THE LAITY AS A FACTOR OF PROGRESS:
JOHN HENRY NEWMAN AND
FRIEDRICH VON HÜGEL
C. J. T. TALAR

Newman’s defense of the role of the laity in the development of doctrine not only occasioned a negative reaction from the Vatican, it had continued reverberations among his followers. This essay examines Newman’s influence on Baron Friedrich von Hugel and then compares the Baron’s positions with those Newman’s biographer, Wilfred Ward.

Note, Venerable Brethren, the appearance already of that most pernicious doctrine which would make of the laity a factor of progress in the Church. Pascendi dominici gregis (1907)¹

On the eve of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), several writers authored a number of essays that addressed the role of the laity in the Catholic church.² Three made reference to Newman, with two quoting extracts from his writings. Less than surprisingly, one of the latter was drawn from the 1859 Rambler article, then recently republished, “On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine.”³ The other, taken from The Lectures on the Present Position of Catholics in England (1851), was cited as directly relevant to the kind of laity seen to be needed in the church in the United States of the day:

I want a laity, not arrogant, not rash in speech, not disputatious, but men who know their religion, who enter into it, who know just where they stand, who know what they hold, and what they do not, who know their creed so well, that they can give an account of it, who know so much of history that they can defend it... I have no apprehension you will be the worse Catholics for familiarity with these subjects, provided you cherish a vivid sense of God above and keep in mind that you have souls to be judged and to be saved.⁴

Since the council, any number of commentators have acknowledged Newman’s influence on its teachings as reflected in Dei Verbum, Lumen Gentium, and Apostolicam Actuositatum. These bear the imprint of his writings on tradition, development of doctrine, and the laity. Moreover, it has been observed that, within Newman’s oeuvre, these areas of theology are all interrelated and can be discerned at various points over the course of his life work.⁵ His appreciation of the laity’s role in

⁵ “To understand Newman’s principle of development, one must be familiar with his notion of tradition, and, from this point of view, the idea of development contributes to an understanding of the laity’s role in the Church.” Samuel D. Femiano, Infallibility of the Laity (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), 37. Hereafter cited: Femiano.
the church, then, constitutes an integral part of Newman's theology.

In his own day he saw the active participation of the laity in those functions that fell within their compass, not only as a way of overcoming the widening gap between clergy and laity in the church, but as important for the very future of Christianity. He thought it an imperative task to strengthen the lay Catholic body against the impending impact of modern infidelity. His brief, though significant, association with the *Rambler* constitutes but one episode in a life that brought him into contact with educated laymen whom he saw could do much good for the church, and members of the hierarchy too often ambivalent, if not fearful or outrightly hostile, toward an educated laity.

The slim volume of pre-conciliar essays published as *The Layman and the Church* contains, in addition to the references to Newman, one to Friedrich von Hügel (1852-1925). Even a single mention of von Hügel at that time is rather remarkable, given the relative neglect of him, particularly among Catholics, for several decades after his death in 1925. Reference to both Newman and von Hügel in an essay entitled "Laymen and their Bishops" points to some shared concerns on their part. But there are more than intellectual affinities that relates these two men.

Newman exerted a direct influence on his younger contemporary. There are some twenty extant letters by von Hügel to Newman, as well as notes made by the Baron in the course of several interviews with Newman in June of 1876. Newman's influence was both formative and pervasive, from von Hügel's early reading of *Loss and Gain* while still in his teens—"the first book which . . . made me realize the intellectual might and grandeur of the Catholic position"—to his acknowledgement shortly after Newman's death that "I talk Newman even oftener than I know."
For all that, von Hügel was no uncritical admirer. One of his biographers has remarked that he found “surprisingly few references to Newman in the baron’s writings, and these few usually sound a critical note.” Thus while there were shared desires for an educated laity working in concert with an educated clergy, while there were consequent problems encountered in relating lay expertise to hierarchical authority, there were also divergences. Some of the latter stemmed from von Hügel’s acquired knowledge of critical biblical methods, some from the milieu in which those methods, along with philosophical currents identified with Maurice Blondel, Lucien Laberthonnière, and Edouard Le Roy, appeared dangerous and threatening to ecclesiastical authorities. Thus a comparison of Newman’s and von Hügel’s understandings of the role of lay scholarship in Catholicism, especially in its relation to theology, can be of interest, not only for what it reveals of the men themselves, but also of the contexts in which they functioned. As a further point of comparison, it is possible to consider von Hügel’s relations with his younger contemporary, Wilfred Ward, in light of the latter’s reputation as something of a faithful representative of Newman’s thought at the time of the Modernist crisis. This dual comparison should help to clarify von Hügel’s motivations and the positions he took as an educated layman seeking to serve the church in his time and circumstances.

