelled of incense and through which the ringing of bells could be heard. It was a Christianity that appealed to the senses and was given in a body of people. Chesterton’s Christianity was instinctively and immediately more Aristotelian. This accounts in part for his enthusiastic interest in politics.

Newman would have his mind changed on the issues of the Protestant Reformation as decided by Evangelicals. He would eventually come to believe in a visible Church, the reality of sacraments as objective vehicles of grace, and most importantly the reality of Christ’s bodily and spiritual presence in the Eucharist. But this was a long time coming through a long shedding of his early beliefs and prejudices. The final step was his ceasing to believe he could be a catholic Christian outside the Roman Catholic Church. But this move to a religion that valued the communal and tangible was ironically what separated him from those to whom he had become closest. For an Englishman, especially a cleric of the Church of England, to become a Catholic in the 1840s was a kind of social suicide. Newman was instantly accused by Anglicans of having already been a Roman Catholic in disguise acting for the subversion of their com-

munion. But his lot was no better as a Catholic. Chesterton wrote of Newman, “Being in fact a sublime example of the fact that the Faith can grow in any soil, and that a clear mind can see the Church from any angle, he yet impressed many of his new co-religionists as almost too strange a stranger to be immediately a friend.”¹⁷ Newman was suspected by Catholics of bringing Anglicanism into the Catholic Church because of his uniquely English, non-Scholastic, way of understanding the faith. Manning groused of his introduction of the “old Anglican, patristic, literary Oxford tone” into Roman borders.¹⁸

Chesterton had no such troubles. He was not attacked by Anglicans because he had never been identified with the Church of England in the way that Newman had. (Remember that *Orthodoxy*, though written as an Anglican, points pretty clearly to the Roman Catholic Church in its evocation of “those countries in Europe which are still influenced by priests” where “Catholic doctrine and discipline may be walls; but they are the walls of a playground”).¹⁹ He was not attacked by Catholics because his own particular imaginative and non-Scholastic understanding of Catholicism had already been tried by fire in the person of John Henry Newman many years before. Chesterton noted that due to Newman’s own particular situation of thus being misunderstood on all sides honed him in a way that most men, Chesterton included, are not.²⁰

Do not misunderstand me. The differences are not absolute, but merely shadings of emphasis in the two men. Chesterton’s writing is deeply personal. His biographer Maisie Ward noted that in Chesterton’s novels “the characters are chiefly energies through whose lips Gilbert argues with Gilbert until some conclusion is reached” (Ward, 177). And most readers feel from his writing, in a most peculiar way, that they know the man, whether they agree with him or not. Neither is Newman simply defensive. Chesterton wrote that Newman’s *Lectures on the Present Position of Catholics*, a response to the round of no-popery that rose up in the early 1850s, were “practically preached against a raging mob” and yet, said Chesterton, there

is “something grander than humour, there is fun, in the very first lecture about the British Constitution as explained to a meeting of Russians.”²¹ The Newman of fun is too little remarked upon. And if Chesterton is Aristotelian and this-worldly, he is also Thomistic in that his love of this life acknowledged the life beyond that simultaneously lights up the present and, in comparison, renders it strangely pale. Shortly before his death he wrote, “I have never lost the sense that this was my real life; the real beginning of what should have been a more real life; a lost experience in the land of the living.”²² Similarly, Newman the Christian Platonist could write that “the Atonement of Christ is not a thing at a distance, or like the sun standing over against us and separated off from us, but . . . we are surrounded by an atmosphere and are in a medium through which his warmth and light flow in upon us from every side.”²³ In this atmosphere Newman, though less interested in politics, was personally responsible for countless ministries of both corporal and spiritual mercy. And his educational philosophy was such that a writer like Brad Miner in his recent *The Compleat Gentleman* can refer to Newman as a “neo-Aristotelian.”²⁴

In their differences we yet see their similarities. The sensitive Newman, “a naked man, with a naked sword,” could flay his opponents while the jovial Chesterton could answer one of H. G. Wells’s half-hour harangues about the “bloody hand of Christianity” with a simple “Yes, you do have a point.”²⁵ Newman could argue with nineteenth-century rationalists and emphasize the world beyond that breaks through to our shadowy existence, while Chesterton could propose to the pseudomystics of the twentieth century a world ablaze with meaning. If, because of nature, personal history, and circumstance, the two men could not share a temperament, that is to say a general mood, they shared what was vastly more important—a vision.

