

# “Apostolical Tradition” and the Defence of Dogma:

## An Episode in the Anglo-Catholic Revival\*

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### I

EARLY IN THE YEAR 1836 that astute politician and erudite amateur theologian, the second Viscount Melbourne, was abruptly plunged into the perilous waters of professional theology. The premature death on January 19 of Edward Burton, Regius Professor of Divinity in the University of Oxford, left vacant the premier theological chair in the United Church of England and Ireland. The Prime Minister acted with remarkable expedition, and on February 20 it was officially announced that (as had already been rumoured) the new Regius Professor was to be Dr. Hampden, Principal of St. Mary Hall and Professor of Moral Philosophy.

Melbourne might well have expected his choice to meet with general approval. Renn Dickson Hampden, still not quite forty-three years old, was already a distinguished man. Graduating with a “double first” in 1814, he had promptly been elected to a fellowship at Oriel (his own college). After his marriage and ordination he had served five curacies in fairly rapid succession and had then devoted himself to research and writing in London, returning to Oxford in 1829. In 1832, the year in which he delivered his impressively documented Bampton Lectures on *The Scholastic Philosophy considered in its Relation to Christian Theology*,<sup>1</sup> he became a tutor at Oriel. Appointed to the headship of St. Mary Hall in 1833, he was elected to the Moral Philosophy chair the following year. When Melbourne’s inquiring glance fell upon him, he was unquestionably a leading figure in his university.

Unhappily for everyone’s peace of mind, the Prime Minister’s eye had not probed quite deeply enough. Hampden’s prominence at Oxford did not reflect any widespread confidence in his doctrine or his judgment, and the first whisper of his new appointment caused a tremendous disturbance. A letter written on February 13 by James Mozley, then a young student of theology and later one of Hampden’s most eminent successors, provides a clear (if somewhat partisan) account of the first rumblings of rebellion.<sup>2</sup>

\*Part of a study prepared for the Theological Commission on Tradition and Traditions, World Council of Churches (Faith and Order Commission).

1. The third edition (Hereford and London, 1848) is the most useful.

2. *Letters of the Rev. J. B. Mozley, D.D.* (London: Rivingtons, 1885), pp. 50ff.

To begin with, there was a great scurry of planning around dinner tables and in common rooms.

We have [Mozley wrote] been all in a commotion for the last week, owing to the report of Hampden's appointment. The news first came out on Monday morning, and of course excited great astonishment. There was no doubt, however, about the fact; Shuttleworth had got it from the person himself; not that any official communication had come down; but that intimation had been given that it was to be so. Accordingly people began to bestir themselves immediately. That very day Pusey gave a dinner to the leaders of orthodoxy in the University, at which Newman, and Hook of Coventry, who happened to be up as select preacher, and others were present. A petition was agreed to, to be signed by the resident Masters, expressive of their condemnation of Hampden's tenets, and their entire want of confidence in him. However, a dinner-party was not to settle everything; and a public meeting was the next thing to think of. So the next day (Tuesday) was occupied in stirring up people. It was also thought requisite that an *exposé* of Hampden should be got up, especially as the length, stupidity, and obscurity of his Bampton Lectures, in which his chief enormities were contained, had deterred most people from ever looking into them; so that he might have maintained the Mohammedan system in them, for anything the majority of persons knew about the matter.

The proposed *exposé*, assigned to Newman, was quickly produced, despite some initial confusion.

The instant the mistake was discovered Newman commenced work again; and proceeded in a most miraculous way—day and night I may almost say, for he sat up reading and writing the whole of Wednesday night. He expected the thing to be printed and ready to send off to town yesterday afternoon, but it was not finished even last night. I suppose that by this time it is; and some copies already sent to town to the Archbishop and others.

The projected meeting was also quickly arranged. To judge from Mozley's narrative, it must have had its lively moments.

On Wednesday morning a meeting was held in Corpus common room, attended by about forty, a petition was read and agreed on, and by that evening had received forty-five signatures. The next evening, Thursday, it was sent up to town with seventy-three signatures altogether; which is a large number; half of the resident masters; especially considering how many would be prevented by *personal* considerations from signing it. It is astonishing how strongly men feel on the subject. Greswell of Corpus said he should consider himself guilty of an act of apostasy from the Christian religion if he did not protest against the appointment. Dr. Gilbert of Brasenose declared the same thing. Dr. Cardwell, Principal of St. Alban Hall was going about for two or three days quite furiously, with a passage from Hampden's moral philosophy lectures in his pocket, and declaring that he ought to be turned out of professorship and hall, and house and home, and everything.