**APPRECIATING THE LAITY’S ROLE: NEWMAN**

In his *Lectures on the Prophetical Office of the Church* (1837), Newman first distinguished between episcopal tradition and prophetical tradition as two complementary ways of handing on tradition. The laity’s voice within the prophetical tradition he subsequently elaborated in “On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine.” The latter preserves an active role for the hierarchy in judging tradition and defining doctrine, in addition to the *pastorum et fidelium conspiratio*—“the working together of pastors and faithful”—the witnessing function common to laity and hierarchy. However, it should not be inferred that the laity is thereby relegated to a purely passive role. There is something, Newman affirms, in their *conspiratio* that is not in the pastors alone. Though a focus on reflection itself can connote a passive mirroring, one may “consult” a mirror to learn about one’s appearance. Even so, the bishops, “consulting their ‘faithful reflection’ in the people, might come to know things which they could have learned in no other way.” In this sense the laity are not confined to the “learning church.”

A third collective entity acknowledged by Newman to have a part in this dynamic understanding of the process of tradition is the *schola theologorum*—“the school of

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14 Femiano, 124. “Newman’s explanation of the way in which the infallible *consensus* of the faithful influences the deliberations of the hierarchy also finds an echo in the documents of Vatican II. When certain of the bishops wished to say that the faithful are infallible because they reflect the teaching of the infallible magisterium, it was objected that such a notion was not adequate. From an investigation of the Church’s tradition, it was found that the process of development of doctrine sometimes begins in the people; their consensus activates the infallible teaching authority of the magisterium. In such cases the faithful’s infallibility is not merely a passive reflection of the magisterium’s teaching but it is an active exercise of the laity’s prerogatives.” Ibid., 156.
theologians." Just as the laity has a role in relation to the magisterium, so he accords them a role with regard to theology. In advocating the necessity of an educated laity for the well being of the church in his own day, as well as for an impending future marked by unbelief, Newman envisioned their solid grounding in theology. This would equip them to function in a way complementary to theologians. A theologically educated laity would be able to take the work developed by theologians and make that known. In the main Newman considered the subjects of formal theology to be outside the province of the laity. Moreover, this seems to have been more than a conclusion reached on purely pragmatic grounds, given the then-prevailing ecclesiastical climate evident in the controversies over the Rambler and its successor, the Home and Foreign Review. Part of it apparently stemmed from the autodidact character of the theology as practiced by laymen such as W.G. Ward and Orestes Brownson, which left them ill-equipped for solid and systematic theological argument. Part too may be attributed to the positive contributions he saw laity able to make within the spheres of intellectual activity contiguous with formal theology, those areas of temporal affairs where the layman was in a position to bring the faith to bear upon a variety of secular matters.

In Newman's mind,

Theologians inculcate the matter, and determine the details of that Revelation; they view it from within; philosophers view it from without, and this external view may be called the Philosophy of Religion, and the office of delineating it externally is most gracefully performed by laymen. In the first age laymen were most commonly the Apologists. Such were Justin, Tatian, Athenagoras, Aristedes, Hermides, Hermias, Minucius Felix, Arnobius, and Lactantius. In like manner in this age, some of the most prominent defenses of the Church are from laymen: as De Maistre, Chateaubriand, Nicholas, Montalembert, and others.

Thus taking into account his conception of the laymen's own sphere of activity, as well as the circumstances of his day with respect to lay access to formal theological training and attitudes of ecclesiastical authorities to lay initiatives, Newman thought lay theologians to be rather exceptional.