III. Similarities of Vision

The figure most commonly compared to Chesterton is, of course, St. Thomas Aquinas. Chesterton's constant exhortations to look at the work and the students of the common doctor echo all through his writing, not least his great book on the Dumb Ox himself. It is easy to see why this is the case if we play the game with which we began. Both were known for their immense girth. Both were intense listeners who nevertheless sometimes seemed distracted. Both wrote millions of words but little in the way of correspondence. Both died relatively young. Both were relatively insensitive to slights. And of course, both shared the Aristotelian mindset, instinctively approaching reality first with the seen and then moving to the unseen. But despite these details, especially the details regarding a common temperament, Chesterton's vision still looks inescapably like Newman's. Indeed, in his article "Was Chesterton a Peeping Thomist?" Ralph McInerny, no mean student of St. Thomas, ends up referring nearly as much to Newman as he does to Thomas. McInerny writes that Chesterton and Thomas "saw faith and authority as the ambience in which reason can best achieve its end."²⁶ One could say the same of Newman. Newman saw naked reason as, well, naked. It needed a sphere of activity on which to act, first principles, and authority. So it was for Chesterton. McInerny observes that many contemporary professional philosophers are fine with a few first principles and a bit of logic, but consider rational activity so narrowly that it leaves out almost the whole of human activity, including their own.²⁷

Orthodoxy is especially filled with this broader perspective on what is rational. We see it especially in the chapter "Authority and the Adventurer" where Chesterton responds to the question of why he believes in Christianity:

I can only answer, "For the same reason that an intelligent agnostic disbelieves in Christianity." I believe in it quite ra-

tionally upon the evidence. But the evidence in my case, as in that of an intelligent agnostic, is not really in this or that alleged demonstration; it is in an enormous accumulation of small but unanimous facts. The secularist is not to be blamed because his objections to Christianity are miscellaneous and even scrappy; it is precisely such scrappy evidence that does convince the mind. I mean that a man may well be less convinced of a philosophy from four books, than from one book, one battle, one landscape, and one old friend. The very fact that the things are of different kinds increases the importance of the fact that they all point to one conclusion.²⁸

This summary of Chesterton's does justice quite well to Newman's own understanding of how humans ordinarily operate as what we might call instant or automatic philosophers. The sphere of rational activity is not limited to a few mathematical or scientific modes and methods, but includes the type of thinking that all humans do. In fact Chesterton's passage is reminiscent of a remarkable passage from one of Newman's *University Sermons* titled "Implicit and Explicit Reason," which Chesterton may have read:

One fact may suffice for a whole theory; one principle may create and sustain a system; one minute token is a clue to a large discovery. The mind ranges to and fro, and spreads out, and advances forward with a quickness which has become a proverb, and a subtlety and versatility which baffle investigation. It passes on from point to point, gaining one by some indication; another on a probability; then availing itself of an association; then falling back on some received law; next seizing on testimony; then committing itself to some popular impression, or some inward instinct, or some obscure memory; and thus it makes progress not unlike a clamberer on a steep cliff, who by quick eye, prompt hand, and firm foot, ascends how he knows not himself, by personal endowments and by practice, rather than by rule, leaving no track behind him, and unable to teach another.²⁹

Reasoning is not simply a matter of doing mathematical proofs or even of arguing in general. The broad reasoning behavior Newman describes so movingly as “implicit reason” (later to be labeled the “illative sense”) is what we all do because that is the kind of rational animal we are. For both Chesterton and Newman the fact that someone cannot articulate a proof with steps does not make him irrational. As Newman says, “Clearness in argument certainly is not indispensable to reasoning well. Accuracy in stating doctrines or principles is not essential to acting upon them.”³⁰ “Paper logic,” in Newman’s somewhat derisive term, is only the trail left behind the climber. And this trail only hints at how the climber actually made his way. (It’s not certain whether Chesterton or Newman knew that that arch-paper logician Descartes actually credited the Virgin Mary with giving him his great insights in dreams and made a pilgrimage to the Holy House of Loreto in thanks.³¹ If not, it certainly would have delighted them.)

Of course this exploration of what true rationality meant for the two began by noting that rationality needs both faith and authority to guide it to its ends. But passages like the ones above from both Chesterton and Newman have given some the impression that reason is not merely an action on the part of a subject but is actually subjective. That the climber cannot teach anyone exactly how he did it has meant to some that “the path” doesn’t really exist, only many paths. This explains why both Newman and Chesterton were occasionally accused of skepticism or theological modernism by their opponents.

