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The Respect of Virgin Mary
in Blessed John Henry Newman's teaching

Thesis of the Doctoral dissertation



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The Anglican Church of Newman's age was torn into a lot of tiny parts which were separated from each other. Practices, prayers, theological background were different at these communities. Newman belonged to a part of the Anglican Church which insisted on tradition. This was a community where said word really had weight, where truth supported with arguments was acceptable for everybody. In the 19th century, spread of liberalism became an increasingly great danger. It was necessary to take steps against this. A new movement was founded by a few professors of the University of Oxford.

The main objective of this movement was to set the Anglican Church's teaching on the basis of the Bible by studying the Apostolic Fathers, to re-interpret the Articles, and to try to return to the fundament of the Anglican Church. These efforts found a big echo through the university, and they reached a great mass of people through the essays.

Written many essays, Newman was one of the movement's significant persons. The works of Newman and his friends gave a new impetus to the Anglican Church.

Tradition was important for Newman and his friends. There were some English families, which respected traditions, ancestry and old principles. Newman belonged to a community like this, so when studying his statements, it shall be considered that his conviction and reliability, as well as every single sentence played an important role in his work. Newman always put his speech on paper and read it out. Newman's statements did not simply serve as a call of attention, but they represented a testimony about an internal experienced truth.

I would like to introduce Newman's conversion through the respect of Mary. This question was a problem for the convert during his whole lifetime. Newman already wrote about his childhood experiences in connection with Mary in the apologia and then he justified the equity of the Holy Virgin's respect in detail in his famous Mary sermon in 1832. In addition to this sermon, he recalled Mary's person again and again in his other statements, and he always spoke about her with the highest respect.

After his conversion, Newman wrote a letter about Mary's respect to his friend Pusey who was a professor of theology regarding the teaching of the Apostolic Fathers. In this letter, based on the works of the Apostolic Fathers and the Bible, Newman tried to explain his decision in favour of the standpoint of the Catholic Church regarding the respect of Mary and in the same time, he also tried to collect the reasons of his conversion.

In the 19th century, there were a lot of changes in the doctrines regarding the Holy Virgin. The Immaculate Conception was formulated as a dogma by the Church officially in 1854. This teaching was accepted by Newman already. The 1st Council of Vatican also dealt with Mary's person and the teaching of Assumption, but the political situation, and the short duration of the council did not make the constitution of this teaching possible. In Newman's writings, Mary was not only a simple device in God's hand, but she played an important role in the redemption with her personality and conscious decision. Actually, Newman set up a complete mariology with his work.

In my dissertation, I would like to point out what consisted in the background of Newman's conversion, and how his dislike of the Catholic Church and of its teaching turned to an opinion which accepts the Catholic Church.

However, a problem has come up that it was not simple to determine the Anglican Church's teaching in certain questions, since some Anglican communities accepted some teachings which were also acknowledged by the Catholic Church as its own, while other Anglican communities stood near to the Reformed Church. Since the Anglican Church did not constitute any dogmas, therefore the Articles and the sermons served as a basis for the creation of the independent Anglican theology. Experiments were made later to put the Church's teaching on renewed fundamentals, like the Westminster creed, but with little success. The work of Newman and his friends was an experiment, in which efforts have been made to return to the fundamentals of the Anglican Church again. The Movement dealt with the Articles and the sermons in detail, which served as a basis of the Anglican Church's teaching. One of these determining Articles was the teaching about "Via Media."

Based on this, the Anglican community tried to define its teaching between the Evangelic and Catholic Church.

Visibly, the reformed theology had a large effect on Anglican communities already in the 16th century and sometimes they represented an even more extreme standpoint, than those of the Reformed Church. Newman and the movement would have preferred to lead back the Anglican Church to its fundamentals, in which it was a help that the Anglican Church confessed the teaching of entailment. However, statements have been found in the teaching of the Apostolic Fathers regarding the respect of saints and the Holy Virgin which helped the movement's members to reconstitute the Anglican Church's teaching and to reconsider and accept the formerly dislikeable teaching represented by the Catholic Church.

The Anglican community defined itself already in the articles, but also in other theological writings to be on the half way between the Catholic Church and the Evangelical Church. This definition raised many questions as well. Later, the reformed community had a greater effect on the Anglican community. Thus, the Anglican community moved gradually to the direction of the reformed creed. Further questions were also raised, namely the situation of the honour of Mary and the saints. Both Luther and Calvin respected Mary, which was based on the teaching of the Council of Ephesus. Later, the followers of the reformers drew away from this basis and the respect of Mary and the saints ceased to exist. This process was promoted by the fact that prayers and liturgies being in connection with Mary's respect have been made within the Catholic Church which placed Mary's person to the same level with God and before Christ respectively.