LIVING THE LAITY'S ROLE: VON HÜGEL

As the son of an Austrian diplomat, Friedrich von Hügel received his education outside the normal institutional structures, under the tutelage of a series of governesses and male tutors. His life as an independent lay scholar, unaffiliated with a university, deprived him of institutional colleagues. He compensated for this by forming a wide-ranging network of international scholarly contacts, from a variety of religious backgrounds. Moreover, his family background gave him access to members of the Catholic hierarchy. He used this access to seek to gain support for scholars, clerical and lay, who were working within the church and utilizing critical methods in exegesis, church history, and philosophy. Beyond this, he himself made
contributions to legitimating critical biblical scholarship and to the philosophy of religion in ways that went beyond defending the status quo, calling for an intellectual renovation of Catholicism that bore directly upon the dominant neo-thomism. In this he went beyond Newman’s conception of the layman’s role in relation to theology and indeed beyond Newman’s own stance toward ecclesiastical authority.

With von Hügel we may also expect to find a mingling of principle and contingent circumstance. Lastly, while it can be said of Newman that his life and his work were “inextricably intertwined,”17 where von Hügel is concerned his life assumes if anything greater significance for understanding his views on the laity:

Von Hügel was influenced by Newman and his school, not so much to write a theology of the problem of the laity in the Church, as to embody that problem in himself. What he wrote on the subject is scattered, but there was an underlying unity to his life which offered a tentative solution in action.18

Along with Newman, the French priest Henri Huvelin exerted a strong influence on von Hügel. Among the advice received and recorded by the Baron was the necessity of a deep interior life of prayer for anyone who would do serious critical work, especially with the bible.19 While it is not possible to examine von Hügel’s family life here, it is important to state that his experience as a husband, a parent, and a lay Catholic shaped his spirituality. That his spiritual life did provide a secure foundation for his critical research is attested by George Tyrrell in one of his letters to the Baron: “it is just because your faith is so much stronger than theirs that you can afford to make so many concessions, to allow the existence of so many adverse facts and difficulties.”20

By the 1890s, in face of the “so many adverse facts and difficulties” put forward by Protestant and rationalist biblical scholars, von Hügel determined that he had, on the basis of his mastery of Hebrew and Greek, his patient working through the biblical text in its original languages as well as in translation, and his serious study of the work of contemporary exegetes, a right to speak. More than this, as a layman he felt that he had a duty to speak, given his conviction that laity were less confined by rules of ecclesiastical censorship than were clerics, lacking as they did any kind of official authority and in consequence able to speak more freely. In his great work, *The Mystical Element of Religion* (1908), he described “a layman’s special virtues and function” as “complete candour, courage, sensitiveness to the present and future, in their obscurer strivings towards the good and true, as these have been in their substance already tested in the past, and in so far as such strivings can be forecasted by sympathy and hope.”21

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20 George Tyrrell to Friedrich von Hügel, 16 February 1898, quoted in M. D. Petre, *Von Hügel and Tyrrell: The Story of a Friendship* (London: J.M. Dent, 1937), 26. The “theirs” to whom Tyrrell refers are the “many whose orthodoxy needs to be perfected by a husk of narrowness.” For discussion of how von Hügel’s family relationships and friendships informed his spirituality see Ellen M. Leonard, *Creative Tension: The Spiritual Legacy of Friedrich von Hügel* (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 1997), ch. 7.
Von Hügel's long apprenticeship in biblical scholarship did not produce any technical works of exegesis. Rather, he saw his contribution as one of gaining a hearing for freedom in the exercise of historical methods of interpretation while arguing that freedom was not incompatible with an authoritative religious tradition. Over 1894-1895, he published a three-part article, "The Church and the Bible," in the *Dublin Review* in which he made a case for a responsible exercise of such an approach in Catholicism in light of a liberal interpretation of *Providentissimus Deus*. At the fourth International Scientific Congress of Catholics in Fribourg, Switzerland, in August of 1897, a paper by him that presented a carefully worked out demonstration of how critical scholars had reached their conclusions regarding the Hexateuch was read by the Barnabite priest, Giovanni Semeria.