Before long the Heads of Houses began to contemplate a definite initiative of their own.

They had positively a meeting on Thursday to deliberate whether a petition in due form from the whole University in its corporate capacity should not be presented against Dr. Hampden's appointment, he himself being present at the meeting.

The last few words give some hint of what poor Hampden had to endure as the storm gathered force. In the close-knit society of unreformed Oxford he could hardly escape repeated embarrassment. On one occasion (we are told) he appeared unexpectedly at a meeting of Heads of Houses who were discussing his case. Dean Gaisford of Christ Church tried to cover the ensuing silence by rising and poking the fire. Dr. Shuttleworth, the Warden of New College, promptly took his cue. "Hampden," he inquired brightly, "will you go on now, or will you wait till it burns up?"<sup>3</sup> All things considered, it is not surprising that Hampden, reserved, sensitive, and rather humourless as he apparently was, should have found the situation so intolerable that he tried to withdraw his acceptance of the Divinity chair.

Melbourne, however, having made a considered decision in the first place, was not disposed to let either Oxford or Hampden off so easily. In the end the university could do no more than express its want of confidence in Hampden by excluding him from the board which appointed "select preachers" and from the commission of "six doctors" established by the statutes to examine charges of heresy. Meanwhile, on March 17, 1836, the new Regius Professor had delivered his inaugural lecture—a rather dignified appeal, it should be said, for a fair consideration of his teaching.<sup>4</sup> He was to occupy the Divinity chair until 1847, when amid renewed outcries he left it for the see of Hereford. By way of anticlimax we may note that his most conspicuous act in an episcopate of two decades was an attempt to get several younger men condemned for their theological vagaries.<sup>5</sup>

There may well have been more than one reason for the widespread and violent opposition to Hampden's appointment. One particular reason, however, is both the main concern of this study and the most conspicuous feature of the "Hampden Persecution"—namely, the fear that his teaching, if it gained a hearing, would subvert the accepted standards of Christian orthodoxy. As it happened, the leaders of the Oxford Movement, then nearing the peak of its influence in the place of its birth, were Hampden's most forceful and cogent critics on this score. Consequently, we may fittingly treat the theological attack on Hampden as essentially an episode in the story of the Anglo-Catholic Revival.

It must be admitted that the genuinely theological basis of the Tractarian campaign has not always been recognized. On the contrary, Newman and his friends have repeatedly been accused of acting for morally dubious reasons, personal or partisan. To some observers it has seemed quite obvious that the root of the trouble was disappointed ambition. By others it has been aggressively argued that Hampden's real and unforgivable offence

3. C. E. Mallett, *A History of the University of Oxford*, Vol. III (London: Longmans, 1927), p. 260.

4. R. D. Hampden, *Inaugural Lecture Read before the University of Oxford*, 2d ed. (London, 1836).

5. For a sprightly but unkind account of Hampden's part in the *Essays and Reviews* case, cf. G. Faber, *Jowett: A Portrait with Background* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), p. 250.

in Anglo-Catholic eyes was his plea for the admission of Dissenters to Oxford.<sup>6</sup> Neither charge, however, is more than superficially plausible. It is true that Pusey, Newman, and Keble all appeared on the list submitted to Melbourne by Archbishop Howley after Burton's death, and there is reason to suppose that they would have welcomed the appointment of one of their own number in preference to anyone holding such views as Hampden's.<sup>7</sup> It is also true that they opposed any dilution of the Anglicanism of Oxford, because of their strong conviction that a church, a definite creed, and an accepted pastoral relationship must play a crucial role in all true education. But these facts do not justify a charge of academic jealousy or sectarian exclusiveness against Hampden's opponents, especially when the evidence for their serious theological concern is so unambiguous.