The teaching of the Anglican Church did neither deny the saints' nor the Holy Virgin's respect, however, due to the effect of reformation, and mainly to the fight against the Catholics, the honour of saints was pushed into the background.

A devotional picture, rosary or even a candle was often enough to punish Christians or sending the whole family into exile. Although the saints' respect remained in the liturgical calendar, but the saints' cult and its theological background have been lost.

The Protestant communities accepted the Nicea creed, which acknowledged the "community of saints". At the same time, no respect was given to saints, their pictures were removed from the churches, the places of pilgrimage built mainly in honour of the Holy Virgin were demolished and the sculptures, pictures were removed from the churches. The same can also be observed at Anglican communities but the saints' respect partly remained. The Movement's aim was to create the theological background of the saints' respect and disseminate the respect of Anglican saints.

Here, those saints were mainly considered, who lived in England, but they were not accepted by the Catholic Church as a saint and later those, who lived a holy life after seceding from the Catholic Church, so the Anglican community set them up as an example for the believers.

In addition to the respect of saints, Newman taught the saints' intervention. It means that he respected certain saints not only for their good example given by their lives for the practice of the faith, but because they, who are already at God, may intervene for those who ask for their help. The principle of intervention for others were also accepted by the Protestant churches, as St. Paul said, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and fill up on my

part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church; “ however, the Protestant church denied that dead persons, who did not rise yet, could intervene for others. Newman recognised the importance of the teaching of intervention during the examination of the Apostolic Fathers' works, and confirmed that saints, who are at God, have a special contact with us and we may ask for their intervention.

A continuous development can be seen in Newman's respect of Mary. Regarding his juvenile activity, Mary's person was introduced to the Anglican community with some kind of excuses, as Mary's person and respect was always brought into connection with the teaching of the Catholic Church.

Newman did not know the Catholics' conception about Mary and he thought, that Mary's respect was much more excessive, than it really existed.

In addition, he tried to modify the conception of the Anglican community and help in recognizing the correct way of Mary's respect.

Apart from studying the Apostolic Fathers teaching, the Articles and sermons which dealt with the respect of saints and pictures in detail, made a good basis to better recognize the principles of the saints' honour and constitute the standpoint of the Anglican community in connection with Mary. Regarding the respect of the saints and pictures, the sermons gave a detailed description about their role in the Old and New Testament. However, in the first centuries of Christianity, this question had to be examined again in the Greek environment, as other points of view came up which were not included in the Bible. The Apostolic Fathers' writings were quoted by the author of the sermons, which described the mistakes relating to the respect of saints and the correct way of respect in detail.

This question came into the foreground again and again during the church history, however the author of the sermons did not consider for important to deal with this. In connection with Mary's respect, these statements and writings are well useable.

Newman did this when dealing with the theological background of the saints' respect in two tracts.

Some titles came into the foreground which made Mary's person more understandable. At the same time, these expressions were also in relation with each other.

The first expression which we examined was Jesus bearing the titles of the Verb of God and the Son of God also included in the Holy Scripture. He confirmed that Mary's mission was supernatural.

In further examinations, we met the expression of “theotokos” which is not included in the Holy Scripture, but the Apostolic Fathers use it at many places in their works. This expression helped the early church to better understand Jesus’ humanity, but its false interpretation carried the danger that Mary may have been worshipped as God and placed beside or even above Jesus by the theology.

However, the more accurate understanding of this question was helped by the fact that these criticisms were made firstly not in the 19th century, but already in the Apostolic Fathers' age, so instead of giving new answers for these questions, it was only necessary to apply the Apostolic Fathers' teaching. This teaching was important, because the Anglican Church accepted the Apostolic Fathers' writings and the universal councils of the first four centuries, like the Council of Ephesus, which honoured Mary with this title. Apart from the Catholic Church, the orthodox churches also respected Mary as the Mother of God and this opinion strongly supported the resolution of the Anglican Church to honour Mary with the title of theotokos.

The name “Eternal Virgin” derived from this title, was interpreted by the church in two ways. One of them related to virginity, as a state of life, while the other interpretation was innocence. The Apostolic Fathers went into detail about this teaching and confirmed that Mary was preserved by the Almighty not only from the original sin, but from all personal sins too.