Later, in a third publication that sought to gain latitude for critical scholars, von Hügel arranged with Charles Briggs, an American Protestant who had run into trouble with his own denomination over his critical positions, to publish a joint response to the Pontifical Biblical Commission's pronouncement on the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. The latter basically affirmed the traditional Catholic approach, binding the text rather closely to Moses and, in the process, binding Catholic exegetes to a position difficult to reconcile with the conclusions reached by critical scholars, conclusions whose bases von Hügel had examined in his Fribourg paper. The decree possessed a degree of specificity that precluded any attempts at a liberal interpretation. In his contribution, von Hügel stressed that, though an authoritative decision with papal sanction, the commission's answer remained subject to evaluation by competent scholars. And, should the solution it put forward prove unworkable, then scholars "who love the Church" had a "strict duty" to make that known. Indeed, to keep silent could tacitly encourage a "further accentuation" of such strictures, "an accentuation which could not fail to be profoundly damaging to Rome."

In addition to von Hügel's direct contributions via his scholarly writings to debates over "the biblical question," there were occasions on which he materially aided the publications of others. In 1884, he had written to Newman, expressing his appreciation for the latter's articles on biblical inspiration. There is a certain symmetry, then, in von Hügel's being called upon by Father Henry Ryder, the superior of the Birmingham Oratory after Newman's death, to comment on a manuscript.

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23 Originally delivered at the Congress in French, the paper was published as "La méthode historique et son application à l'étude des documents de l'hexateuque" in *Compte rendu du quatrième Congrès scientifique international des catholiques Sciences exégétiques* (Fribourg, Switzerland: Imprimerie et librairie de l'oeuvre de saint-Paul, 1898), 231-65, and subsequently in English in *The Catholic University Bulletin* 4 (1898): 198-226 plus a separately numbered appendix.
24 The text of the commission's decision may be found in *Rome and the Study of Scripture* (St. Meinrad, IN: Abbey Press, 1964), 118-19.
25 Charles A. Briggs and Baron Friedrich von Hügel, *The Papal Commission and the Pentateuch* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1906), 35-36. This small volume was also published in French and in Italian the following year.
26 Von Hügel to Newman, 1 July 1884 in C. S. Dessain, ed., *Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman* vol. XXX (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 382-84. In the course of the letter he characterized inspiration as "the burning religious question of the hour" and noted how members of the faculty at the Paris Institut catholique had recently expressed their appreciation for Newman's efforts to secure a position that could be viable for Catholic Apologetics.
Ryder wrote that dealt with scriptural inspiration and modern biblical criticism from the perspective of a scholastic theologian. From their correspondence it is clear that the Baron succeeded in widening Ryder's horizons and bringing his conclusions in the published version more into line with contemporary biblical criticism.27

A second instance of such assistance occurred in 1892 with another cleric, Christian van den Biesen, a young professor of scripture at St. Joseph's College, Mill Hill. Since the subject of the article was a delicate one for Catholics, “The Authorship and Composition of the Hexateuch,” von Hügel's recommendations extended to moderating its tone and introducing necessary qualifications into the exposition.28 One of Newman's ideals was greater cooperation between it and the clergy, to the benefit of both. The two instances just noted can stand for many in which von Hügel embodied that ideal. To them one can add many occasions on which he felt free to consult clerics of his acquaintance.

Unless an article or book generates controversy, as indeed a number of Alfred Loisy's did, it is difficult to assess its impact. So with von Hügel's published contributions reviewed thus far. Loisy judged “The Church and the Bible” series too densely written to have much of an influence; the Fribourg paper was overshadowed by the controversy generated by the Dominican Marie-Joseph Lagrange's presentation on pentateuchal criticism, given at that same congress and subsequently published in the *Revue biblique*; while *The Papal Commission and the Pentateuch* and its translations virtually disappeared in the wake of the anti-modernist syllabus and encyclical issued in 1907.29 There were, however, a series of direct interventions that von Hügel made with high-ranking members of the hierarchy. Although these did not have the kind of longer-term effect that he desired, they did succeed in placing an informed perspective before influential members of the episcopate, the cardinalate, and indeed the papacy itself.