We may indeed feel some qualms about the controversial methods employed by Newman in his *Elucidations of Dr. Hampden's Theological Statements*,<sup>8</sup> the *exposé* with which the Tractarian literary campaign opened. Leaving none of his victim's theological infelicities unnoticed and none of the unfortunate implications of his statements unexplored, Newman was often less than completely fair to Hampden's conscious intentions. Nevertheless, what the latter appeared to be saying in plain words was quite enough to inspire genuine and profound theological disagreement in minds committed to the Tractarian position. In fact, the central issue of the controversy was explicitly referred to by Newman himself as early as November 28, 1834—that is to say, long before the Divinity chair fell vacant—when he wrote to thank Hampden for sending him a copy of his *Observations on Religious Dissent*. "While," he said, "I respect the tone of piety in which the pamphlet is written, I feel an aversion to the principles it professes, as (in my opinion) legitimately tending to formal Socinianism."<sup>9</sup> The same note was to be repeatedly and loudly sounded throughout the dispute. If, however, the Anglo-Catholics were honestly convinced that Hampden's ideas, if logically developed, would undermine the whole structure of orthodox Christianity, we hardly need to look further for the explanation of their unyielding opposition to his promotion.

No doubt, even granted their sincerely religious concern, we can hardly expect to find that the men of the Oxford Movement did full justice to Hampden's aims and positive beliefs or that they dealt adequately with all the problems which his work more or less explicitly raised. We may well find ourselves wondering whether F. D. Maurice's misgivings, expressed in a letter to Julius Hare on February 27, 1836, were wholly baseless.

I should [Maurice wrote] be exceedingly puzzled how to act if I were now in Oxford and had a sufficiently prominent position to make action necessary.

6. Cf. Thomas Arnold, "The Oxford Malignants and Dr. Hampden," *Edinburgh Review*, 63 (April-July 1836), 225-39. (The title was supplied by the editor, but the tone of the article was quite in keeping with it.)

7. Cf. Newman's letters to Keble and Froude, in Anne Mozley (ed.) *Letters and Correspondence of John Henry Newman during His Life in the English Church* (New York: Longmans, 1911), Vol. II, pp. 143ff.

8. Oxford, 1836.

9. Mozley (ed.), *Letters and Correspondence of John Henry Newman*, Vol. II, p. 69.

Dr. Hampden, I think, was utterly unfit for the Divinity Chair, but whether newspaper controversies and denunciations of heresy may not do more harm to divinity than Lord Melbourne could ever do were he to select ten such men, must be surely a serious question. That Newman will prove him a heretic I do not doubt; the fear I should have is that he may convict himself by the same process, for this seems generally the hard fate of men who attack a onesided notion, that they give currency to the other half of it, which in the end proves equally mischievous.<sup>10</sup>

The trouble was that the eminent Tractarians really were in a "sufficiently prominent position to make action necessary." All things considered, they rose rather well to the occasion. At least they were perceptive enough to recognize a crucial theological problem and creative enough to work out a clear and consistent (even though incomplete) answer.

## II

We have already noted the gist of the Anglo-Catholic diagnosis of Hampden's theological condition. At the height of the controversy it was neatly summarized by one of the party's lesser lights, Henry Arthur Woodgate, Fellow of St. John's College, Oxford.

Dr. Hampden's whole view [he wrote] of the origin and nature of the doctrines of the Christian Church, and of the relation in which they stand to the Holy Scriptures, is radically wrong, and opposed to the opinion and practice of the Church in every age.<sup>11</sup>

In a word, for the Tractarians the crux of the Hampden case was the problem of "dogma," its character and its authority. Whatever could be said in Hampden's favour in other connexions, his views on this point were so essentially destructive that no compromise with them was conceivable.

The issue was bluntly stated by Newman in an article on "Apostolical Tradition," written some time before Hampden's appointment but published only in October 1836.<sup>12</sup> The immediate occasion of the article was a collection of letters entitled *The Brothers' Controversy*,<sup>13</sup> in which an Anglican clergyman, C. T. Longley (later Archbishop of Canterbury), and his brother-in-law, a layman of Unitarian leanings, discussed the historic Catholic dogmas and their relation to the Bible. Newman, however, thoroughly dissatisfied with Longley's somewhat hesitant vindication of creedal formulae, did not limit himself to comments on one particular book, but set out to elaborate a comprehensive theory of dogma. Eventually and inevitably, he came into direct conflict with Hampden.