Whether Chesterton was a “liberal” in the political sense can be debated till our Lord’s return, but to understand him as a liberal in the theological sense is misguided. Liberalism in religion was the lifelong enemy of both Newman and Chesterton. For Newman it is important to remember, from the passage previously quoted, that his first conversion was both creedal and dogmatic. What he received from faith to make reason work were precisely those first, dogmatic principles about God and the world. And that aspect of his

first conversion stayed with him for the remainder of his life. In fact, his *biglieto* speech, given upon receiving the red hat of the cardinal, treated his lifelong opposition to liberalism in the theological sense. He described this enemy:

Liberalism in religion is the doctrine that there is no positive truth in religion, but that one creed is as good as another, and this is the teaching which is gaining substance and force daily. It is inconsistent with any recognition of any religion as true. It teaches that all are to be tolerated, for all are matters of opinion. Revealed religion is not a truth, but a sentiment and a taste; not an objective fact, not miraculous; and it is the right of each individual to make it say just what strikes his fancy.³²

Newman goes on to emphasize that this liberalism nevertheless emphasizes certain virtues like justice, truthfulness, sobriety, and self-command. But this is precisely why it so dangerous an enemy. In believing that one can simply jump to the virtues while cutting up the dogmatic first principles as firewood, the liberal is unwittingly cutting apart the planks on which he has managed to reach the virtues in the first place. And once the dogmas are cut, the man and his virtues will sink. Chesterton diagnosed the same problem:

When the journalist says for the thousandth time, “Living religion is not in dull and dusty dogmas, etc.” we must stop him with a sort of shout and say, “There—you go wrong at the very start.” If he would condescend to ask what the dogmas are, he would find out that it is precisely the dogmas that are living, that are inspiring, that are intellectually interesting. Zeal and charity and unction are admirable as flowers and fruit; but if you are really interested in the living principle you must be interested in the root or the seed.³³

In other words, dogma is man’s best friend. It is the only friend the liberal has who will in the end support him in his intentions

of sobriety and justice and self-command. As Chesterton says elsewhere, the liberals don't consider all political ideas as equally leading to concrete goods: for them, "it is only the paths to heaven and hell of which it is enough to say that they are paved with good intentions."³⁴ Good intentions need principles, but even if one has the correct first principles, that is the correct faith, as a member of the fallen human race, one needs the guidance of an authority that is not one's own. This is a key element of Newman's approach to Catholic Christianity as it is glimpsed in the *Essay on Development*. After sketching out his case for the rationality of the Christian revelation, Newman notes that a revelation that points to both a doctrine and a practice also logically points to "the appointment in that scheme of an external authority to decide upon them, thereby separating them from the mass of mere human speculation, extravagance, corruption, and error, in and out of which they grow."³⁵ It is not just the fact that one has any old Christian authority, but it is, in Chesterton's words, "thinking a certain authority reliable; which is entirely reasonable."³⁶ The authority must be reliable. Or, in theological language, it must be infallible. The belief that reliable or infallible authority was given to each believer in an absolute way because of the Spirit's indwelling does not make much sense given the evident historical disagreements between Christians. Nor does the Protestant alternative of Scripture alone (in any of the versions of this idea offered) as a final authority cohere, because it cannot speak authoritatively concerning its own interpretation. Chesterton put the point amusingly when he wrote that "the Puritans thought they were simplifying things by appealing to what they called the plain words of Scripture; but as a fact they were complicating things by bringing in half a hundred cranky sects and crazy suggestions."³⁷ And more bluntly, "you cannot put a book in the witness-chair and ask it what it really means."³⁸ No, the external authority that was reliable had to be a living voice, one that could draw on those first principles we know as dogmas and pluck from them wisdom for the moment. That authority had to have competence at drawing out

the good and rejecting the evil, both present in abundance in all the cranky sects and crazy suggestions. That external authority had to be a Church with a capital “C.”