Here once again it will be more a matter of giving some indication of the extent of his activity in this area, rather than imparting details of specific instances. Also of importance are the reactions that were forthcoming from ecclesiastics regarding the involvement of a layman in these concerns. In 1893, around the time that he was first entering into correspondence with Loisy, von Hügel was able to discuss the problem of biblical studies with Cardinal Vaughan. The result left him optimistic, although an article on the biblical question promised by Vaughan never materialized.30 The following year while in Rome the Baron met with Cardinal Rampolla and, at the latter's invitation, submitted a memorandum for the pope on issues they had discussed bearing on the state of the church in England.

Paramount for Roman minds at the time was the question of Anglican Orders, and the memorandum understandably engaged that issue. It went on, however, to address


28 See Barmann, *Baron Friedrich von Hügel*, 24-26. Van den Biesen's article was published in the *Dublin Review* in two parts, in October 1892 and in January 1893.

29 Alfred Loisy, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire religieuse de notre temps* vol. 1 (Paris: Émile Nourry, 1930), 386-87. Lagrange's paper was published initially in the Congress's *Compte rendu* (179-200) and later in the *Revue biblique* 7 (1898): 10-32 as "Les sources du Pentateuque." The syllabus *Lamentabili sane exitu* was issued in July of 1907 and the encyclical *Pascendi dominici gregis* the following September.

the current ecclesiastical ban on Catholics attending the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, and entered a plea for a broad interpretation of *Providentissimus Deus*. Years later von Hügel learned that Cardinal Ledochowski considered the submission of a memorandum on such subjects "un impertinenza" on the part of a layman. In November of 1895, back in Rome, he obtained another interview with the Cardinal Secretary of State, again presenting his views on the English religious scene. Von Hügel's views were out of step with the prevailing Vatican mind-set. Merry del Val, for one, judged the Baron a source of confusion rather than clarity, and was glad to see him leave.31

In May of 1901 he wrote again to Rampolla, this time in direct support of Loisy which was at the same time an appeal for a certain latitude for critical scholars and their work. That letter had also been passed on to the pope. Later that same year he was able to reinforce these representations in person to Rampolla, and again to Alberto Lepidi, Master of the Sacred Palace. With Rampolla he dwelt more on matters of policy: the impact that a condemnation of Loisy or of critical work would have on the reputation of the Roman Catholic Church in England. The discussion with Lepidi was more substantive: inspiration, inerrancy, development, relativity, German rationalism, and allied subjects. Writing to George Tyrrell in toward the end of 1901, after these encounters, he reaffirmed his sense of right, indeed of duty, to speak on matters of science:

... I wanted to put on record, with as much respect and temper, but also of whole-hearted conviction and finality as possible, my slowly acquired certainty that we were face to face, not with a question of individuals and their possible or real eccentricities; or of specific theological doctrines, true or false; but with that of a new science with its own immanent method, laws, and practically irresistible force; and with a question of faith only in this sense—as to whether its representatives and interpreters were or were not determined to declare that the faith can find no place within its borders for this science.32

In addition to his own measures of support for Loisy and for biblical science, von Hügel enlisted others who would have some authority in these areas to intervene in a positive way with the Vatican. To a significant degree, these various attempts—direct and indirect—to influence Roman authorities raise the broader issue of authority itself. What sort of "immanent" authority could be legitimately claimed for critical scholarship in relation to an authoritative church structure and an authoritative tradition? What were the limits of each of these authorities? And what sort of authority could von Hügel claim as a layman with issues that clearly had a bearing on theology? Faced with Roman pronouncements that required broad interpretation for Catholic critical scholars to continue to function, or that imperiled such functioning, how was a Catholic scholar to preserve his intellectual integrity? If conclusions

31 Ibid., 55-60. Ledochowski's comment was communicated to von Hügel in a letter from C. L. Wood (Lord Halifax) of 5 September 1911; quoted in James J. Kelly, *Baron Friedrich von Hügel's Philosophy of Religion* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1983), 69n.

32 Von Hügel to Tyrrell, 18 December 1901, in Petre, *Von Hügel and Tyrrell*, 93.
conscientiously arrived at, after carefully weighing the evidence, turned out to be at variance with authoritative pronouncements, what would constitute a legitimate response?