Let us [he said] hear Dr. Hampden on this subject, a writer who is here introduced, not from any wish to come into collision with him, but because

10. F. Maurice (ed.), *The Life of Frederick Denison Maurice* (London: Macmillan, 1884), Vol. I, p. 191.

11. H. A. Woodgate, *A Letter to Viscount Melbourne*, 2d ed. (London, 1836), p. 18.

12. J. H. Newman, "Apostolical Tradition," *British Critic*, 20 (July-Oct. 1836), 166-99.

13. London, 1835.

it has fallen to his lot to state objections to Catholic Truth in a more distinct shape than they have been found in the works of Churchmen for some time.<sup>14</sup>

Coming from a man who disclaimed any desire to "come into collision" with Hampden, these words may seem rather aggressive, but Newman was persuaded that Hampden's writings fully justified them. As a clear and irrefutable piece of evidence he proceeded to quote a well-known passage from *Observations on Religious Dissent*. Hampden had been trying to lay bare the roots of disunity among Christians.

The real causes of separation [he had written] are to be found in that confusion of theological and moral truth with Religion, which is evidenced in the profession of different sects. Opinions on religious matters are regarded as identical with the objects of faith; and the zeal which belongs to dissentients in the latter, is transferred to the guiltless differences of fallible judgments. Whilst we agree in the canon of Scripture—in the very words, for the most part, from which we learn what are the objects of faith—we suffer disunion to spread among us, through the various interpretations suggested by our own reasonings on the admitted facts of Scripture. We introduce theories of the Divine being and attributes—theories of human nature and of the universe—principles drawn from the various branches of human philosophy—into the body itself of revealed wisdom. And we then proceed to contend for these unrevealed representations of the wisdom of God, as if it were that very wisdom as it stands forth confessed in his own living oracles. "The wisdom that is from above" is at once "pure" and "gentle." Surely it has no resemblance to that dogmatical and sententious wisdom which theological controversy has created.<sup>15</sup>

This statement is, in fact, an excellent summary of the theory that Hampden had spelled out in his Bampton Lectures. As it makes unmistakably plain, the conclusions he drew from his researches really did undermine the historic dogmas of Catholic Christianity. On the one hand, he spoke slightly of the *authority* of Christian dogmas; "fallible judgments" he called them, and "unrevealed representations of the wisdom of God." On the other hand—and in the end still more destructively—he criticized the *content* of Christian dogmas, describing them as "theories of the Divine being and attributes—theories of human nature and of the universe," and as such alien to the biblical message.

From his standpoint, as Hampden's opponents correctly argued, it would be hard to justify the Church of England's traditional reverence for the Nicene Creed, let alone its use of less august doctrinal formularies. Hampden's critics, however, may well seem to us, as we look back over the intervening century and a quarter, to have been so preoccupied with this difficulty that they missed the real merits of his thinking. Certainly there is more than a little in his ideas that speaks to our modern theological condition. If we reflect seriously, for instance, on the role of confessional

14. Newman, "Apostolical Tradition," p. 180.

15. R. D. Hampden, *Observations on Religious Dissent*, 2d ed. (London, 1834), pp. 7f.

systems, articulated in elaborate "scholastic" theologies, in the tragic fragmentation of Western Christendom, we shall hardly dismiss Hampden's diagnosis lightly. Again, as we see emerging from the rather confused historical argumentation of his Bamptons the thesis that the root principle of medieval scholasticism—namely, the more or less open and extensive employment as *ancilla theologiae* of an ontology inherited from pagan Greece—was already operative in the theologies of the Fathers and even in the definitions of the Ecumenical Councils, we may not unreasonably be impressed by his historical insight. Yet again, in the contrast that he draws between faith and philosophy, or, more specifically, between the positive and factual character of the biblical faith and the speculative world-views of the philosophers, we can hardly fail to find an interesting anticipation of a popular theme of modern "biblical theology." Hampden's style may have been turgid, his view of Scripture may have been pre-critical, and we may not be quite sure that he fully understood his own theory of dogma—but for all that it is tempting to see him as something of a prophet and his critics as mere stodgy conservatives, concerned purely and simply to maintain the ecclesiastical *status quo*.

