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"In whose name I write": John Henry Newman;s reading of the Alexandrian fathers

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Abstract

The history of doctrine has been shaped by its historiographers. Prominent among nineteenth-century historiographers is John Henry Newman (1801-1890), a patristic scholar whose interest among historians today normally lies in his writings on doctrinal development or in his own story of conversion. It is the purpose of this thesis to show that historians of theology, particularly of the patristic era, should also be interested in Newman's engagement with Origen, Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria. In turn, this should interest all those who know the Apologia, for as an Anglican and as a Catholic Newman held different views of these Fathers. This thesis provides an examination of the changes that occur in Newman's reading of, and writing on, the Alexandrian Fathers across the years. Overall, three things will be seen. First, comparing his first book, *The Arians of the Fourth Century* (1833), with his later works, reveals a flattening out of Newman's account of history occurring just when he was propounding that doctrine is dynamic. Secondly, analysis of his sermons of the 1830s and 1840s shows an Alexandrian christology ("Monophysite" in Cyril's sense, as Newman explains it) in tension with his claims at the time, that he was leaving the Anglican Church because it held an analogous position to the Monophysites of the fifth century. Thirdly, contrasting his translations of Athanasius in the *Library of the Fathers* (1842-4) with his "free translation" (1881), reveals the effect thirty-five years of reading Catholic scholastic theology had on Newman.

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Newman later wrote that the influences leading him in a religiously liberal direction were abruptly checked by his suffering first, at the end of 1827, a kind of nervous collapse brought on by overwork and family financial troubles, and then, at the beginning of 1828, the sudden death of his beloved youngest sister, Mary. There was also a crucial theological factor: his fascination since 1816 with the Fathers of the Church, whose works he began to read systematically in the long vacation of 1828. This he regarded as his second formative providential illness. Oxford Movement. The Reverend Mr. John Henry Newman--a writer unsurpassed in style and clarity, a preacher of unparalleled power and grace--the most famous and, perhaps, the most influential Anglican minister in all of England, did the unthinkable: he joined the Roman Catholic Church. In his youth, Newman himself would have thought it unthinkable. Born in 1801, he was the eldest son of a nominally Anglican father and an evangelical Anglican mother. During this time, Newman began to study early Church history and the teachings of the Fathers. He discovered many doctrines taught in the ancient Church, especially the sacramental system and apostolic succession, which had been largely abandoned among Anglicans. This was the first step on his road to Rome.