LAYMEN AND AUTHORITY: VON HÜGEL AND WILFRED WARD

In May of 1907, Cardinal Steinhuber, the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of the Index, published a letter condemning the Italian review, Il Rinnovamento. He characterized it as having been founded "with a view of fostering a most dangerous spirit of independence from the authority of the Church, and the supremacy of private judgment over that of the Church herself and of erecting itself into a school to prepare an anti-Catholic renewal of minds." Von Hügel's name was included among "those who seem to wish to arrogate to themselves a magisterium in the Church and to teach the Pope himself."33

Steinhuber's letter reflects the ecclesiological perspective of the "Joint Pastoral Letter on the Church and Liberal Catholicism," issued in December of 1900. Ostensibly the product of the English bishops, in reality it was authored in Rome by Merry del Val with the executive and editorial assistance of the Jesuit Superior General, Luis Martín.34 It propounds a two-tiered ecclesiology, basically identifying the Ecclesia Docens with the pope and the bishops in communion with him and the Ecclesia Discens with the large body of the faithful, encompassing laity, priests, as well as bishops in their private capacity. While the laity may be permitted or even at times encouraged to address religious topics, they do this not in their own right, but in strict subordination to authority.35 In his encyclical Vehementer Nos, (1906), Pius X reinforced the essentially passive role of the flock: "the only duty of the multitude is to allow themselves to be led, and, like a docile flock, to follow the Pastors."36

Von Hügel acted out of a different understanding of the church, one that affirmed the importance of ecclesiastical authority as a necessary part, but only as a part.37 Scientific disciplines could claim a legitimate authority of their own, one that needed to be respected for what it was. Moreover, this intellectual element was not independent of an interior life; indeed, as Huvelin emphasized, the latter was fundamental for a healthy exercise of serious critical work. In addition to such matters of principle, there was the insistent pressure of critical scholarship, notably, though not limited to, biblical studies, for which authoritative pronouncements were not adequate. In a number of these areas there was sufficient difference between von Hügel and Newman—and Wilfred Ward as Newman's faithful exponent—to account for their divergent reactions when faced with church authority.

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33 An English translation of Steinhuber's letter appeared in The Tablet 109 (11 May 1907); quoted in Barmann, Baron Friedrich von Hügel, 184. Il Rinnovamento had published the Italian translation of The Papal Commission and the Pentateuch.
34 Though identified at the time as the initiative of the English hierarchy, acting with papal approbation, the pastoral's true origins have been established by David Schultenover in A View from Rome (New York: Fordham University Press, 1993), ch. 4.
35 For a summary of the Pastoral's contents, see David Schultenover, George Tyrrell: In Search of Catholicism (Shepherdstown, West Virginia: Patmos Press, 1981), 144-46.
First, von Hügel was well acquainted with “On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine” and was no more willing than was Newman to divide the church between an active, teaching hierarchy and a basically passive laity. The church, he affirmed to Tyrrell in 1906, “in none of its members is simply teaching, in none of its members is simply learning.” Then too he was directly indebted to Newman’s discussion of the threefold office of Christ in the preface to the *Via Media*. These elements were taken by von Hügel to correspond to the external, intellectual and mystical elements in the human soul that come to expression in religion. Like Newman, he is aware of the necessity to achieve a balance among these elements—given tendencies for one or another to dominate. A recurring word in von Hügel’s correspondence is “appurtenance,” which speaks to his conviction regarding the importance of adhering to some institutional form of religion with its faith and practices. In his preface to *The Mystical Element of Religion*, in the course of acknowledging his intellectual and spiritual debts, he identifies Newman as the one “who first taught me to glory in my appurtenance to the Catholic and Roman Church, and to conceive this my inheritance in a large and historical manner.” That said, “official organisation and authority are part, a normally necessary part, of the fuller and more fruitful religious life; but they are ever only a part, and a part in what is a dynamic whole.”

Moving beyond Newman to von Hügel’s experience of the church in his own day, especially in the wake of the Modernist crisis, the Baron judged institutional authority—“officialdom”—to have acquired a dominance that was dysfunctional to Catholicism. As he wrote to one of his correspondents in 1909, “there is a grave difficulty as to the working out of the Catholic idea of authority.... [T]he centralising, the absolutising of authority has now got to a pitch, tending to destroy authority’s own raison d’être, and to paralyse, instead of stimulating, the powers of the soul.”