Any such judgment would, however, be altogether too superficial, at any rate as far as the Anglo-Catholic opposition was concerned. The Tractarians themselves came fairly close to certain of Hampden's positions. His critique of a divisive confessionalism, for example, and his insistence on the distinctiveness and superior claims of the truth of revelation with respect to philosophical speculation, had significant parallels in contemporary Anglo-Catholic literature. In Hampden's case, however, these views were part and parcel of a sweeping repudiation of metaphysical theology as such, and here the Tractarians found themselves compelled to part company with him, for the simple reason that their basic conception of the nature of Christianity was radically different from his. For them there could be no authentic faith apart from the confession of supernatural truth, and no confession of supernatural truth that did not involve definite affirmations, authoritative in origin and metaphysical in substance. In short, for them Christian faith embodied a definite and essentially immutable view of the structure of reality. What Newman wrote thirty years later, in a statement of the principles that had guided him at the beginning of the Oxford Movement, was true, *mutatis mutandis*, of the entire school:

First was the principle of dogma: my battle was with liberalism; by liberalism I meant the anti-dogmatic principle and its developments. . . . From the age of fifteen, dogma has been the fundamental principle of my religion: I know no other religion; I cannot enter into the idea of any other sort of religion; religion, as a mere sentiment, is to me a dream and a mockery. As well can there be filial love without the fact of a father, as devotion without the fact of a Supreme Being. What I held in 1816, I held in 1833, and I hold in 1864. . . . Even when I was under Dr. Whately's influence, I had no temptation to be less zealous for the great dogmas of the faith, and at various times I used to resist such trains of thought on his part, as seemed to me (rightly or

wrongly) to obscure them. Such was the fundamental principle of the Movement of 1833.<sup>16</sup>

This basic religious conviction is the ultimate clue to the implacable Anglo-Catholic opposition to Hampden.

It should be added that Newman's reference to Whately's anti-dogmatic influence is important. In attacking Hampden, the Tractarians did not see themselves as campaigning against an isolated individual. On the contrary, their intense opposition can be understood only if we realize that Hampden appeared to them as one of a group of theological subversives whose teaching was steadily undermining the Church's powers of resistance to the godless "liberalism" of the day.

A preliminary list of suspects can easily be compiled from Tractarian writings. First after Hampden himself were two of his associates in the little circle of critical theologians commonly known as the "Noetics," whose spiritual home was the Oriel common room. To one of them, Richard Whately, Archbishop of Dublin from 1831 to 1863, Hampden may have owed his promotion, since Whately certainly urged his claims on Melbourne. To the other, Joseph Blanco White, an ex-Roman Catholic whose intellectual history was a long and losing battle with theological scepticism, he was widely believed to owe his dominant ideas. Next, and much less obviously connected with Hampden, came an even more strangely assorted pair—a Scottish lawyer and theological writer, Thomas Erskine of Linlathen, and an American Congregationalist minister and author of improving books for the young, Jacob Abbott. Finally, dimly discerned across the North Sea, but at least vaguely suspected as a focus of anti-dogmatic infection, stood the figure of Schleiermacher.<sup>17</sup>

Whatever one may think of their evaluation of the work of these men, Newman and his colleagues were certainly right in treating them as evidence of a widespread rejection of traditional dogmas as intellectually dubious and religiously irrelevant. Whately, for example, while his personal teaching (at least in his mature years) was substantially orthodox, was not much interested in dogmatic questions, and his anti-authoritarian and anti-metaphysical views, as Newman at least knew from his own experience, naturally fostered an anti-dogmatic outlook. Erskine, without formally denying the truth of the Trinity, wrote that, as revealed in Scripture, it enlightened our "moral ignorance of the Divine character" without doing anything to remove our "metaphysical ignorance of the Divine essence,"<sup>18</sup> and in the very act of making such a distinction expressed a severely restricted view of the scope of Christian doctrine. Blanco White, writing for his own edification but presumably recording what he was accustomed to say to his Oxford friends,

16. J. H. Newman, *Apologia pro Vita Sua* (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1956), p. 163.

17. On the last three named, cf. J. H. Newman, *Tract Seventy-Three: On the Introduction of Rationalistic Principles into Revealed Religion* (Oxford, 1835).