Newman and Chesterton both came to identify this Church as the Roman Catholic Church. Their reasons for doing so are both negative and positive. Both came to see that the Anglican Church was not capable or willing to claim such a voice of authority, or even to claim authority at all in most cases. While Newman was, because of his deep reading in the Eastern Fathers, always closer theologically to the Orthodox Churches than he was to Latin Catholics, he never believed that their nationalistic ecclesiology matched the objectivity and the unity that he saw in the New Testament Church. Chesterton, with his robust sense of the Church as the “Thing” certainly agreed. The Catholic Church was capable and willing to claim unity and authority. And in looking at its history, they saw this body’s record at sifting from the ideas of pagans and heretics, condemning false understandings and developing the true understanding of the Gospel mysteries, as the evidence that the Catholic Church was who she claimed to be. In the *Essay on Development* Newman marveled at the Catholic Church’s ability to borrow the good from pagan Gnostics and Platonists, heretical Montanists, Novatians, and Manichees and still remain pure. He wrote, “She alone has succeeded in thus rejecting evil without sacrificing the good, and in holding together in one things which in all other schools are incompatible.”³⁹ Chesterton put it this way: “Remember that the Church went in specifically for dangerous ideas; she was a lion tamer. The idea of birth through a Holy Spirit, of the death of a divine being, of the forgiveness of sins, or the fulfillment of prophecies, are ideas which, any one can see, need but a touch to turn them into something blasphemous or ferocious.”⁴⁰ In this Church of the lion tamer, that is to say, in Christ’s body, are being gathered all things so that they can be returned to God the Father. And when this wild ride is over, in him will be all in all.

Conclusion

Newman and Chesterton's vision is one of a rationality set free and escaping the tiny circles of rationality in which others spin their wheels. The paradox, if you will, is that that freedom is at the same time a slavery, or in Chesterton's words, thinking a certain authority, not me, reliable. It is a higher slavery that makes the freedoms of this world come to life, and not, as they often do, become slaveries of their own. It is not a circle at all, but, as Chesterton writes, a cross, whose ends are open so that they can extend and reach every corner of the universe. This higher slavery consists of faith and authority. Faith, not in faith itself, as the theological liberals have curiously advocated, but objective faith in God who made himself known in Christ and by the Spirit makes all things new. Authority, not as mere power, but in its original sense of *auctoritas*, authorship, a knowledge of what the story is all about, because of a relation to the author of the great drama. This authority both Newman and Chesterton identified as the Catholic Church, the Bride from whom the divine Bridegroom withholds nothing. Newman and Chesterton both embrace this vision of reality in a way that is humble, for as they understand, to say that they know the truth is not to say that they comprehend it, but that it comprehends them. Newman wrote of Scripture in the *Essay* that "it cannot, as it were, be mapped, or its contents catalogued; but after all our diligence, to the end of our lives and to the end of the Church, it must be an unexplored and unsubdued land, with heights and valleys, forests and streams, on the right and left of our path and close about us, full of concealed wonders and choice treasures."⁴¹ For Newman, authority was not a door closing on mystery, but a key that could alone unlock it.

But Newman's *Apologia* contains also the curious claim that "from the time that I became a Catholic, of course I have no further history of my religious opinions to narrate."⁴² Newman goes on to explain that he does not mean that he has given up thinking or even thinking theologically (remember that *The Grammar of Assent* had not yet been

written), but that he has found peace in Catholic faith. Embracing the faith was the ridding of anxiety; it was “like coming into port after a rough sea; and my happiness on that score remains to this day without any interruption.”⁴³ Newman, surrounded by a nineteenth-century rationalism that claimed to be the home of the human spirit, had seen so many around him, including his brother Francis (who went from Evangelical Anglicanism to an early version of premillennial dispensationalism to a vague skepticism), wander far afield for peace. He was to emphasize the aspect of homecoming. Like Augustine he exclaimed often that he had been restless until finding his rest in the body of the Lord. Chesterton, surrounded by twentieth-century spiritualists, immoralists, and race-mystics who claimed to be daring adventurers but never left the small mental circles of the zeitgeist, would emphasize something different, namely the excitement of homecoming, the discovery of a land in which one really could discover new things. If, as he said, the “revolutionaries are always reactionaries” and the “individual faddists are not fickle, but fixed,” the Catholic enters the doors of the Church and finds that it “is much larger inside than outside.”⁴⁴ It is the “trysting place of all the truths in the world,” the banquet that never runs out.⁴⁵

The thin Newman and the fat Chesterton both feasted upon the common vision of the heavenly banquet. They knew and wrote that it alone fills the eater but never loses its savor. This is why both have become themselves a feast for Christians of all sorts, even if not all have come to the same conclusions regarding their vision of the Roman Catholic Church. The Orthodox Bishop Kallistos Ware sprinkles Newman throughout his writings, while the literary biographer Joseph Pearce often tells the story of obtaining an interview with Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and finding the Ignatius Press *Collected Chesterton* sitting prominently on a shelf in the novelist’s front room. Similarly, the Evangelical apologist Ravi Zacharias often recommends Chesterton volumes in his Veritas Forum presentations, while James Sire made Newman one of his central intellectual models in his Intervarsity Press-published *Habits of the Mind: Intellectual*

Life as a Christian Calling. Chesterton and Newman's Catholic particularity is obviously no barrier on either side of the ecclesiastical fence to seeing them in all the wonder of their similarities and differences. In view of the vision to which they call attention, the oddness of this couple becomes a wonderful contrast between two gems in the crown of the King.