The ascendancy of the institutional element occurred at the expense of the intellectual and the mystical (interior). Von Hügel viewed his own vocation as a layman as one of contributing to an intellectual renewal of Catholicism:

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41 Von Hügel to Malcolm Quinn, 17 November 1909, in Holland, 174. In 1906 the Baron had passed on to Maude Petre an observation by Dom Germain Morin, a Benedictine patristics scholar, that in Rome “‘the most odious form of clericalism’ is rampant now,—the determination to exclude all laymen from theological work and such like activities.” Von Hügel to Petre, 17 April 1906, in James J. Kelly, ed., *The Letters of Baron Friedrich von Hügel and Maude D. Petre* (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 39. Von Hügel returned to an examination of “Institutional Religion” in his *Eternal Life* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1915), where he noted that it was “zealous believers, mostly laymen and non-Italians” who had worked to press the policy of Ultramontanism on Rome; “And zealous believers, perhaps again mostly laymen and non-Italians, may arise who will successfully aid the return to a wider and richer, a truly Catholic action. After all, Rome depends upon its subjects as truly as its subjects depend upon Rome” (359). Newman received favorable mention on the following page in the context of appreciating the laity as an active presence in the teaching church. In a letter, von Hügel reflected that this chapter “contains emphatic, clear-cut sentences which the present authorities will not like, and which, I hope, may have the more of an effect, as they certainly were written outside of all excitement or nervous irritation and came, as the Preface explains, as an inevitable part of the book’s central argument and point” (Von Hügel to Petre, 15 October 1912, in Kelly, 137).
... I find myself inclined . . . to do all I can to make the old Church as inhabitable intellectually as ever I can—not because the intellect is the most important thing in religion—it is not; but because the old Church already possesses in full the knowledge and the aids to spirituality, whilst, for various reasons which would fill a volume, it is much less strong as regards the needs, rights and duties of the mental life.42

As indicated, however, in his own experience von Hügel found his intellectual work to have a direct bearing on his interior life. In a study of von Hügel's spirituality, Joseph Whelan counts as one of the most original elements in the Baron's spiritual teaching “his insistence on the 'purgative' service performed by genuine science for the religious spirit itself.”43 If science could perform a purifying work of its own, it could also act compensatorily: “during the Modernist controversy [von Hügel] found in science, in criticism, in historical scholarship an integrity and seriousness he did not find in Rome.”44

RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

To return to the issue of religious authority, von Hügel's engagement with critical scholarship played no small role in shaping his own responses to church pronouncements. As already indicated, if the more specific conclusions of such study were subject to review and judgment by ecclesiastical authority, the methods themselves and their general results claimed a legitimate autonomy. Such scholarship also played a part in setting limits on the claims for the structure and scope of authority itself. Several conclusions put forth in the 1904 address, “Official Authority and Living Religion,” bear directly on these dimensions.

The work of biblical exegetes and church historians had challenged tendencies in the theology dominant in Catholicism to read current structures back into Christian origins. Since “Church organisation and Officialism, in all but the very rudimentary, Synoptic-Gospel form of their original operation . . . is not the direct and deliberate creation of Our Blessed Lord Himself,” then a certain “width, elasticity, and a noble humanity” are introduced “into our conception of the Church.” The church remains of divine institution, but it also appreciated as “a work built up in and through and for the abiding necessities, aspirations and helps of men.”45 The clear implication: the historically developed form that governance structures have assumed is not the only one they have taken in the past, or could assume in the future. Secondly, renewed appreciation of the humanity of Christ that has proceeded from critical study of the New Testament bears import for the scope claimed for authority: “it is truly impossible that theologians, or indeed Church Authority generally, should have an inerrancy higher, or more extensive in degree or kind, than Our Lord's; or, rather, that He should be less infallible than they.”46

44 Martin Green, Yeats's Blessings on von Hügel (London: Longmans, 1967), 14. “He had a rare sense, one especially rare among Catholics, of the moral dignity of the intellectual function” (87).
45 Von Hügel, Essays and Addresses II, 18-20.
46 Ibid., 21.
Stemming then from von Hügel's own sense of his vocation as a lay scholar in the church, and from the pressures of the “immanental force” of critical methods across the disciplines of biblical exegesis, church history and philosophy, there emerges a different relation to authority than was the case with Newman, as well as an evaluation of Newman's stance. While part of their differences in this respect may be attributable to differences in temperament, it is clear that they transcend matters of personality.