18. Thomas Erskine, *Remarks on the Internal Evidence for the Truth of Revealed Religion* (Edinburgh, 1820), pp. 96f.



explicitly and totally rejected the very possibility of Christian dogma, as traditionally conceived.

One of the most beneficial consequences [he said] of knowing *God in Christ*, is the exclusion which that view gives to all metaphysical notions of the Deity. The metaphysical definitions of God are false, contradictory—they are the true source of Atheism. . . . Let Metaphysics alone. Study the *Manifestation* of God to us in Christ; the man who is one with God, *striving, struggling* against evil; the living image of God, for a time, seemingly overcome by evil—then rising triumphant—then disappearing from the scene of his struggle, and allowing his enemy to sow *tares, &c.*, but not permitting him totally to regain the ground obtained by the Divine victory. . . . All this is intelligible—all this agrees with the appearances of nature. . . . Do you mean, says the Divine, to limit the power of God?—I mean no such thing. I only follow his *revelations*—the natural and the supernatural—as far as they lead me—and then stop, without attempting to draw conclusions as to the nature of God.<sup>19</sup>

From these instances alone it is clear that, as the Tractarians feared, a new spirit was stirring in Christendom, driving men to question the accepted certainties on which, through the centuries, Christian theology and piety had been built. In criticizing Hampden, the Anglo-Catholics were, as they rightly believed, defending one theological world against another.

### III

Confronted with the challenge of anti-dogmatic theology, the "Puseyites" took up once again the weapon—especially congenial to men who delighted to call themselves "Apostolicals"—of apostolicity. In 1833 they had met the threat of "National Apostasy" with a ringing reaffirmation of "Apostolical Succession." Now, facing what they regarded as the still greater and more insidious menace of theological "liberalism," they responded with an appeal to the authority of "Apostolical Tradition."

This response was undeniably one-sided. As we have seen, the "liberal" critique of dogma had both a formal and a material aspect. On the formal side, it denied the binding authority of dogmatic formulae, treating them as nothing more than human attempts to express divine revelation. But on the material side it went further, and cast doubt on their validity even as theological propositions, on the ground that metaphysical discourse, which they exemplified, was at best irrelevant to Christian faith and at worst a misuse of human language. To the formal criticism the affirmation of "Apostolical Tradition" was an appropriate answer. Something more was needed, however, if the content of the historic dogmas was to be effectively defended against the charge of meaninglessness, and that something more the Tractarians did not seriously attempt to provide.

It cannot be said that they completely failed to see the problem. A certain philosophical myopia was perhaps their most serious weakness as

19. J. H. Thom (ed.), *The Life of the Rev. Joseph Blanco White* (London, 1845), Vol. II, pp. 6f.

defenders of Catholic Christianity under the conditions of the first half of the nineteenth century, but that myopia was not total blindness. Keble, for instance, in discussing the problem of dogma, could speak quite clearly of the nature and consequences of

that which may be called the *Nominalism* of our days; I mean, the habit of resolving the high mysteries of the faith into mere circumstances of language, methods of speaking adapted to our weak understandings, but with no real counterpart in the nature of things. Whoever [he remarked] takes this line must needs hold the tradition of antiquity cheap, since it is based altogether on the supposition which he rejects as unphilosophical.<sup>20</sup>

Another witness testifies with some asperity to certain philosophical stirrings in the Anglo-Catholic camp. About 1830, Mark Pattison tells us, Whately's logic or "some form of Nominalism" was predominant at Oxford.

But when Tractarianism had made the clergy aware of their own strength, and high sacerdotal doctrines were openly proclaimed, we fell off from Whately, and vague, indefinite, realistic views under the influence of Coleridge and Sir William Hamilton slowly occupied the schools.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, if the Tractarians chose to present a basically authoritarian apologetic for dogma, the reason was not a total lack of philosophical perception or resources.

Nonetheless, they were, in fact, willing to stake their case on authority alone, leaving philosophical difficulties unresolved. Newman's article on "Apostolical Tradition" gives some indication of the lengths to which he, at any rate, was prepared to carry the appeal to sheer authority.