Notes

1. Maisie Ward, *Gilbert Keith Chesterton* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1943), 579 (hereafter cited in text as Ward).
2. Joseph Pearce, *Literary Converts* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2000), 420.
3. John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1918), 19–20.
4. G. K. Chesterton, *Poetry, Collected Works*, vol. 9, ed. Aidan Mackey (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994), 30.
5. John Henry Newman, *Letters and Diaries*, 31 vols., ed. Charles Stephen Dessain et al., vols. 1–6 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978–84); vols 11–22 (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1961–72); vols. 23–31 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973–77), 1:29.
6. Ian Ker, *John Henry Newman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 488.
7. John Henry Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, 8 vols. (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1896), 4:291.
8. G. K. Chesterton, *The Victorian Age in Literature* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963), 22.
9. Newman, *Apologia*, 5.
10. Mark Noll, "The Evangelical Mind Today," *First Things* 146 (October 2004): 34.
11. Louis Bouyer, "Newman et le Platonisme de l'âme Anglaise," *Revue de Philosophie* VI (1936): 285–305; Louis Dupré, "Newman and the Neoplatonic Tradition in England" in Ian Ker and Terrence Merrigan, eds., *Newman and the Word* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000): 137–55.
12. John Henry Newman, *Discussions and Arguments on Various Subjects* (Longmans, Green and Co., 1897), 277.
13. G. K. Chesterton, *Autobiography*, in *Collected Works*, vol. 16 (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), 95.
14. Ibid., 140.
15. Chesterton, *Autobiography*, 96.
16. Ibid., 96.
17. G. K. Chesterton, "Why Newman Was Misunderstood," *Chesterton Review* 16, no. 2 (May 1990): 5.
18. J. Derek Holmes, *More Roman than Rome: English Catholicism in the Nineteenth Century* (London : Burns and Oates, 1978), 127.

19. G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 145.
20. Chesterton, "Why Newman Was Misunderstood," 6.
21. Chesterton, *Victorian Age*, 22.
22. Chesterton, *Autobiography*, 58.
23. Newman, *Letters and Diaries*, 12:224.
24. Brad Miner, *The Compleat Gentleman: The Modern Man's Guide to Chivalry* (Dallas: Spence, 2004), 79; although see Joshua Hochschild, "The Re-Imagined Aristotelianism of John Henry Newman," for what kind of Aristotelian Newman was (*Modern Age* 45, no. 4 [Fall 2003]:333–42).
25. Chesterton, *Victorian Age*, 22; Michael Coren, *The Invisible Man: The Life and Liberties of H.G.Wells* (New York: Athenaeum, 1993), 80.
26. Ralph McInerny, "Was Chesterton a Peeping Thomist?" in *A Chesterton Celebration at the University of Notre Dame*, ed. Rufus William Rauch (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 9.
27. *Ibid.*, 15.
28. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 143.
29. John Henry Newman, *University Sermons: Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford between A.D. 1826 and 1843*, 3rd edition of 1872, with introduction by Mary Katherine Tillman (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 256–57.
30. *Ibid.*, 259.
31. Ralph McInerny, *The Very Rich Hours of Jacques Maritain* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 123.
32. John Henry Newman, *My Campaign in Ireland*, part 1, ed. William Neville (privately printed, 1896), 393–400.
33. G. K. Chesterton, *The Thing*, in *Collected Works*, vol. 3 (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1990), 300.
34. G. K. Chesterton, *The Well and the Shallows*, in *Collected Works*, vol. 3, 435.
35. John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, 6th edition of 1878, with foreword by Ian Ker (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 78.
36. Chesterton, *The Thing*, 289.
37. *Ibid.*, 308.
38. Chesterton, *Why I Am a Catholic*, in *Twelve Modern Apostles and Their Creeds* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1968), 131.
39. Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, 365.
40. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 100.
41. Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, 71.
42. Newman, *Apologia*, 238.
43. *Ibid.*
44. G. K. Chesterton, *Where All Roads Lead*, in *Collected Works*, vol. 3, 43, 42; G. K. Chesterton, *The Catholic Church and Conversion*, in *Collected Works*, vol. 3, 94.
45. Chesterton, *Why I Am a Catholic*, 132.