Here it may be instructive to compare von Hügel's position as a lay scholar with that of Wilfred Ward. For Ward had also been influenced by Newman to a significant degree, lived through those decades of intellectual ferment known as the Modernist crisis, and through his own writings and editorship of the *Dublin Review* (1906-1916) had to come to terms with ecclesiastical authority. Both Ward and von Hügel were in basic agreement that the challenges posed to the church were more effectively met by an intensification of its intellectual and sacramental life, rather than by polemic. And both demonstrated as much or more by their lives as by their writings on the subject their commitment to an active role by the laity in meeting those challenges. Likewise, the two men would have admitted in principle the necessity of an intellectual freedom for critical scholarship within Catholicism. There emerged, however, differences between them in how far they were willing to press that intellectual freedom with ecclesiastical authorities, and how best to go about doing so.

In Ward's estimation, discretion, loyalty, and moderation would ultimately gain the confidence of church authorities. Part of his reluctance openly to criticize authority derived from his understanding of Newman. In the midst of the Vatican condemnations of Modernism, Ward could insist on the necessity of discipline and purification of the intellect by ecclesiastical authority and the latter's salutary role in protecting the faithful from speculations which upset their faith and devotional life.47

In view of what he saw to be a growing authoritarianism on Rome's part, and alive to the “immanental force” of critical methods in a way that Ward was not, von Hügel set different limits on church authority and counted Ward's deferential approach naïve and ineffective. Though he tried to think with the mind of the church, von Hügel resisted any over-identification of that mind with the hierarchy and judged that in rare instances disobedience to church authorities could be justified as obedience to a higher authority. Thus he could find Newman in some regards unsatisfactory. As he wrote to Ward in 1911:

> I cannot but feel, more strongly than formerly, and doubtless quite finally, one, to my mind now grave, peculiarity and defect of the Cardinal's temper of mind and position. His apparently absolute, determination never to allow,—at least to allow others,—*any* public protestation, *any* act or declaration, contrary to current central Roman Policy, cannot, surely, be pressed, or imposed as normative upon us all. For taken thus, it would stamp Our Lord Himself as a deplorable rebel; it would condemn St Paul at Antioch as intolerable; and censure many a great saint of God since then.48

47 Mary Jo Weaver, “Wilfred Ward’s Interpretation and Application of Newman” in Weaver, ed., 36-38.
To a significant degree critical scholarship impacted these divergences. By 1893 von Hügel and Loisy were aware—in a way Newman could not have been and Mgr Maurice d'Hulst still was not—that the biblical question had gone beyond the bounds of inspiration and inerrancy to encompass the relation between historical consciousness and faith more generally. Wilfred Ward shared some of von Hügel's awareness of what was at stake in the work of a Loisy, but did not share the Baron's tolerance for what were regarded as the excesses of such critical exegesis and their consequent dangers for the faithful. It is noteworthy that Mary Jo Weaver commends Ward as an interpreter of Newman *qua* Newman in both the biography and in *Last Lectures*, but judges Ward's application of Newman's style and thought to his own times as "myopic."\(^49\) Thus, while Ward may have been without peer as Newman's interpreter a case can be made for von Hügel's having a better grasp of the times and hence occupying a better position to adapt and apply Newman's thought on the laity to that situation.

That application was not made without a price, and in assuming it von Hügel stands again in solidarity with Newman. In short, as Karl Rahner observed:

> [T]here are circumstances in which people can have a real duty to speak their minds within the permitted limits and in a proper spirit of respect, even though this will not bring them praise and gratitude 'from above'. . . . They must also learn that it can be God's will for them to live for a time, as Newman said, 'under a cloud', because they represent a spirit out of the ordinary that comes form the Holy Spirit."\(^50\)

And he concludes, "Ultimately no formal rule can be laid down as to how to achieve a concrete synthesis of what are apparently such opposing virtues."\(^51\)

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\(^49\) Weaver, 29.


\(^51\) Ibid.