Nothing [he wrote] is more common in the usage of the world than what logicians call *words of second intention*, which mean nothing at all to those who are not conversant with the sciences which employ them for their own purposes. Almighty God might surely put His own meaning on human words, if it may be reverently said, and might honour them by making them speak mysteries, though not conveying thereby any notion at all to us. Here then at once we are admitted to the privilege of a dogmatic creed, in spite of Mr. Blanco White. . . . It is something after all to be intrusted with words which have a precious meaning, which we shall one day know, though we know it not now. . . . Whereas the New Testament contains dogmatic statements concerning the Divine Nature, proposes them for our acceptance, and guards them with anathemas, it is clearly our duty to put them forth formally, whether we be able in our present state to attach a distinct meaning to them or not. . . .<sup>22</sup>

"Paradoxical" is surely too flattering an epithet to describe such a thoroughly agnostic vindication of metaphysical theology!

In the passage just quoted, Newman appealed to the authority of the New Testament. His recent controversial experience, however, had con-

20. John Keble, *Sermons, Academical and Occasional* (Oxford, 1847), p. 215. The text of the sermon quoted here, "Primitive Tradition Recognized in Holy Scripture," is reprinted in E. R. Fairweather (ed.), *The Oxford Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 63-89.

21. Mark Pattison, *Memoirs* (London: Macmillan, 1885), p. 166.

22. Newman, "Apostolical Succession," pp. 176ff.

firmed him in the view that an exclusive reliance on biblical authority must in the end prove subversive of orthodoxy.

Is it indeed possible [he asked],—we do not say possible in the way of logical consistency, but is it possible in matter of fact, and in the case of men in general—to believe that the doctrine of the Trinity is a mere human view of Scripture passages, and yet necessary to be believed in order to salvation? Does not, in consequence, the theory that Scripture only is to be the guide of Protestants, lead for certain to liberalism? We do not, indeed, for an instant suppose that any clear and unprejudiced reasoner could help seeing that the Catholic doctrine really *is* in Scripture, and that, therefore, the denial of it incurs the anathema therein declared against unbelievers; still, while belief in the document is made the first thing, and belief in the doctrine but the second (as this theory would have it), it inevitably follows in the case of the multitude, who are not clear-headed or unprejudiced, that the definition of a Christian will be made to turn, not on faith in the doctrine, but on faith in the document, and Unitarianism will come to be thought, not indeed true, but as if not unreasonable, and not necessarily dangerous.<sup>23</sup>

In essence, this line of thought was a development of the old High Church critique of ultra-biblicist Protestantism. Impressed by the widespread acceptance of “Arian” and “Socinian” interpretations of Scripture in the eighteenth century, the High Church divines had argued that such a trend was inevitable once the Bible, uprooted from its historical, churchly setting by a rigid application of the *sola scriptura* principle, was left to the tender mercies of interpreters swayed by the intellectual fashions of the day. Of course they did not—any more than Newman after them—admit that “Arianism” or “Socinianism” had any real basis in Scripture. But they believed that the definite doctrines which formed the historic Christian world-view were the clue to a right understanding of the biblical message.

The principle that the High Churchmen opposed to a narrow biblicism was clearly stated by Edward Hawkins, one of Newman’s mentors at Oriel. It is from “*tradition*, the traditions conveyed from age to age by the Church in general,” rather than from the Bible, that the believer first learns of the Christian revelation.

[Traditions] are allowed by the most orthodox divines to be “a good help” to the study of the Scriptures, why may they not have been *intended* to assist us? Common experience and common practice seem to declare that some assistance of the kind is *needful* and *reasonable*, why may not this assistance have been designed for us from the first—as from the first *in fact* almost every Christian has been by such aid introduced to Christianity? In a word, why may it not have been the general design of Heaven that by early oral, or traditional, instruction the way should be prepared for the reception of the mysteries of faith; that the Church should carry down the *system*, but the Scriptures should furnish all the *proofs* of the Christian doctrines; that tradition should supply the Christian with the *arrangement*, but the Bible with all the *substance* of divine truth?<sup>24</sup>

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 171f.

24. Edward Hawkins, *A Dissertation upon the Use and Importance of Unauthoritative Tradition* (Oxford, 1819), pp. 17f.

Where the Tractarians went beyond this High Church theory was in their twofold insistence on the substantive content of the creedal tradition as a testimony historically independent of Scripture, and on the apostolic—and therefore, ultimately, the divine—authority of that tradition. Hawkins, for example, had spoken of tradition as providing “system” and “arrangement,” as distinct from the “proofs” and the “substance” of Christian doctrine, but the Tractarians recognized no such clear-cut distinction. Again, Hawkins, while suggesting a providential origin for tradition, had spoken explicitly of “unauthoritative tradition,” thereby excluding the notion that it could claim acceptance *iure divino*. Tractarian writers, on the other hand, flatly affirmed the divine authority of the creedal tradition.

We are [Keble said] naturally, if not reasonably, jealous of the word Tradition, associated as it is in our minds with the undue claims and pernicious errors of Rome. Yet must it not be owned, on fair consideration, that Timothy's deposit [cf. 2 Tim. 1:14] did comprise matter, independent of, and distinct from, the truths which are directly Scriptural? that it contained, besides the substance of Christian doctrine, a certain form, arrangement, selection, methodizing the whole, and distinguishing fundamentals; and also a certain system of Church practice, both in government, discipline, and worship; of which, whatever portion we can prove to be still remaining, ought to be religiously guarded by us, even for the same reason that we reverence and retain that which is more properly Scriptural, both being portions of the same divine treasure.<sup>25</sup>

Those [Newman wrote] who consider that the Creeds are the word of God, as truly, though not in the same sense, as the Scripture, and derived in the same way from transmission from the Apostles, of course will be shocked at finding their expressions treated as a “dogmatical and sententious wisdom.” . . . The doctrinal statements of the creeds are not to be viewed as mere deductions from Scripture, any more than the historical statements of those creeds—the article of the Homousion any more than that of the Resurrection; but as the appropriate expressions and embodying of apostolical teaching, known to be such, and handed down in the Church as such from age to age. If this be so, it is in vain to argue about “various interpretations of Scripture,” “pious opinions” and “theories” upon “facts,” and of “differences of fallible judgments;” it is equally vain to talk of “hieroglyphics casting shadows” and “metaphors explanatory of metaphors,” and so forth. These “Interpretations” turn out to be authoritative and original statements; these “opinions” are doctrines; these so-called secondary metaphors are primary symbols given by Apostles or expressive of their known teaching.<sup>26</sup>

It was to the conjoint witness of Scripture and tradition, then, that the Tractarian appealed as a decisive authority against the novelties of their anti-dogmatic contemporaries. Scripture, read out of its proper context, might fail to impart its full doctrinal content, but Scripture and “Apostolical Tradition,” read together, left no room for doubt concerning the true nature of the Christian revelation. That revelation was a mysterious, but none the less real, communication of divine truth. In it the nature of the triune God himself, the real relation of creatures to him and the purpose

25. Keble, *Sermons*, p. 188.

26. Newman, “Apostolical Succession,” pp. 181f.

and character of his activity in and for his creatures, were all disclosed. The substance of this disclosure was faithfully transmitted through the apostolic Scriptures and apostolic tradition, and embodied in part in the classical dogmas of ancient Christianity. If we mean to speak of the Christian revelation at all, we must accept the full apostolic testimony, and the sense of that testimony, taken as a whole, is unmistakable.

"Whoever takes [the nominalistic] line," Keble observed, must needs hold the tradition of antiquity cheap."<sup>27</sup> Contrariwise, whoever holds the "tradition of antiquity" dear must needs accept the possibility of metaphysical theology and dogma. But we are bound to hold the "tradition of antiquity" dear as long as we remain true to Christianity as an historically given reality, because "Apostolical Tradition" is an integral part of the total historical datum. The views expressed by Hampden are thus inherently incompatible with a thoroughgoing acceptance of the Christian faith.

When that has been said, the Tractarian mind does not find it necessary, or even useful, to say much more. God's word stands secure, be the philosophers never so unquiet. In that word, enshrined in Scripture and tradition, the convictions which make up the Christian picture of reality find their sufficient vindication. "What remains but to express a confidence, which cannot deceive itself, that, whatever be the destined course of the usurpations of the reason in the scheme of divine providence, its fall must at last come, as that of other proud aspirants before it?"<sup>28</sup>

27. Keble, *Sermons*, p. 215.

28. J. H. Newman, "The Usurpations of Reason," in Fairweather (ed.), *The Oxford Movement*, p. 32.